

THE first thing I notice when I come home from hospital is the sound. Birds, joggers, walkers and workmen chirrup, thump, pad and yell outside my window. I hear them all, relishing the arrival and departure of sounds. I hadn't realised how isolating and empty six floors up could be. The return to a three-dimensional life of sound is an unexpected treat.

For days at a time I lie on my bed, gazing out of my street-facing window. I settle into my role as a receiver of sound, an observer of movement. The physiotherapist's instructions are uncompromising. No swimming, no pilates, no gym. Lie down, sit up, lie down. I approach the enforced rest with a kind of dread. But I find that with no compulsion to act I am free. I do not have to have an opinion, to make a response. I am on retreat, fasting from action, immersed in sound.

I come to love the nearness and passage of sound, the signal of arrival and the receding away. I love the glimpses of the neighbourhood. One day I see a procession of children stream past, a bubble of chatter and



blather of teachers. I hear the plasterers next door in a day-long joust. I hear the whoops and hoots of *Happy Birthday* sung for the two-year-old across the road. I hear the screech of wheels in the wee hours, the clatter of trucks over speed humps.

When I need cocooning, I listen to audio books on my iPod, the earphones clamped to my head to protect me from too many sounds. I

bask in the rhythm of voices, the momentum of narrative. I rest in other people's worlds.

Death visits my neighbourhood. My friend loses her daughter, another their mother. I see the neighbourhood respond, the movement of flowers and food. The bereaved walk past my window, they walk their dogs and seek solace by the river.

I go to a funeral but I cannot manage crowds. I notice the waves of energy vibrating from so many bodies. The finely tuned judgment of conversation is beyond my grasp. With relief I return to my bed. The window makes the decisions for me. People come into its frame and leave. It is enough to bear witness.

A friend has an exhibition I cannot attend. "It is all right," she says, "I felt you were very available to me, knowing you were resting." I know the truth of this. Sometimes just by being, we make ourselves available to each other, the universe, to our neighbourhood. The bliss of rest can be a kind of prayer.

Julie Perrin is a Melbourne writer and storyteller.