

# Daniel Smith: The quiet

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Spring has sprung in the Driftless Region of southwestern Wisconsin.

The grass is greening in the lowland pastures. The robins have returned. Just yesterday, the honeysuckle began to leaf out in the woods behind my house. It is a beautiful time of year in a beautiful place to live, even in these difficult days.

The quiet of the region drew me here and it is the quiet I notice the most today. Like my fellow citizens, I stay home to help halt the COVID-19 pandemic. It is as if we all have gone back in time to a more sedentary life. There is only occasional traffic down my rural road - a single car, the milk truck bound for the dairy farm a mile west, the UPS truck making deliveries.

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There is little else and it is so quiet. It brings back other times when life paused.

As a child, I watched President John F. Kennedy inform the country of a crisis that could lead to nuclear war. I remember the quiet that fell over our household, even as we stocked basement shelves with canned goods and water. I remember thinking, with the naivety of youth, that as dairy farmers, we would be spared the fallout because we had to milk the cows.

A year later, the quiet returned as I sat with my family to watch President Kennedy be laid to rest. The only sounds I remember from that day were the click-clack of the hooves of the riderless horse trotting beside his coffin as it travelled through the streets of our nation's Capitol. Time stood still and no one spoke

Four decades passed and still milking cows, I remember turning up the barn radio

on a beautiful September morning in 2001. They were talking about a plane crash, then another, then another and still one more. I had planned to begin chopping corn silage that day but that no longer seemed important. I remember the clear blue sky void of vapor trails, the gentle autumn breeze through the corn fields, the way the world changed completely in a single day.

And now, the world has changed again. In the house, we try to avoid the hourly rush of news. We check in with family and friends and do our best to work from home. We attempt to build new routines to replace all we used to do. And everywhere, it is so quiet.

Last evening, I walked down the road past the woods and fields. I heard coyotes start up with yelps and cries on their nightly run through the rural countryside. I envied them their wildness and freedom. They moved on, leaving only the quiet.

*— Smith serves as the president and chief executive officer of Cooperative Network, one of the nation's largest trade associations. Cooperative Network supports cooperatives in Minnesota and Wisconsin from more than a dozen business sectors with legislative advocacy, education and business development programs.*