



The United Methodist Church, Philmont, NY

We moved to Philmont when my daughter was an infant. She had always been a bad sleeper, always hard to put down, hard to keep down. Any little noise would wake her up. And she kept a very irregular sleeping schedule.

I had just put her down for a nap, creeping silently out of the room. Suddenly, the sound of church hymns was filling my house. I didn't know what was happening. It was SO LOUD, I could only assume they were coming from the United Methodist Church, which is about the length of a football field from my house. Now, please understand, we had bought the house a couple years earlier, coming up weekends and whenever we could get a few days off from work. And yet, I had never heard these bells before. It was a complete shock.

My daughter woke up, of course, and started crying. I was beside myself. The baby cried and cried. The music was so loud, it was incredible. Hymns played by church bells--and it went on seemingly forever. The music eventually stopped and my daughter could finally take a nap. But then, later in the day, it happened again! It turned out that it happened *every day, three times a day*--at 9:00, at noon, and again at 6:00! I remember walking around enraged those first few days. For me, it was such an invasion of privacy, such unwelcome noise pollution! I We had left New Jersey thinking we were moving to a quiet village. It wasn't the fact that the church played hymns (very sweet), but rather that they were so loud and went on so long. Even with the windows closed, it always woke the baby. I was working from home then, and everyone on my conference calls could hear them clearly and would always remark upon it.

I thought about talking to the church administrators. I thought we could compromise: maybe not three times a day? Maybe just one hymn? Maybe just chimes? I started talking to my neighbors. I asked, "Should we start a petition against this?" And they told me, "What do you mean? We LOVE the bells! We're so happy that they're back!" I said, "What do you mean *back*?" I came to find out that the church's music recording had been broken for a few years--during which time we had moved into the neighborhood. Of course, I had no interest in pursuing action after hearing how much everyone liked those bells. I resolved to just work around the noise.

But guess what happened? You got it--I became a huge fan of the United Methodist Church's bells. My daughter got used to them, too, and soon slept right through them. After all these years, they blend into the fabric of Philmont daily life. Moreover, they keep my day on schedule. The 9:00 bells signal that it's time to get to work. When noontime comes and I hear the bells, it reminds me that I'd better get focused on whatever I need to accomplish because I'll have to pick my daughter up at school in two and half hours. At 6:00 pm, it's Pavlovian: the bells start and the dog comes and stares at me. This is my reminder to get her dinner ready. It's hilarious! Now, I totally love and value the bells and I get why everyone missed them so much. If you grow up with these bells, you come to rely on them, just as I have.

By Mindy Gardner