

Look, Listen Live

March 10

THERE'S A MICROWAVE oven in the tree outside our window. I can't see it, but the beeping sound I hear must mean it's finished cooking and I wish whoever owns it would come and collect it; it's driving me crazy. Maybe it's a bird; it seems to move from tree to tree and I don't think microwave ovens do that. But birds don't sound like that either, do they?

There are other sounds floating through the window this sunny afternoon. The belediye's red, rusting c.1928 Austin Western grader, the one with the rusting levers, the doorless, almost floorless cab, and the missing windows, is putt-putting somewhere on the other side of the little river. Its engine has a unique pitch so we always know when it's around. One of these days it's going to clank clatter collapse onto its bald-tired wheels and everyone in the village will gather round to mourn, and then they'll carry away the bones and reuse them.

Not far from where the grader is working there's a soccer field, and I can hear the yells and hoots of children kicking a soccer ball around. Futbol is the number one sport here, and there's almost always a pickup game going on somewhere in town. This particular field is used every afternoon; sometimes it's a group from school and there are organized games, other times it's just boys booting a ball. The noises they make are happy ones though, and I know when I hear them that it's time to stop what I'm doing and think about fixing dinner; or maybe tell Ray to think about fixing dinner.

When the wind is right the sounds of the highway come through the window too. Turks love to toot their horns, which often play more than one note. If I paid closer attention to the various tunes I could no doubt tell you when the dolmus passes a certain house, when the Izmir bus goes by the benzene station, and when that friend of the woman who lives on the corner goes to Fethiye. After honking, the most predominant traffic noise is the infamous, high-pitched buzz of motorbikes that pierces glass, clay bricks, and fillings. Their number is legion. We see ancient motorbikes and motorcycles kept running with nothing but baling wire and super glue and appeals to Allah. Nothing mechanical ever seems to be junked here, it gets

rebuilt and repainted and repaired and resold and recycled and redeemed.

The belediye must be testing new mosquito-killing equipment, for there goes a man carrying something that looks like a leaf blower and roars like only a two-cylinder engine without a muffler can, spitting yards and yards of oily blue smoke and, probably, insecticide. He's following the road next to the river and three boys are chasing along behind, breathing in the fumes and eager to see what's what. Göcek's regular bug machine is an old beat-up pickup with a motor on the back and a big drum filled with something smelly, and it roars down every road in town about once a week during mosquito season. This occasionally causes consternation on the waterfront, as we witnessed one evening last summer. It was a busy Saturday night and the restaurant tables lining the sidewalks and the promenade were full of diners enjoying the balmy evening. Then down the main street, straight through the pedestrians and feet away from scores of diners, comes the bug machine, belching noise and billowing fumes. The tourists grabbed napkins to cover their faces or their food, and a few aimed hard looks at the driver. But this is Turkey after all. Most of us shrugged and kept on eating.

Maybe the warming sun is bringing all these people out; there's a peddler now, calling out his wares. He's the second I've seen in as many days. They've suddenly appeared from nowhere, selling blue, red, and yellow plastic buckets, basins and baskets from off their backs. He pauses for a minute and looks up at the window, but I shake my head no and he turns, to saunter back toward the village.

Most of the noises that drift through our afternoon windows are pleasant; the mooing of cows, the clucking of chickens, the pad, pad, swish, swish of grandma's feet moving through the garden below. I like to stay cognizant of grandma's whereabouts (her ever-present cigarette helps), because she has a habit of startling me with incredibly resonant screeches at unexpected moments. Her voice has a high-pitched, glass-breaking tone that would shame a banshee, and when she lets go everyone within a half-mile hears. One of our friends calls these shrieks "barnyard hollers," and says all peasant women develop them to communicate over long distances. I would guess it works.

There's the afternoon prayer call. The müezzin sounds stronger now than he did this morning; I was afraid he was coming down with something. I am turning into a regular village busybody, sitting here at the window. But

this is one of the things I came to Turkey for—to feel at home with sights and sounds different from those we left behind. And except for the bird that sounds like a microwave oven, I think I'm beginning to succeed. ❖