

The Years Went Softly By

by [David Wiener](#) (May 2025)



Woman at a Window (Caspar David Friedrich, 1822)

A long time ago
When we were very young
(Godalmighty, we were very, very young!)
In the apartment below us
There was an old lady.
A widow, I'm pretty sure.
She Came
From back east somewhere, I think, and the son had rented
The studio unit just below us
And set her up there.
Near-total strangers, just a neighbor, we knew her only to say
Hello every now and then.
When her door was open
In the warm weather
You could catch a glimpse of her Revere Ware pots and pans,
her stacks of magazines, and things that old people use.
And on her walls
Old, old pictures
When she and her kids were young.
Every morning, we heard bustling around
Her little tea-kettle whistling
And being taken off the fire.
And she would sit and sip at her big window
And watch the world go by.
She watched the trees, she watched the cars, my wife going off
to work, and the kids on their way to school.
A nurse stopped by every day.
And every week, the ladies who cleaned.
A friend stopped in,
The phone would ring,
And the years went softly by.
Once, when my wife took a day off, she saw me as I was taking
down the trash and said:
"I missed my friend this morning—is she all right?"
"Oh, she's fine! Just playing hooky from work." (It was a

rotten job.)

“That’s nice,” she said, “time off is nice.”

We wished each other a lovely day and she closed her door.

About a year later

The apartment was vacant

And the years went softly by.

[Table of Contents](#)

David Wiener has written cover, feature, and interview articles for various performing arts magazines including *American Cinematographer*, *Producers Guild Journal*, *Cahiers du Cinema*, and *The Journal of the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain*. His plays have been produced in London, India, Canada, Australia, Mexico, and the U.S. and have been published three times in the Smith & Kraus “Best Plays” one-act anthology series. He In 2007, he completed a Literary Internship with La Jolla Playhouse and went on to work as that theatre’s Dramaturgy Associate during the 07-08 season.

Follow NER on Twitter [@NERIconoclast](#)