

House by the Side of the Road

As a poet, Sam Walter Foss (1858 – 1911) produced five volumes of collected poetry, described as “the common man” variety.

Born in rural Candia, N.H., Foss lost his mother when he was 4 years old. He worked on his father’s farm, and attended school in the winter. He graduated from Brown University in 1882, married a minister’s daughter, and served as librarian at the Somerville Public Library in Massachusetts.

A chance encounter while on a hike through the New England countryside inspired Foss to write one of his most famous poems, *The House by the Side of the Road*. Foss had just covered 24 miles on a 25-mile trek. He was weary and wishing to hitch a ride on a passing wagon, yet there was none in sight. He decided to take a rest under a tree just off the road.

Posted on the tree was a sign that read: *There is a spring of good water inside the fence. Drink if you are thirsty.* As directed, Foss helped himself to a drink and noticed another sign on a nearby bench: *Sit down and rest if you are tired.* Once seated, he noticed another sign atop a basket of apples: *If you like apples, help yourself.*

Soon, an old man appeared, and Foss asked him about the signs. “Well, we had the water going to waste, and we thought it would be a good thing if we could get some thirsty travelers to drink a little bit of it,” the old man said. “Then, this is a pleasant spot to rest in, and Mother reminded me of this old bench that was doing nobody any good in our attic. So I brought it down here. We have more apples than we can eat at this time of the year, and we thought that it would be a satisfaction to us if they could be used somehow. So we put up the signs, and they seem to be doing some good.”



They had certainly done Foss some good. He now had the energy to tackle the last mile of his journey, and felt inspired to do something more.

He thanked the old man, and set off on his way. When he reached his final destination, he sat down and wrote the words: *Let me live in a house by the side of the road, and be a friend to man.*

In a very real sense, that is what we do in Life Care and Century Park. We provide a house by the side of the road, and in our actions, strive to be a friend to men and women.

– Beecher Hunter