

09/September/Gone Before You Know It
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September has always seemed like a time of beginnings. The same feeling I had as a child about summer and the endless possibilities it held out before me, I felt as a teacher at the beginning of a school year. Though I'm long past buying *August-to-August* calendars, I still feel an excitement for what the future holds as I turn the calendar from August to September.

Summer is gone before you know it. Signs of autumn are everywhere. With cool nights and mornings, the furnace kicks on, a sound I'd almost forgotten. In farmyards, hay stored for winter in what looks like giant marshmallows dots the land. Coal Creek is down, not so swollen with rains as in early summer. Out the window overlooking the creek, falling leaves drift often now, and the lawn is peppered with the crispy crackle of dried leaves, the rattle of autumn. "The lovely yellow leaves of time," U.S. Poet Laureate Ted Kooser calls them.

Time, like the seasons, keeps moving along. We pretend August will last forever. But the glory of the garden is gone before you know it. The magenta hydrangea, sunny yellow gladiola, fiery orange zinnia, and tomatoes ripe on the vine—all are fading.

Sounds of summer are fading too--the pounding and sawing for a new home being built across the road; the ever present roar of a riding lawn mower somewhere down the road; the buzz of a neighbor's chain saw still clearing downed trees from last year's storm. The clang of horseshoes against the stakes at Wheeler's Upper Park is becoming occasional, as is the whistle of steamboats in Nehalem Bay. The almost silent dip of the kayak's paddle at dusk as herons begin their evening perch along the Nehalem River will soon become rare as winter rains move in.

Summer was a time to enjoy the comforts of home—hanging clothes on the line, lying in the hammock with a good book, listening to the creek, the bees at work, the soft breeze whistling in trees. I took in summer sights and stored them up for winter. Like the big old dog I saw stretched out on top of a picnic table after his walk; black and white cows huddled under trees for shade; dogs, ears flying in the wind, in the back of contractor's trucks. There's something special about eating outside in summer. It was a time for breakfast in the garden with friends, dinner on the patio in late afternoon light or appetizers while sitting in the newly painted "Fire Red" Adirondack chairs. I left the doors open even if that meant a few squirrels made their way in. Neighbor dogs wandered in too. They seemed to know we needed comfort after the passing of our own dog Buddy. Poet Mary Oliver says, "What would the world be like without music or rivers or the green and tender grass? What would the world be like without dogs?" I didn't know how painful it would be to live with the unending absence of no-Buddy in the house to welcome me home. I'm ambushed by grief at every turn by small remembrances.

Almost everyone in my age group had visits this summer to or from grandchildren. My

grandchild visits were limited to Skype calls on the computer, but they were entertaining enough to make me smile every time. “Where’s Nana?” my almost 3-year grandson says when the video doesn’t come on right away. “Is she in there?” I hear him ask daddy. He thrashes away on his guitar for me, shows me his barely perceptible “artwork” to which I reply “Wow!” and shows me an owie on his arm. “ Tiffany bite me at school,” he says. When I close off the call with “Goodnight sweetie,” he replies the same, “Goodnight sweetie.”

Some days when I hike Neahkahnie, the peak is soaked in with fog. Raindrops drip from Sitka Spruce and slide down my neck. On other days, the fog clears to give a view of the valley below. Lush and verdant, it rolls out below me in shades of sand and green surrounded by mauve mountain ridges. I breathe in the fresh clean air thankful for another September on the Oregon Coast.

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