

Going Back, Moving On

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Jars of homemade golden plum, orange-yellow peach and brilliant auburn fig jam sparkle on my kitchen shelf. Blueberries and raspberries stack up in the freezer to wow the palette with a taste of summer on a winter day. Resident deer eye the loaded apple tree. Though they've eaten most of my roses, I'm thankful to have deer around who call this place home too. Soon it'll be time to think about getting ready for winter. But that can wait till October. Now's the time for holding on, stocking up and savoring every last drop of summer. Even with crisper mornings and fog across the valley, most days are warm and sunny. Beneath the birdhouse, the yellow roses of summer still give me a nod in the soft afternoon breeze. The last of the fat crimson tomatoes hang heavy on the vine, finally—harvest time.

Summer sounds are beginning to dwindle—the chug of lawnmowers, the rat-a-tat-tat of building projects, the sound of a tractor rumbling up from the creek with logs in the bucket for the woodshed. The babble of the creek lessens as it meanders along under alder branches waiting for rain. The hum of bees and shrill cry of eagles above the Nehalem River diminish. Already I'm missing the buzz of hummingbirds' dive-bombing the feeder.

The changing of the seasons is a reminder that nothing stays the same. While I patiently wait for the last tomatoes to ripen on the vine, I send a letter to a friend whose time of flourishing is also at an end. As I ponder time and change, I'm reminded of a statement Senator Edward Kennedy's made to Obama urging him to seek the White House in 2006. It's a statement that could apply to any of us in this life: "Your time only comes once, and this is your time."

September has always seemed to be a time of going back. Going back to school and lessons, going back to fires in the wood stove, going back to football games and practices, to oven suppers, to

schedules on the calendar. The sun is heading south. The light is changing and shadows are lengthening creating a golden glow upon the garden. I'm finishing up my summer reading, those long delicious mysteries and going back to nonfiction books such as Richard Louv's Last Child in the Woods. I find it troubling to learn that his evidence suggests, "a generation so plugged into electronic diversions that it has lost its connection to the natural world." A remark of a fourth-grader in San Diego is especially disheartening: "I like to play indoors better," he says, "cause that's where all the electrical outlets are." I renew my determination to give my grandsons bug jars, wildflower and animal track books, and nature games to play in the woods. I'm grateful to live in an agriculture county with a strong FFA and 4-H component that promotes hands-on learning for young people. The Headlight Herald reported that 341 4-H members entered more than 1,900 exhibits or contests at the Tillamook County Fair this year, a testament to thriving country kids who value and contribute to their families and communities while building strong character and work ethic.

I gather in the loveliness of ebbing summer days, the scarlet of geraniums in the window box against fire engine red Adirondack chairs. I pack the linen closet with the smells of summer sunshine on sheets and towels. Three grandsons celebrated birthdays this summer and visited my country home digging ferns for their garden and collecting bouquets of skunk cabbage leaves. My floral arrangements took third place at the Fair; next year I'll try for a blue ribbon. Much to my surprise, the Stargazer lily came up again after all. The Harvest Moon is back, so named because it lights the way for farmers to harvest their crops. I sometimes work a bit in the garden in the last light of day. I gather in the memory of it too; soon the light will be gone. As I turn toward home, I relish the changing of the seasons, the going back and the moving on.
