

Once in a Blue Moon

September, 2012

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When our family sat around the dinner table in the 1950's, my father ruled the roost. He commanded our attention, and we gave it because he was a great storyteller. My mother and I knew he'd make us laugh or gasp and expand our world beyond the kitchen table of our house on Fifth Street in Dexter, Michigan. He told us one tale after another about his day and the people he met while working for Detroit Edison Company. I liked my father's language, expressions and the way he gestured with his thick meaty fists and pounded the table causing the salt and pepper shakers to jump. Some of the expressions and slang I heard at the table were never found in my English books. Expressions like *he's all wet, she's the cat's meow, he was in cahoots with her, she drives a jalopy, or horse feathers, and hi-de-ho*. When describing a rare occurrence, he'd say, *that only happens once in a blue moon*.

A blue moon. We all had a chance to see one last month on August 31. Even though no moon is really blue, it's a folklore term that refers to an extra full moon in a season or the second full moon in a month. This year's blue moon came in the same month Neil Armstrong died, the first man to set foot on the lunar surface in 1969. A blue moon won't happen again until July 2015.

As we head into autumn, the rhythm of life changes. Vacations wind down, and the kids go back to school. The light and twilight is different, softer somehow than summer's light. The sounds of crunchy leaves drifting and skittering tell us of summer's end. The hummingbird appears less frequently at the feeder, but the multiple blossoms of the Stargazer lily still hold. It's a mystery to me why the lily produced 20 blossoms this year and only one last year, but I'll take it as a once in a blue moon moment just as I'll take the small miracle of 25 apples on the tree, double the yield from last year. Each day I poke around the garden looking for surprises. I find a few red onions, stalks of kale, Swiss chard, beets, some late tomatoes and a few crookneck squash. I could make a week of dinners from the fading harvest of fall.

We who live on the edge of land and sea live in quiet harmony, I think, with the natural world. We notice everything. I hear flapping wings of pigeons as they flit from one conifer to another above the brook running under dark branches on Coal Creek. Spiders weave their gossamer webs at every nook and cranny. The white *Rosa rugosa* continues to bloom in dense thickets along the cliff and glows in the moonlight. Soon bright orange rose hips that resemble small tomatoes will form.

I don't have to look far to find *once in a blue moon* moments. These small miracles, ordinary moments, give me assurance that all is right with the world:

Finding plump blueberries still for sale on McDonald Road, and only \$2.50 and on the honor system.

Seeing cows meander through the pasture toward the barn as they do every day at milking time.

Laughing at the two woolly bears on McDonald Road. I know they're not woolly bears, but probably Scottish Highland cattle. But I like the sight of them, together as always, grazing and resting under their lone tree.

Noticing my daughter's car parked at her workplace by Wanda's. For the moment, I know where she is and that she's safe.

Observing the kingfisher that darts above the Nehalem River, the eagle that soars over the North Fork, a road that gracefully bends and curves beneath undulating mountains.

As we head into another season, consider this Irish blessing:

*May you have warm words on a cold evening,
a full moon on a dark night and
a smooth road all the way to your door.*

I shall not wait until November, the time of Thanksgiving to be grateful, because there's so much to be thankful for—now.