

IN THE HARVEST TIME OF LIFE

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Just as weather changes the landscape, time changes us

By MURIEL JENSEN
For The Daily Astorian

Thomas Wolfe wrote in “You Can’t Go Home Again”: “Then summer fades and passes, and October comes. We’ll smell smoke then, and feel an unsuspected sharpness, a thrill of nervous, swift elation, a sense of sadness and departure.”

Autumn was always my favorite season. I had my sense of sadness and departure in the spring when my husband passed away, so, in the knowledge that nothing else can ever hurt that much again, I’m welcoming fall and everything else it brings.



Flowers really show off just before they wither, their fullness magnificent. Leaves shout their color before they fall. The wind smells as though it came from across the world and picked up every herb and spice along its way. The river is alternately embroidered with sunlight, beaded with boats or wears the morning mist like a scarf.

Life is like that: brilliant, fragrant, filled with surprises every time you turn around, and just when you’re marveling at how wonderful it all is, there’s that pinch of pain, the knowledge that it won’t last forever, and you’ll have to say goodbye.

But in the meantime, fall gives us a lot to do. The farmer takes in the harvest, the outcome of what he planted in spring and nurtured all summer. Now it must be cured, retained and stored. Those of us in the city have used our gifts and talents, all we’ve striven to learn and bring to our community to make our little corner of it a better place. It’s the result of everything we’ve worked for.

There is a little sadness in the farmer’s harvest and the city-dweller’s retirement, because it’s over. But if we think of the end of autumn as completion rather than loss, the outlook is hopeful.



Muriel Jensen photo

Muriel Jensen’s fall decorations.

Excitement in the air

At the moment, autumn parallels my life. You’re thinking I’m kidding myself and I’m really a winter woman. I used to always say as I grew older that inside I still feel 17. A lot has happened, though, and I’m not quite that breathless anymore. Still, I feel no more than 30, excited by the new day, completely engaged in all that surrounds me, still looking forward. So if you consider my real age compared to how I feel, the average puts me in the autumn of my life.

Just as weather changes the landscape, time changes us. We grow more interesting inside as we age because we know more, we’re calmer, we wear a certain confidence because it’s all happened to us and we’re now philosophical, even fearless.

Suddenly the skills we’ve acquired on our journey can be directed in a way of our own choosing. More options are open to us because most of us no longer

have to satisfy an employer. We are our own bosses.

For the first time in my entire life, no one else figures into my decision-making but me. I do miss being able to turn to my husband and ask, “What do you think?” He always had a valuable opinion. But I now make my own decisions without the practicality that was more his style than mine. I’m wrong sometimes, but I can live with that. Wolfe said, “Make your mistakes, take your chances, look silly, but keep going.” I love that.

There is excitement in the autumn air, “a thrill of nervous, swift elation.” I love the possibilities, the knowledge that the prettiness is leaving and the substance is coming. Anyone can deal with spring and summer, but it takes a hearty soul to negotiate a cold, windy fall on the Astoria hills, and nothing is quite as cold as a late December rain drop down the back of your jacket.

Unafraid of winter

But what a great place to be at this time of my life. The same women who were once my panel of experts when I was writing and needed the kind of research you can’t get from a book are now my posse.

My dearest friends are a retired nurse,

a retired 911 dispatcher, a retired city planner, a teacher’s aide, a transplanted Canadian. In that miraculous dynamic of how we are all placed where we need to be, somehow we are still all here together. They have supported and sustained me in ways that humble and amaze me. I like to think that we could be one sturdy force for good. We’re batting around ideas about what we could do, and who could use our help. We haven’t put the pieces together yet, but the plan will coalesce in time.

Winter’s just around the corner, but that doesn’t scare us. A lot goes on under the earth that makes any thought of comparing winter with death seem invalid. Snowdrops, cyclamen and pansies all flower in the winter. And though both conifers and deciduous trees go dormant, some scientists maintain that they do a sort of math using temperature and time to determine the right moment to bud. Can’t you just imagine them with their eyes shut tightly and their fists clenched (of course they have eyes and fists) as they focus their energy on the right moment to send out their buds in a spectacular display?

So, fall or winter makes no difference to me. Perhaps I’m both. Do you think there’s such a thing as “finter”?

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