

WELCOMING THE ARRIVAL OF AUTUMN

Golden Autumn by name, she heralds inevitable liberation from the restricting bonds of summer heat. And brushed by the train of her garment, summer's prickly greens and blues soon transform to longer, softer wavelengths of red and orange and yellow.

At about this time each year, I watchfully await signs of her coming--not on a specific calendar day, but in a particular season of pleasantly distinctive and remarkable quality. This week, Golden Autumn, crouching just outside my door, unexpectedly sprang upon me. And as with her previous annual visitations, she caught me not disappointed.

Surely because our house faces directly west--and no trees shield afternoon's sun--summer has lain upon us like a blanket, hot and heavy. Stifling, staley air, tempered infinitesimally only by a layer of insulation just added to the door, saturates and permeates our garage.

So when I slightly cracked the front door early Friday morning and felt lightness in the air, I silently rejoiced. "Autumn," says Gregg Easterbrook, "truly is what summer pretends to be: the best of all seasons. It is as glorious as summer is tedious; as subtle as summer is obvious; as refreshing as summer is wearying. Autumn seems like paradise."

But for the unforgettable pungent odors of burning leaves wafting through our neighborhood, few autumn memories of my own childhood linger. But decades later, our son would often indulge himself with flying leaps into the copious windrows of fallen leaves snaking about our yard. At least, that is, until he had more intimately associated himself with the work which had created those fluffy brown dunes.

For several years, autumn announced my pilgrimage back to college, a ritual I never warmly embraced. But on the other hand, Golden Autumn still brings balance by also staying tedious and tiring lawn care.

Today, varied enemies have entrenched themselves on several fronts to launch guerrilla warfare at their discretion against my contentment. But enter Golden Autumn--bearing the hopefulness of plunging once again into coolness and color for both respite and renewal. For Golden Autumn speaks of new beginnings.

But why the acute interest in autumn--especially this autumn? Perhaps because my own season of life impels me to carefully count remaining autumns as a miser his gold, to treasure them as a definable and finite resource. And perhaps because physical infirmities have recently barred me from activities I've sorely needed--to be out and moving, experiencing the solitude and majesty of God's creation as man pits himself against mountain....

Summer inflicts pain only autumn can salve, puts wrinkles in life only autumn can smooth. And like a mother with her hurting child, Golden Autumn heals the soul by touch and words alone.