

Falling out with Fall

I know many people love Fall. They love the changing of the seasons; the colour hues turned from classic greens to earth toned golden browns. Many, complete with their reenergized romantic, face travel near and far to not only see the changing of the leaves but also to drink in its magic portion of exuberance of the sights.

Like Elizabeth Barret Browning suggests

Go, sit upon the lofty hill,
And turn your eyes around,
Where waving woods and waters wild
Do hymn an autumn sound.
The summer sun is faint on them —
summer flowers depart —
Sit still — as all transform'd to stone,
Except your musing heart.

Sure, it is nice to frolic in the Fall season; to reconnect with nature again as it begins to slumber before giving birth again. Sure, it is nice to go off on earthy pilgrimages. Sure, it is nice to rattle off some sublime lines from poems by Auden, Longfellow and others. But there is a side of Fall that some people curse, not because they are morbid and Fall reminds them of the brevity of their own lives.

No one likes to clean up someone else's mess. They didn't create it so why should they have to clean it up. The mess I am talking about is the chore of having to clean up dead leaves from lawns, driveways and footpaths. That is a chore that has been thrust upon me every Fall.

My house is surrounded by trees. They are beautiful to see; become a brief resting place for passing flocks of birds as well as engaging in their own dance routine to the music of the free wind ensemble.

During the year, I try to manicure my lawns, hedges, shrubbery, and vegetable garden. But when the Fall arrives, I inherit another daily chore – cleaning up the dead leaves that cascade in the wind and, gently come to rest everywhere there is a receptive resting place. The surroundings become an unwelcome blanket of a continuous work in progress.

Armed with a leaf blower, a hungry leaf bag and a rake, daily, I do battle with the deadbeat leaves. Standing back to admire my accomplishment after a few hours of work, I still notice a soiled apron of new, dead leaves inhabiting the places I just cleaned. It reminds me of the gospel story of the legion of devils that return to inhabit a freshly renewed space in a person's life.

Later, I sit in my living room, priding myself in my accomplishment, I look out only to see the trees laughing at my futile work as they continue to shed more skin in preparation for a dormant winter.

Of course, people sympathize with me in my never ending chore. They console me by saying “what else can you expect when you are surrounded by trees;” or “they will die away soon.” Expectations do not clean up nature's mess which is left to test even the greatest of patience.

I thought, by having all the needed tools of the leaves trade, the task might become easier. Instead, it becomes a continuous battle to channel pride against frustration; accomplishment against the swirling winds; life against death.

While the battle continues, I try to fill my mind with more reflective thoughts instead of cursing the death of nature that I have to witness. Snippets of scripture come to mind. “Our days are like the grass. Like flowers in the field, we blossom. The wind sweeps over us and we are gone. Our place knows us no more.” (Psalm 103:15-6)

During my more reflective moments, I think about the repeating cycle of nature; the trees that bring us a new collection of green and earthen colours each spring, allowing the song birds a perch to call out to passing feathered friends; providing shade for human and retirement during the short winter days.

As I pause to think about the autumn, if not winter of my own life, I am not only reminded of the brevity of life but also of its cyclical nature. While I may curse the seemingly never ending chore of burying dead leaves, I peel back the memories, experiences, chance and planned meetings of peoples as well as fleeting but life giving moments that often disappear in the twinkling of an eye.

Maybe W. H. Auden captured it best when he wrote:

Now the leaves are falling fast,
Nurse's flowers will not last,
Nurses to their graves are gone,
But the prams go rolling on.