

The North Halton Compass

Reach then a soaring quill,
that I may write
As with a Jacob's staff
to take a height

CLEVELAND

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Brass Tacks

Editorial - Deborah Quaille, Arts Editor

The sumac is flaming, those big yellow buses will soon be back on the road, and the pumpkins in my garden are decidedly orange. All the signs point to one thing: we're swinging into another "new year."

I guess my internal timing will always be set with a calendar that begins in autumn. This could be a throwback to all those years of heading back to school, and indulging in the necessary books, pens, woolly sweaters and tartan skirts. Or perhaps, deep at some cellular level, my Celtic roots still recognize the signals leading up to November 1, Samhain, the new year's celebration and its glorious feast after the harvest.

Whatever the reason, when the fall fairs set up and the Steam Era chugs into Mill Town, I remember why it's so wonderful to have a rural soul - autumn in the countryside must certainly be the highlight of the year for farmers and townfolk alike.

The Steam Era recalls a time that's gone but certainly not forgotten. Those big engines hissing out vapour were the leading edge of technology not so long ago, and many a local farmer displays his family heritage with pride on the Milton Fairgrounds.

Our fairs are celebrations of rustic traditions, steeped in the thrill of a good year's work, whether that stems from growing those gigantic pumpkins that weigh five times what I do, or simply picking a bushel of apples with the most perfect blush.

For those who don't "dig" the potato and tomato shows, however, many other events have been added to the fairs, like demolition derbies or tractor pulls.

Call me hopelessly old-fashioned, but I prefer the simpler pleasures of harvest and handiwork. My children like to look at the vegetables that have grown to resemble aliens or some superhero. The vibrant creations of school children, or the intricate stitching of an heirloom quilt usually catch my eye, especially if that labour of love took somebody countless hours last winter.

My 401-commuter husband always looks for the heavy horses, watching enviously as they trot past in fine form, in his mind's eye seeing the fine Belgian/Percheron mix they had on their farm. I'm over snapping photos of the best heifer for the 4-H page in the paper, while the kids have to go through the petting zoo "just

Autumn's

Rural Rituals

one more time." After a few midway rides and something unusual to eat - like an emu burger or some bizarre blue candy floss - we trudge back to the car - tired, dusty, possibly sporting a little too much sun on our noses, and wide grins that do nothing to hide our obvious delight.

Still, it's good to come home and relax after the weekend's merriment. The stone steps at the front of my old Ontario-style farmhouse are deliciously warm in the late afternoon sun, making it a pleasant place to rest my laurels. As I crack open a bottle of apple cider, I notice the driveway is covered with scattered leaves, a cheerful mosaic that echoes the tones of the dried Indian corn hanging on the board and batten.

Oh, yes, it's autumn. September makes us realize how good it is to be here, settling back into routine, pulling in the harvest, and echoing the new season's rural rituals.

*It was Autumn, and incessant
Piped the quails from shocks and sheaves,
And, like living coals, the apples
Burned among the withering leaves.*

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

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