

Longing for Home

In late September, I begin to long for the sights, smells, and sounds a good New England autumn brings. Growing up in New England and making it my home for more than 30 years has spoiled me a bit. Seeing the brilliant oranges, fiery reds, and golden yellows that kiss the trees and turn the hills into a mosaic of color brought on a certain coziness. The sugar maples—and the sweet, amber sap they held captive in their trunks—were magic all their own. The smell of fresh, wet earth and the rich musk of decaying leaves that filled the air signaled that the season had changed. The ritual of unpacking wool sweaters and thick cotton socks was a welcome chore. And things seemed to slow down just a bit. Curling up on the couch with a good book, cozy blanket, and mug of tea became more common as the summer faded.

It was a delight to visit one of the many New England farms. I relished strolling through pumpkin patches, bending to inspect each pumpkin carefully before placing it in the wheelbarrow to take it home. The farm might also include an apple orchard for picking McIntosh apples (New England's best variety) that, when turned into an apple pie, filled home with heady goodness and warmth. If you were lucky, you also got to put a thick slab of farm-made cheddar on that piece of pie. Many farms offered warm, sugary donuts and hot apple cider—or grilled corn on a stick dripping with butter. The farms had corn mazes to get lost in and corn stalks to buy to decorate lamp posts and front doors.

Autumn also brought with it the best holiday—Halloween! My childhood home was always decorated with cornstalks on the light post and by the door, cattails in urns, pumpkins lighting the path to our front door and bats, ghosts, or witches hanging from the eaves. My mom would often dress up as a witch to hand out the candy—to those who were brave enough to knock upon our door.

Traveling back east in the fall is a favorite trip as I know I'll be welcomed by all the things that made the season so special for me as a child and young adult. When I go back, I can while away the hours at dozens of antique and second-hand shops or hit a flea market and discover myriad treasures. I can stop by a brewery for a local, hand-crafted stout, and enjoy a high school or professional football game. (New Englanders love their football team!) And of course, visit the farms and special fall festivities like "Hey Day" that includes hayrides, apple pie, arts and crafts, and a scarecrow making contest.

I have lived in the Pacific Northwest and now live in a high-desert, western state, and I can honestly say, there is nothing like a New England fall. Fall means home to me. It's a time to slow down, snuggle in, and get cozy. To be at home, wherever that home is.