The seasons of life

I sat on the back stoop on the cusp of autumn, coffee in hand, and bade goodbye to summer.

“Seems like I hardly knew you,” I said.

Summer sighed, reluctant to move on. But despite her grip, the first frost will come to our valley and the growing season will come to an end. Signs of the seasonal change have shown up the past few weeks. The barn swallows that nest in the old dairy barn have flown south. The hummingbirds are passing through, stopping to fuel up before continuing their southern journey.

The apple harvest has been abundant. We’ve picked many for eating and for freezing. The deer make their nightly visits to feast on the fallen ones.

Time – relentless and without mercy – marches on. The change of the seasons marks the cadence. The summer solstice where daylight rules slowly gives way to the autumnal equinox and we slide into the season of darkness.

This was the summer that I was going to enjoy sitting outside on the porch more often. This was the summer I was going to sit around more nighttime campfires. This was the summer that … the good intention list trails off and disappears like the spring lilacs.

Too busy, but deeds left undone.

Too tired, but regrets remembered.

I allowed myself a brief melancholic wallow to tune into my emotions. The valley was waking up. The birds sang and coyotes mourned in the distance. The sun was breaking through the morning fog.

Then autumn whispered, “I am here.”

She was there across the creek in the green canopy of leaves. Splotches of red and yellow dotted the verdant canvas. She was there in the apple trees. She was there in the morning sun.

The change in seasons is a reminder that I’m growing older.

We’re growing older.

I recently visited my mother, who is 86 and is in an assisted living facility. She is in good health, but she struggles with her memory. When I walked into her room, she greeted me and asked how the farm was doing. “I’ve been thinking,” she said. “I have to decide if I’m going to stay here or go back home.”

Where is our home? Is it our current address? Or is it the place in our memory and in our hearts that we remember as home? Or is home something that we create with our loved ones both now and before?

“The farm is fine, Mom,” I replied, although it isn’t the same and never will be. “And your home belongs to someone else now.”

But in her mind, home and the farm some days means Dad is still alive, they are still milking cows, she is feeding calves and they are spending time on the back porch overlooking the creek and hills.

In a few weeks those hills will be ablaze with color. I’ll be scraping frost off the windshield and searching for my jacket.

But life brings unexpected surprises. I was trimming grass when I noticed a few dandelion weeds in full bloom. In the waning days of summer a plant that is profuse in the spring decided to challenge the seasonal norms.

The seasons and rhythms of life march on.

 It’s up to us to find the beauty.