



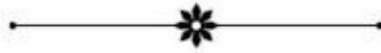
## An October Walk

**O hushed October morning mild,  
Begin the hours of this day slow.  
Make the day seem to us less brief.**

*Robert Frost (1874-1963)*

I may have shared some of these thoughts with you before. I have lived in the same rural place for almost half a century, and I do feel that October is a uniquely magical time. As I age I have to move more slowly with the help of a walker. These days I see things that I missed when I was traveling more rapidly over the same area.

I would like to make this something of an October dialogue. As I share with you some of the things that have struck me, I'm hoping that you might take an October walk and perhaps share with me some of the things that you experience as well. How does that sound?

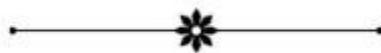


I'm starting down by the hickory tree which is beside the county road. A few days ago it was filled with green leaves. Overnight it became a 70 foot torch of yellow and brown. As I take a moment to rest, I hear what sounds like a wind chime. It's the hickory nuts falling through the tree's branches, making noise as they bounce downward.



Our scarecrow Chester has just made his annual appearance, sitting on a bale of straw surrounded by corn stalks and pumpkins. Chester is getting a bit old now, but he can still hold up his arm in a friendly salute to the people biking or driving past. Many of them wave back. Some even stop and let their children pose for a picture with Chester.

Nearby is a long row of pumpkins. I am very fond of pumpkins. Years ago I planted this patch for the many children in the families that use our Food Pantry. There are commercial pumpkin patches around, but many of our neighbors cannot afford the prices. Here it's free. I'm no longer able to do the hard work. I rely on the skill and efforts of our farm manager Lance, with the help of our young interns. But you'll find me there soon when the kids choose their pumpkins. I wouldn't miss it for anything!



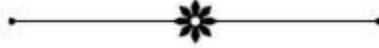
In the old orchard, it seems like the leaves began turning red and orange after the first cold night. And several of the pear and apple trees developed a shiny wax coating, as if they were dressing up for a holiday.



Our good friend Paul Monette (1945–1995), the author and AIDS activist, made his last visit to Starcross during this season. He lived in Hollywood but had been brought up as a New England kid. When our young David brought Paul an apple, he looked at it for a long time and then said, *I had forgotten there was a time when every family had a fruit tree. To eat the fruit of the tree sharing the land with you makes a difference in how you live your life.*

Paul was right!

Just across the garden fence I hear another sound. The corn is pretty much harvested by now, but the stalks wave back and forth in the breeze making a pleasant sound like soft castanets.



Walking behind the old farmhouse, I see a snake very slowly lift his or her head out of a hole in the ground. When I am spotted, the snake even more slowly returns underground. I wonder how many animals are under my feet in their winter quarters. As I look up, I find a raven staring at me. Perhaps the bird is wondering if I have prepared my winter quarters!

Shuffling ahead I enter the olive grove. Everything is still very green here. However the underside of the leaves are silver, and so even with the slightest breeze, there is this graceful dance of green and silver.

The olive harvest will not start until the end of the month. But a happy group of friends are laying out the nets and helping Sister Julie and Lance prepare the fields. It will be a smaller harvest this year, only about 50% of last year. Even so, we are better off than the majority of olive growers in the state. It is all related to climate change. There was a heat wave in February, causing the trees to wake up and blossom. But it was a false spring and in March a polar stream destroyed the blossoms. Most growers are expecting only 30% of last year's crop. I think one reason we are doing a bit better is because we are organic and also give a lot of individual care to the trees. We love them. They not only give us oil but happiness.



Being surrounded by the olive trees brings back many memories. I may have shared this before, but at my age I am allowed to do that! Once I came upon a young war veteran picking olives. She told me she was there because she heard olive trees were a symbol of peace. I asked her if it helped and she said yes. She knew she had been emotionally wounded and was in the process of healing. We are all in wars of various kinds during our lives. It's important to know when we have been wounded and are in need of healing. And if you find yourself looking for a healing environment, olive groves are a great place to start!



I begin slowly up the hill, taking time to pick up some of the fallen leaves. My walker has a net basket in front which is now filled with colorful leaves. No two are the same. I find that I am not alone in searching for a leaf. Little creatures are scurrying around underneath the mounds of leaves.

I sit down to rest on the bench we call “the haiku bench.” In front of me is an old apple tree. I

remember a haiku our sister Marti wrote while sitting on this bench during her last illness,

*Under the same tree  
that showered me with petals —  
red and yellow leaves.*



Here I am surrounded by tall trees, mainly redwoods and Douglas fir. A friend of mine is convinced that trees have a sense of community. In fact she feels they form families. When one tree is attacked by a harmful threat it not only releases something to fight the perpetrator, it also signals the other trees which begin to produce the needed protection. How do they communicate with each other? Well, that's something that will be revealed in the future.



I have often tried talking to an old tree about my aging. And it did seem that some corner of my brain opened to a message, which went something like this,

*I am me and I am growing where I was planted. I will die, but I have been part of the community of life.*

That seems like pretty good advice no matter where it came from!



The shadows lengthen and I go inside.

Now, I sit with people I love, and a cat named Tigger. We all stare out at the night sky, looking into nothing — and everything.

*Brother Toby*