

I read an article this past Labor Day weekend and it noted that autumn is a lot like beginning a new year because it signals a new phase or a period of renewal in our annual journey. Kids go back to school, companies reassess their year-end fiscal positions and a seasonal shift in our wardrobes takes place.



September has always been a transitional time for me. I married Mac on a Labor Day weekend twenty-one years ago. I started college in North Carolina, four states away from my Pennsylvania home over thirty years ago. My father suffered a stroke twelve years ago on a Labor Day morning.

This fall's kick-off season is tinged with a bit of sadness as summer closes. Just before I left Beaufort for a trip to Lake Lure in the Blue Ridge Mountains to celebrate our wedding anniversary, I learned the details of a friend's passing from his weary sister. He had spent his last seven years bedridden, succumbing to strokes and cancer. Their mother took a turn for the worse immediately following his death and as of this writing, I don't know if she is still alive. A fellow from church had to put down his dog and then began chemotherapy just before the holiday weekend. My sister-in-law was laid off. On the day I prepared to leave for the long weekend, I called a friend and discovered that her father had fallen, broken his hip and she and her mother had cancelled their trip to Alaska, an excursion they had planned for almost a year. In a queer sort of way, each of these unfortunate circumstances may be for the best. Certainly, life changes in the blink of an eye.

What became clear to me in my few days away from Beaufort is the idea of immediacy and seizing the moment or day. My husband and I went for a hike to a waterfall at Chimney Rock and I left the trail to stand under the cool drops of mountain rain bouncing off of rock on its descent to the beginnings of the Broad River. I went for a swim across a finger of Lure Lake behind our condo, climbing out of the water onto an abandoned dock, alone for just a moment amidst the quiet trees and gentle hills. And I drove a total of four hours for a two-hour visit with my friend and her father whose hip is now a titanium ball in an aged hip socket because I don't know when I'll get that close to Highlands, NC again to see his smiling blue eyes.

One of my favorite places in North Carolina is Black Mountain. It is a quaint little town, much like Beaufort, surrounded by the natural beauty of eastern mountains – the antithesis of our coastal marshland. On the drive back from a day trip to Black Mountain from Lake Lure, Mac and I stopped for some wildflower honey at Ray and Almeta Kirstein's farm. I don't know how many acres they own but Ray still lives in the house he was born in eighty-four years ago and during our visit, we learned that Ray doesn't trust lawyers or real estate agents. The couple has seventy-two head of cattle and three dogs. Their hives have decreased from fifty-two to only seventeen and they believe that radio waves from cell phones may be confusing the flight of honey bees. The Kirstein's were landscapers for Billy and Ruth Graham. My only point in sharing this exchange is the idea that if we hadn't seized the opportunity to turn from Highway 9 onto a gravel drive whose only welcome was a small sign on a telephone pole advertising honey for sale, we'd have never met those charming folks and I wouldn't have learned that ammonia is the best way to treat the bee stings I got on a hike to the top of Lookout Mountain.

While we were gone, Beaufort made news on The Weather Channel and CNN as three and a half inches of rain dropped in the Lowcountry and the Wal-Mart had a bomb scare. A signed watercolor of the Beaufort waterfront by Nancy Ricker Rhett decorated a wall in the condo bathroom where we vacationed and the Kirstein's told us they had visited our new hometown on

a day trip from Savannah. It seemed we couldn't quite get away from our reality. So we'll head back into a new season and a brand new year of marriage filled with the metaphors of scaling life's mountains and enduring the painful stings of everyday life. We are blessed in knowing we still have one another and the opportunity to seize the daily moments life offers.