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## The Thief of Summer

Thursday, August 4, 2011 | Written by Laura Z. Sowers

It is already high summer. For me, this is less of an official date than a personal designation. When I was young, early summer was just a matter of climbing the rungs of June and July that peaked at my birthday. After that, it was a downward slide that landed in the mud puddle of "back to school." On the way down, I dragged my sneakered feet along the rails trying to slow the momentum. Despite my efforts, the all-too-brief, delicious days of summer were drawing to an end. Life was sweet, summer was short, school was bearing down, and I squeezed every moment of pleasure I could out of it.

This year things have not been so clear. Rather than savoring the seasons, I impatiently tapped my foot waiting for spring to be done with the angry, dirty blusters, untimely freezes, and disappointing blossoms that were carried away on relentless winds. Summer roared in with scorching sidewalks and evening heat that prevented the lazy dinners on the patio and evening walks along the ditch bank that I looked forward to during the long chill of winter. This wasn't the summer I'd had in mind.

On the news recently, I heard several on-the-street interviewers asking people how they were bearing up under the heat. Many of them responded that they couldn't wait until it was winter again. Apparently, they had forgotten the numbing cold, impassable roads, record high snowfalls, and record low temperatures. Maybe this is a case of the "grass is greener" syndrome.

But I think it's more complicated than just wanting what we can't have. As I get older, it occurs to me that I have a library of past experiences that I unconsciously use to judge the present. The other day, with my grandchildren over, I noticed they seemed perfectly content with the too-hot temperatures and the just-stormy-enough skies that deferred their swimming. We still ate outside, walked along the ditch, played in the sand at the park, listened to music, and had a perfectly happy time. My day was no different from theirs, but I measured and compared it to my mental library of summer days and deemed the weather "not perfect." I want to stop doing that.

I'm hearing this vague dissatisfaction from a lot of people on a variety of subjects. It's common to hear complaining about politics, morals, popular music, the economy, and on and on. The talk often goes to a wistful generality about "the good old days." Am I the only one who remembers November 22, 1963 when President Kennedy was shot? Or 1979 when we had hostages in Iran? Or the mid 1980s when we had the last recession? Or 1963 when the Beatles came to America that was wonderful...well, you get my drift. I see the problems of today, and they are intense, and they distress me, but are we robbing ourselves of joy and appreciation for what is in front of us, right now? More importantly, have we forgotten that God didn't just wind up the clock and leave us here to fend for ourselves? He is still in control. Of everything. Totally.

I don't believe our good Father wanted us to be the only generation deprived of a full and abundant life. So, is it wise to mourn what used to be at the expense of what is here today? Maybe this is what Jesus had in mind when He said, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (Jn.10:10 NIV). Another version says, "...that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."

I once heard a speaker tell of being in a rowboat with her daughter. The sun was setting and a watercolor rainbow of light spilled across the lake. The mother watched her young daughter taking in the scene and noticed tears in her eyes. The little girl looked at her mother and said, "It's so beautiful! But why am I crying, Mama?" Her mother smiled and said, "Oh, honey, it's okay. You're just homesick for heaven."

I suspect there are little glimpses of heaven in every day if we have the vision to see them. To make sure I don't miss all the subtle, good things, I may have to set up a guard to make sure the thief (me) doesn't come in and rob me of it. There's no denying that there is a tricky balance to being in the world but not of the world kind of like patting your head while rubbing your tummy.

When my grandkids were over, Luke found a wounded baby hummingbird fallen to the ground in the backyard. He set it on the lid of a basket, and we marveled at her iridescent wings that sounded like the faint fanning of a deck of cards. There would be no taking flight. We watched quietly as she folded her wings against her body and died. It was a solemn, dignified, almost holy moment. I was struck by the passion to fly that carried to her last breath.

Later that evening, with the grandkids returned to their home, I sat on the patio watching dark clouds pass overhead as the wind roared intensely through the trees. The candle on the coffee table fluttered out, and I thought about going inside. But then I noticed the sky was alive with beauty: swirling indigo clouds, baritone thunder, and encircling lightning. In a while, the storm was over, passing on to its next performance across the Rio Grande. This was the high summer evening God had set before me. I could either enjoy it or find it lacking. I relit the candles, smiled into the darkness, and listened to the night songs of the birds.