

Tale From the Garden!

When I was a teacher at Ayresome Junior School, every Wednesday we had 'Singing Assembly'. By far my favourite song to sing was a catchy tune called 'Autumn Days' by Estelle White. The lyrics go like this:

Autumn days when the grass is jewelled
And the silk inside a chestnut shell.
Jet planes meeting in the air to be refuelled.
All these things I love so well ...
So I mustn't forget, No I mustn't forget.
To say a great big Thank You, I mustn't forget

Clouds that look like familiar faces
And the winters moon with frosted rings.
Smell of bacon as I fasten up my laces
And the song the milkman sings ...
So I mustn't forget, No I mustn't forget.
To say a great big Thank You, I mustn't forget

Whipped-up spray that is rainbow-scattered
And a swallow curving in the sky,
Shoes so comfy though they're worn out and they're battered
And the taste of apple pie ...
So I mustn't forget, No I mustn't forget.
To say a great big Thank You, I mustn't forget

Scent of gardens when the rain's been falling
And a minnow darting down a stream,
Picked-up engine that's been stuttering and stalling
And a win for my home team ...
So I mustn't forget, No I mustn't forget.
To say a great big Thank You, I mustn't forget

It really takes me back to the Autumn days of my own childhood – you know, when the fallen leaves were so deep that you had to wade through them up to your knees, you had to start wearing your knitted fair-isle or arran jumpers in the early mornings and evenings, and thanks to a bumper crop of apples, apple crumble or stewed apples were the dessert of choice for Sunday lunch.

It's been a funny year, weatherwise. I suppose in many ways we've had a 'normal' year, in that we've had a long, cold winter, a beautiful spring, a hot summer, and for the most part a very wet Autumn. My recollections of my childhood summers are tinged with reds and oranges – sunshine, long warm evenings, burnt grass, as well as the eye-wateringly bright neons that defined children's fashion of the late 80s.

The thing I really love about living here in North Yorkshire is the fact that I get to experience all the seasons. There's something refreshing and invigorating moving through each part of the annual cycle. Although it's a slow, constant change, there's so much familiarity there too. I know what I have to look forward to, what I need to prepare for, and when it comes, I'm so very ready for it.

And I definitely love the Autumn. After the long, hot days of summer, I'm ready for the slight evening chills, the colour changes and most of all, the abundance of Autumn. You see, food-wise, Autumn is categorically my favourite time of year. I'm a great lover of seasonal Autumn food – root vegetables, squashes, preserves, jams and chutneys, brassicas, herbs, beans, peppers and crusty fresh bread with everything. I think that the squirrel residing within me knows it's a busy time to collect, store and prepare for the long winter months ahead, and there's something I really like about that. I can't quite put my finger on it, but it's a comforting, calming feeling. It means making the best of what Autumn offers.

Estelle White, 70, a former nun and retired teacher of music and religion, wrote the hymn 'Autumn Days', which prompted choristers at 12th-century St Mary's church in Wroxham, Norfolk, to throw down their hymn books in

disgust. Choir mistress Carole Tims and half her songsters quit when their vicar, the Rev Andrew Parsons, asked them to sing the hymn. They felt that singing in praise of jet planes was not appropriate at the annual Harvest Festival.

Miss White thought the objections "ridiculous". The composer of more than 100 published hymns, she was surprised that the fuss should have been over an 18-year-old song. Mid-air refuelling was a wonder in the Sixties. It was regarded as amazing! Do you remember the TV programme 'Tomorrow's World'? It was about inventions. In the 1960s, there was a constant stream of miraculous new developments that held us spellbound. Her hymn marvels at some of the things which were recent inventions then but are not regarded as out-of-the-ordinary today.

Estelle White didn't believe God was vaguely out there sitting up on a cloud with a beard. She firmly believed that you find the transcendental in everything, hence her tendency to write hymns that brought in real, tangible things, & that included praise to the jet plane! She agreed with the St Mary's dissenters that not all modern music is acceptable. Some could be quite ghastly! You have to have a tune that people can sing & she considered 'Autumn Days' a rather jolly hymn for children.

But nevermind the jet plane – what about the taste of an apple pie? One of my favourite apples is the Egremont Russet with its nutty & sweet flavour & which is available during the Autumn months. Egremont Russet is a classic English russet apple from the Victorian era. Whilst russet apples have generally fallen out of favour, Egremont Russet remains popular with discerning apple lovers who appreciate its unique flavour and appearance. Part of its enduring success is down to niche marketing. This is an apple that dares to be different! It is a russet-skinned variety with a dry flesh - a style of apple that has not attracted the attentions of mainstream apple breeders, but nevertheless seems to have a dedicated following. Also, in spite of its unique appearance, Egremont Russet has many of the characteristics which mark out a good apple: a harmony of flavour and texture, and a good balance between sweetness and sharpness.

The difference is evident as soon as you pick it up. The skin is entirely covered with "russet", which feels like very fine sandpaper. The colour is an attractive dull gold flecked with yellow.

Egremont Russet is a medium-sized apple. The flesh seems quite dry and gets drier with keeping - it is moist rather than juicy. Traditionally described as "nutty", the flavour is more delicate than most varieties, and quite sweet. Both the flavour and the soft flesh are reminiscent of a firm pear. Yet Egremont Russet is surprisingly versatile, working well in savoury salads for example, and a popular partner for cheese.

If you are used to a modern, smooth-skinned, crisp apple then the sandpaper finish of a russet apple like Egremont Russet may sound distinctly un-appealing, but this is a case of the whole being greater than the sum of the parts. It may be very different, but it undoubtedly works - definitely worth a try!



Do you ever count the pips inside your apple?
Do you ever wonder how many apples in the seed?

When looking at a tiny seed, it is impossible to see what will bloom from this minute speck of nothing, the colour it will produce, the flower or fruit, or how large the plant will be. There is vast potential locked within, that under the right circumstances, planted in good soil, watered and covered in sunshine, will produce a miracle. The seed transforms into something more than itself - it gives birth to a plant that blooms and brings beauty, life, colour and fruit; a miraculous something from nearly-nothing.

And so, God calls us to sow - to sow broadly, generously, diligently. Sometimes the seeds that He requires us to sow do not obviously promise anything - yet, we are asked to believe in the potential, the latent miracles inside of these small life-seeds.

For the promise of harvest contained within a seed, we thank you. For the oak tree within an acorn. The bread within a grain. The apple within a pip. The mystery of nature, gift wrapped for us to sow, we thank you.