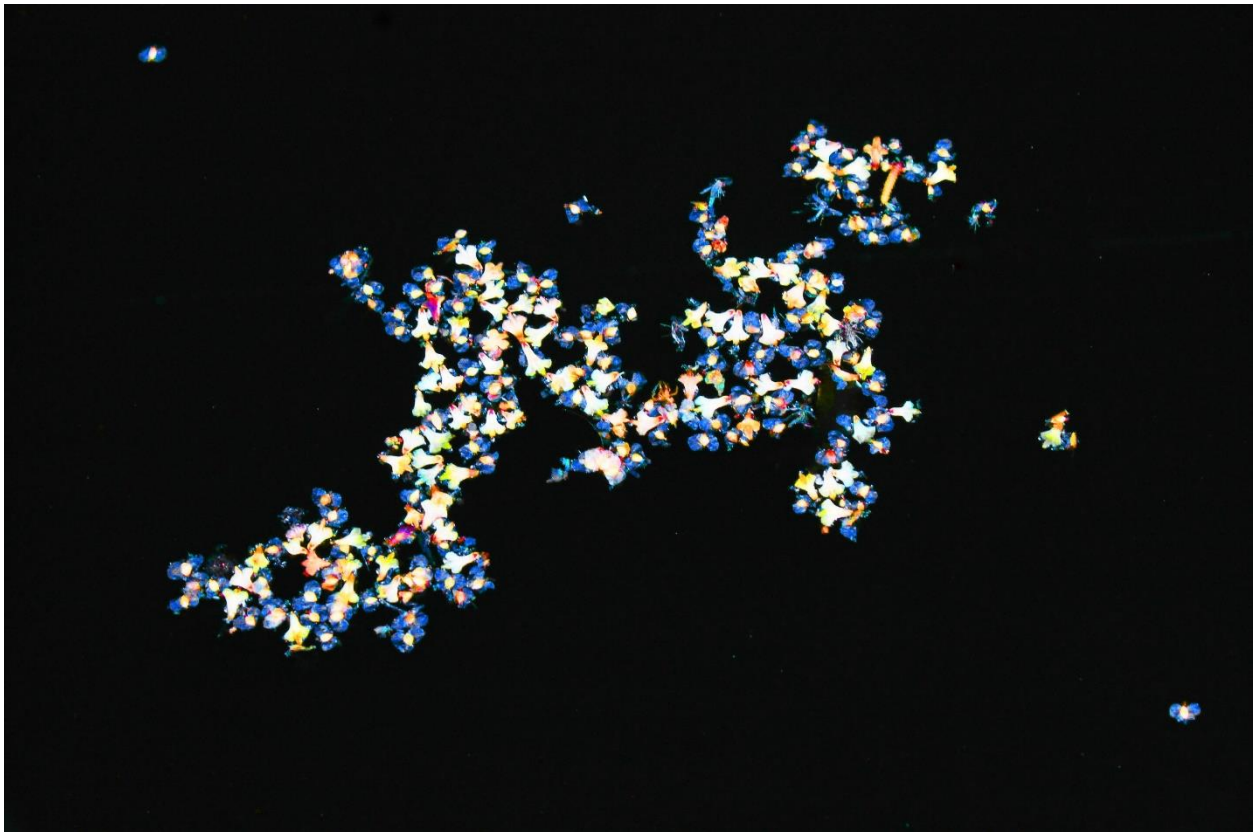


# IMAGES, IDEAS, and REFLECTIONS

*Periodical Letter #21*  
*September 2021*

*from*  
**FREEMAN PATTERSON**



*Plant debris floating in a water barrel*

The Canadian summer is winding down, but just because schools are reopening doesn't mean summer is over. After all, the equinox is still three weeks away and I refuse to be rushed prematurely into autumn.

My busy summer days have been punctuated with unexpected moments of arresting beauty, like spotting plant debris floating in a rain barrel. Time and again it was the most ordinary things that caused a "Wow!" experience and helped me to be more present wherever I was.

Another example was these common grasses growing not far from my front door. Many times I paused to ponder the possible forces that had caused this arrangement, which seemed to alter slightly with every passing day. It's the sort of place where a photographer could easily spend an hour. Every time I was tempted to move in closer on the subject matter, I found myself quickly backing away, not wanting to lose the "tossed" appearance of the grasses.

It was also a great place to ask "why?" Why are some grasses falling left, others to the right? Why are some lying practically flat? Why does their tossed appearance and subtle transitions of tone and hue appeal to me so much? Why do I care?

Whenever you feel compelled to make more than a snapshot or two and particularly when you feel strong interest, emotional energy, or passion, you can be certain that something about the subject matter is functioning as a personal symbol. It's important to "stay with it" until the energy abates – sometimes minutes, sometimes days. Perhaps you'll discover the meaning of the symbol at the time or in the editing process, but it may be weeks or months later in the middle of the night or over a breakfast coffee.





**Just after sunset one recent evening I walked out onto my deck with a glass of wine and immediately did a 180-degree turnaround to pick up a camera. It is a rare day indeed when the river below me fails to provide a scene of compelling beauty, but every now and then it has a special offering.**



**Then, next morning, the rising sun streamed through the mist enveloping my barn and surrounding trees!**



**And, it wasn't over yet!**



These are just five pictorial examples of how little events around home collectively made my summer blossom. I hope you enjoyed similar moments wherever you live.

Meanwhile, my friends in various parts of the southern hemisphere are coming into spring or, as in Namaqualand, are already well advanced into the season. The incredible display of wild flowers there is partly concurrent with summer here in New Brunswick, usually beginning in late July and, depending on the rainfall, continuing into mid or late September. (If you missed seeing a collection of my photographs of Namaqualand in bloom go to my website, click on Periodical Letter, then on issue #7, May 2019, and check out the first four pages, plus the hyperlink to [NAMAQUALAND FLOWERS](#) on page 4 of that issue.)

Speaking of flowers and the southern hemisphere, Mónica Mermoz of Bariloche, Argentina, wrote to recommend highly Peter Robinson's "The American Horticultural Society Complete Guide to Water Gardening." Mónica had a long career as a botanist with the national park service in Argentina, including in Patagonia, which is the region of Argentina with which I'm most familiar.

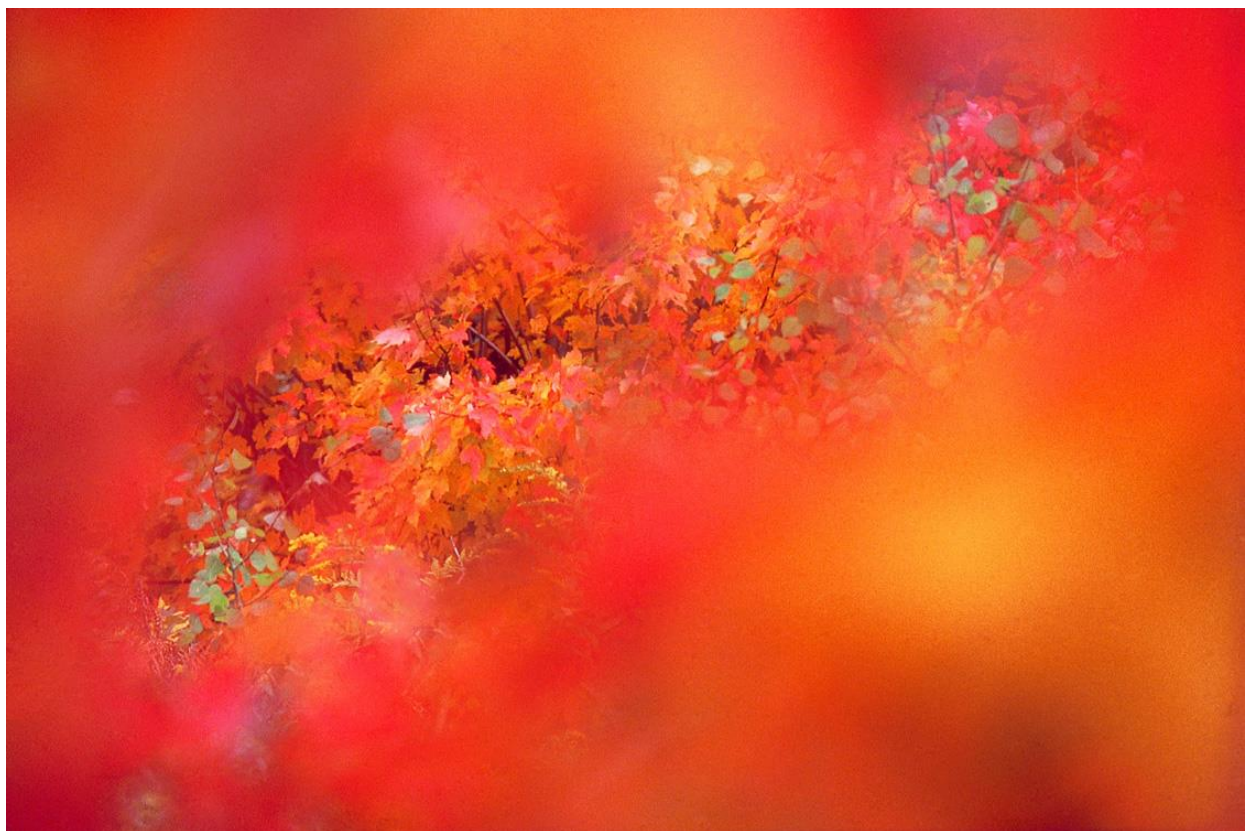
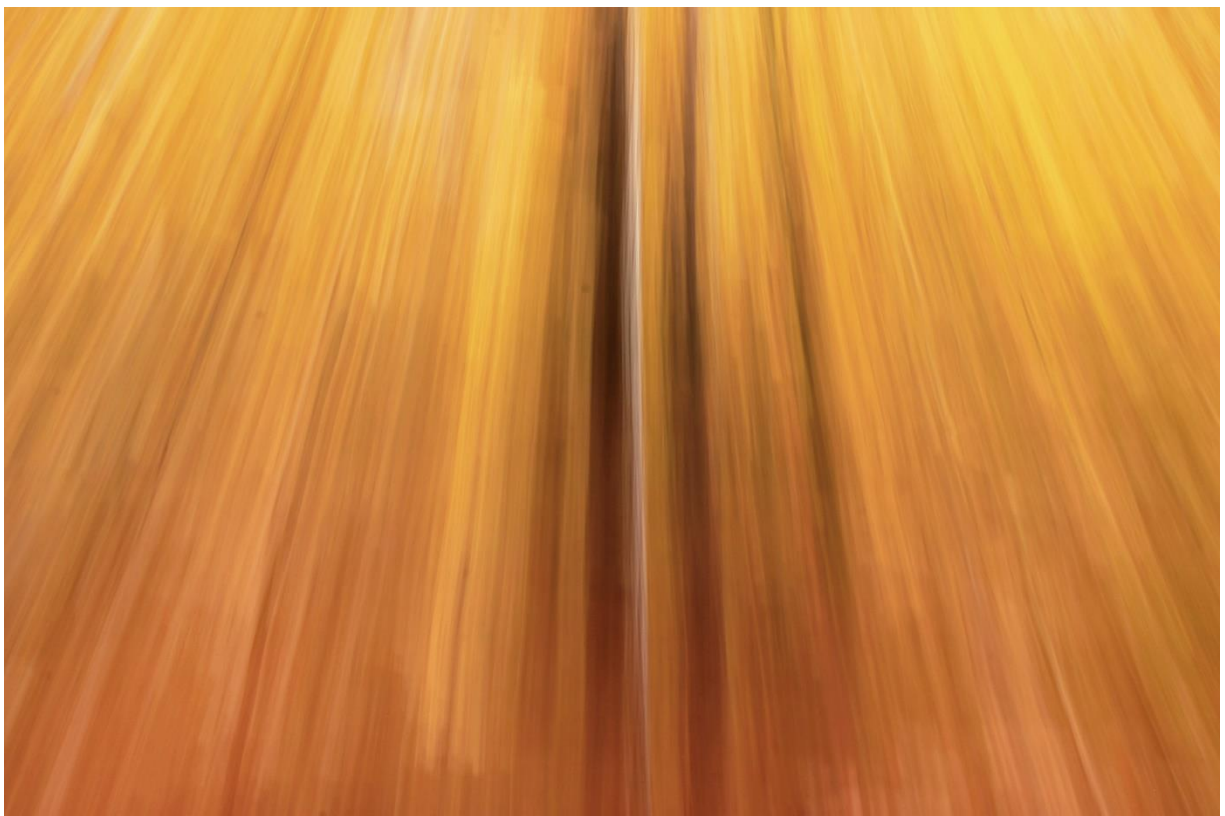
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## AUTUMN

**"And suddenly you know. It's time to start something new and trust the magic of beginnings."** *Meister Eckhart*

**"There will come a time when you believe everything is finished. That will be the beginning."** *Louis L'Amour*





For years I thought that a dry summer would probably produce poor autumn colour, but the reverse is true. However, just because the colour can be spectacular does not mean that, when it's less so, we should start making negative comparisons. Every year has its magnificence, some years in quieter hues. Here are eight of my autumn images in the accompanying hyperlink. (I'm repeating a couple from earlier letters for new readers.) You may refer to some of the images as documentary and others as impressionistic. "Documents of what I saw" and "documents of what I felt" is perhaps more apt. Click on [AUTUMN](#).



I made the photograph above near the heart of a large Canadian city and I remember my feeling at the time – one of enormous relief from the conglomeration of manufactured objects surrounding me and the cacophany of noises enveloping me. It took me back to my three years living on upper Broadway in New York City, where every now and then I set off for Morningside Park, camera in hand, in order to refresh my feeling of living in a world of many species.

Growing up in the country and being able to interact with wild places every day has marked me forever. I need the presence of nature to stay healthy. Even a little does wonders, which is why I grew avocados on the windowsill of my dorm room in Manhattan and had a tangled garden on the balcony of my last apartment in Toronto, a balcony that I managed to enclose in glass and plastic during the winter months and continue gardening.

## MUSHROOMS



Autumn is usually a great time around here to go foraging for mushrooms, but depending on available moisture one species or another seems to pop up during every season except winter. However, I have found mushrooms sprinkled with snowflakes or wearing a snowy toque, here and in both Alberta and British Columbia.

Although all mushrooms are fungi, not all fungi are mushrooms, and fungi are neither plants nor animals, but (surprise, surprise) belong to their own kingdom/category: FUNGI.

This will come as news to everybody who has regarded plants and animals as being the only two categories of living things. Botany is the study of plants, zoology the study of animals, and mycology the study of fungi.

I eat a number of varieties of wild mushrooms, but I photograph every sort. In fact, about every four or five years I am struck by mushroom mania and devote an excessive amount of time to crawling around on my tummy seeking out good angles from which to photograph, as I often want to show the underside of caps. The structure of the gills or pores can be important to precise identification.

Of course, not all mushrooms grow at ground level, but may appear at any height on rotting wood, for example. Whatever the height, it's worth remembering that the mushroom you see is the "fruiting body," not the whole fungus. The heavy work of breaking down plant material (usually) is done by the mycelium, the network of root-like hairs, which exists before and after a mushroom appears, just as roots of plants exist before and after their flowers and fruit, nuts, and seeds appear.

To see a variety of samples from my collection, click [MUSHROOMS](#).

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**"Falling in love is like eating mushrooms, you never know if it's the real thing until it's too late."** *Bill Balance*

**"All fungi are edible. Some fungi are edible only once."** *Terry Pratchett*

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Having warned you to be careful, as some mushrooms will make you ill and a few are deadly, such as the all-white, easy-to-identify *Amanita virosa*, I have to tell you that when I was in high school I sometimes carried a four-litre pail of *Agaricus* mushrooms (the sort most commonly available in food shops and supermarkets) to the school principal. (He lived for decades thereafter.) Our family's dairy herd assured a good supply of these mushrooms every fall. I've also eaten the same variety picked near my room at the little Kamieskroon Hotel in Namaqualand. The grass there receives an annual dollop of sheep manure.

One of my local favourites is the lovely orange, easy-to-identify Chanterelle (*Cantherellus*) and I've let out a big "Yippee!" on those rare occasions when I've found the giant puffball, *Calvatia gigantea* (see photo in the hyperlink,) but there are many more edible varieties that are delicious.

These days I also purchase a selection of mushrooms from a young neighbour at the local Farmers' Market. Among his many offerings is the beautiful and edible "shaggy mane" (*Hericium*), which I've also photographed here growing on dead trees. So, whether you purchase or forage in the wild, mushrooms both raw and cooked are an excellent food choice – low in calories and carbohydrates, sodium and fat free, and full of vitamins.

You can use mushrooms in fondues, casseroles of all sorts, mushroom or meat-and-mushroom loaf, rice pilaf, biscuits, poultry stuffings, with scrambled eggs and omelets, soups and gravies, and on, and on!



*Members of the Coprinus family*



## A COMMON EXPERIENCE

I begin most mornings by reading Richard Rohr's daily meditations. Rohr, a Franciscan priest, well-known author, and founder of the Centre for Active Contemplation draws from the wisdom of all faith traditions. Invariably, he offers something of emotional/ spiritual value, but sometimes it is so relevant that I add it to a computer file for further contemplation. Here is an excerpt from his offering for August 4.

*“When someone you love very much dies, the sky falls. And so you walk around under a fallen sky. —Mirabai Starr, Caravan of No Despair*

*My dear friend Mirabai Starr has suffered many losses in her life, including that of her fourteen-year-old daughter Jenny, which Mirabai writes about with profound vulnerability and wisdom.*

There is no map for the landscape of loss, no established itinerary, no cosmic checklist, where each item ticked off gets you closer to success. You cannot *succeed* in mourning your loved ones. You cannot fail. Nor is grief a malady, like the flu. You will not get over it. You will only come to integrate your loss. . . . The death of a beloved is an amputation. You find a new center of gravity, but the limb does not grow back.

*Richard here: Death cannot be dealt with through quick answers, religious platitudes, or a stiff upper lip. Grief is not a process that can be rushed but must be allowed to happen over time and in its own time. Mirabai recounts that the most important step she took was giving herself permission to mourn in the first place:*

With reticence at first, and then with mounting courage, I dared to mourn my child. From the very beginning I suspected that something holy was happening and that if I were to push it away, I would regret it for the rest of my life. There was this sense of urgency, as if turning from death meant turning from my child. I wanted to offer Jenny the gift of my commitment to accompany her on her journey away from me, even if to do so simply meant dedicating my heartbeat and my breath to her and paying attention.

And so I showed up.” ...

We may also experience a profound sense of loss when a friendship dies, especially if it comes to an abrupt conclusion. The Covid pandemic has been an event on which many friendships have foundered. Do we accept the loss? If it seems we must, then how do we grieve? Grieving is hard, but it is better than blaming, which often poisons us in the process.

Perhaps we should consider having to confront the question of loss as an upside of the pandemic, because it's not on our daily agenda and, because we avoid it, we are often ill-prepared for significant loss in our lives. What do we do when a valued friend seems to become impossible to engage in rational conversation?

I don't have the answers, but like many others I am dealing with the shock and the question. One thing that helps me to control my anger and disappointment is to look beyond the immediate disagreement and also to examine myself. The topic of vaccination/non-vaccination, for example, often seems to be less about vaccines than a symbol for an unrecognized and, therefore, unexamined issue buried deep in the Unconscious. What does the pro or the con position really represent?

Also, the emotional force with which an argument is delivered or a position stated is always telling, a very good indicator as to whether or not it is worthwhile to pursue a discussion, to drop it, or sometimes, to experience the loss of friendship. How do we live with the loss?

To me, Mirabai Starr and Richard Rohr offer perspective that can be a helpful guide.

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**"The reality is that you will grieve forever. You will not 'get over' the loss of a loved one; you will learn to live with it. You will heal and you will rebuild yourself around the loss you have suffered. You will be whole again, but you will never be the same. Nor should you be the same, nor would you want to be."**

*Elizabeth Kübler-Ross*

**"What we have once enjoyed deeply we can never lose. All that we love deeply becomes a part of us."** *Anon.*

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Goeie wense, ALMAL, Goed gaan!

Bons vœux, TOUT LE MONDE, Bon voyage!

Good wishes, EVERYBODY, Go well!

**FREEMAN**

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