

The arrival of autumn, a day trip, meeting a chinchilla, and a flyswatter update (7 Quick Takes)

~1~



Fall is such a beautiful season. I love the mums and the pumpkins and the wondering when my children will tell me what they want to be for Halloween so we can make a mad dash to the store to find costumes.

Last weekend we went to a family gathering to celebrate John's niece's daughter's second birthday. That makes her our great-niece, which makes me feel a little old and a little extra great.

There was pumpkin carving and pulled pork and cake and even marshmallow roasting over a fire pit. Fall has arrived.

~2~

Since I'm not sure those jack o' lanterns will make it to Halloween without rotting, we knew we would need a few more pumpkins.



On Sunday afternoon, while my husband and older son were at our local comic book

store, our younger son decided he wanted to go get pumpkins. But I thought we should go as a family. So, I called my husband and asked him to meet us at Valley View Farms.

We picked the best pumpkins we could find and a couple mums. We even found a battery-powered pumpkin carving knife just like the one the boys' aunt had brought to the party. We are set. They can't wait to use it. But they have to wait because I want some of the jack o' lanterns not to rot before Halloween.

~3~



Much as I love autumn, it is also a season when I find myself reflecting on loss. Our nephew Georgie passed away in utero six years ago this Halloween, and my brother-in-law Eric died suddenly two years ago this past week.

I took the day off and drove up to Westchester County, New York, to spend the day of his anniversary with my sister, Maureen, and her four children. My nephew Origen says it's the annual day I drive up to give Maureen a hug, and that's just about right.

We have a little routine. I arrive in time for lunch, Maureen and I walk to the bagel place, walk home, eat lunch, pull her youngest out of school early so he gets a little extra time at home, wait for the other children to come home, all go to the cemetery together, and then go out to dinner at Mickey Spillane's. We talk about Eric and everything. There are very sad moments, and then there are laughs. Then there are final hugs and I'm on my way back to Baltimore.

It's quite a bit of driving for a brief visit, but it's worth it. Absolutely worth it. And, although I do this for Maureen and her children, I recognize that it ends up also being good for me. My quick round-trip gives me a purpose and a focus on what could be a very difficult day.

~4~

My niece Eileen is a rat enthusiast, and I always check in on her pet rats while I'm visiting. This time, as I was walking down the basement steps to visit the rats, she said, "You haven't met our chinchilla."



Not only had I not met the chinchilla. I didn't even know they had a chinchilla! They applied to rescue a chinchilla and were selected because of their rodent experience.

His name is Timmy, and he's still quite shy, so I didn't pet him. But I know when I make my next trip up with our boys, we will be down in the basement trying to make friends.

So, not only am I a great-aunt, but a great-aunt to a chinchilla named Timmy. I might need to add that to my Twitter profile.

~5~



Our younger son is really into stargazing right now. He's talking galaxies and constellations and planets and light pollution. He wants to drive way out into the country to look at the stars. And he wants a telescope for his next birthday—or maybe Christmas.

The other morning he wanted Chicken and Stars soup for breakfast, so I made the Big Dipper out of the extra stars in the pan.

It's amazing what you can see with the naked eye even before your first cup of coffee.

~6~

If you had been in our house this week, you would have heard this conversation:

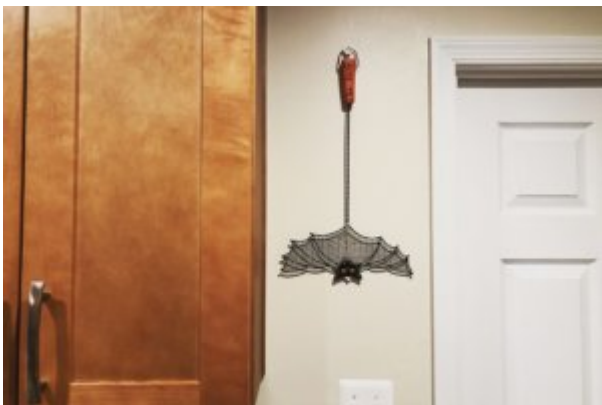


Me: "These baseball cards have been on the floor here for a couple weeks now. Maybe we should just put them away."

Child who is so clearly related to me: "Why? Is someone coming over?"

No one is coming over. So, the cards are still there.

~7~



Thanks to my husband, we now have curtains in our kitchen. He even added a special nail where I can hang my flyswatter of the season.

Because it's October, we have my "Bite me!" bat-themed swatter on display.

It's exciting to think about how I can rotate the collection through.

I'm already thinking ahead to November. I'll have to pick just the right one.

You can find more quick takes at Kelly's blog, This Ain't the Lyceum, and

have a wonderful weekend!