

AUTUMN MUSINGS

SHARON VIRTIS

Autumn in the Air

The warmth of a bon fire...the smell of mulling cider...the beauty of the changing foliage.

The signs of Fall are everywhere!



Celebrating Fall isn't new; most of our modern traditions stem from ancient ceremony and beliefs. The season coincides with the harvest. In fact, prior to the 14th century, "autumn" was simply referred to as "harvest". In the 17th century people began referring to autumn as the "Fall" – the time when the canopy of deciduous leaves fell to the ground – and the name stuck.

Americans have given traditional autumn holidays their own special twist. People have been going door-to-door for food on specific dates as far back as the Middle Ages. The tradition traveled across the ocean to Colonial America but was limited in its celebration due to strong religious beliefs at the time. In the 1800's, Halloween became popularized, and now this tradition has become a time for costumes, trick-or-treating, and spooky fun.

National elections also were timed to follow the harvesting season in the US. In 1845, Congress designated that Tuesdays were the best day to have the highest voter turnout based on the schedules of farmers. Weekends were busy for churchgoers, Wednesdays were market days, and people needed 1-2 days to travel from rural locations to polling centers. November was chosen because it generally meant the busy harvest was over and snow had not yet come.

And Fall in the U.S. wouldn't be complete without Thanksgiving. It was President Abraham Lincoln, during the midst of the Civil War in 1863, who officially proclaimed a national Thanksgiving Day be held every November to remember all those who suffer and to "heal the wounds of the nation." That's something we should all keep in mind this year!

Fall is an amazing time of year. There are so many ways to celebrate, to follow traditions – or to create ones of your own. Happy Fall!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jana", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

MASQUE OF HONOR

We are just three months away from the release of *Masque of Honor*. And things are about to ramp up! There will be more galley giveaways along with announcement of book signing events that will be scheduled throughout the country after the release. And mark your calendars for the release party scheduled on February 9, 2021 at Belmont Country Club in Ashburn, VA. (Belmont is a historic manor and the setting of many scenes in the novel).



If you are a **member of a large book club**, please [contact me](#) to see if your club qualifies to receive an ARC to review in advance of the release date! And don't forget to [preorder your copy](#). (hardcover and Kindle available now!)



Travel Back in Time on Historic Route 66

It's hard not to feel nostalgic when you leave the hustle of the modern American interstate and take a trip through time on "Route 66" – the almost 2,400 mile stretch of highway that once connected Chicago to Los Angeles.

I recently traveled only a small portion of the famous route and enjoyed the history, creativity of the residents, and just the simple pleasure of traveling down memory lane. Steinbeck famously coined it "the mother road" in *The Grapes of Wrath* and it inspired Bobby Troup to pen the iconic song, "(Get your kicks on) Route 66" – which was later recorded by Nat King Cole, Bing Crosby, and the Rolling Stones.

It was paved by the 1930's and became the perfect spot to prototype architecture and services such as the modern gas station, motels and campgrounds.

Most of the credit for the success of the highway is given to Cyrus Avery, nicknamed the "Father of Route 66" due to his passion and support for the project. He was instrumental in the planning of the highway and was behind the campaign to make Route 66 the "Main Street of America."

The Interstate Highway System rendered Route 66 obsolete by the 1980s, with I-40 replacing a large segment of the road. Later, non-profits and other organizations would support the communities that remained and maintain the roadway for tourism that is surviving today.



A look back in History: A Star Spangled Banner

Penned on September 14, 1814 as a poem originally titled, “The Defence of Fort M’Henry,” the American national anthem was inspired by the event of the British bombing Fort McHenry during the War of 1812.

That autumn, Francis Scott Key witnessed the bombardment helplessly as a British captive aboard a ship nearby – but was relieved to find the American flag still flying high over the fort after the onslaught. His words became the song we know today as “The Star-Spangled Banner.” Newspapers featured his poem which would later be set to music – and it became America’s national anthem in 1931. The Maryland native and successful lawyer was in fact a close friend of [Jack McCarty](#) – a main character in [Masque of Honor](#).





Sharon's Southern Cooking Series

The Selma Kitchen has been busy this month with tons of recipes made just for Autumn. This month, I made something that I have never tried before--[candied](#) and [caramel](#) apples! and believe it or not, they didn't turn out too bad.

And with Thanksgiving just around the corner, [check out the complete Thanksgiving Day recipe menu](#) from Williams Sonoma. For [vegetarian](#) and [low carb/keto](#) options, I found some wonderful dishes that I plan to incorporate into my Thanksgiving menu this year. And don't forget the leftovers. From Turkey Waldorf Salad to Mashed Potato Pizza, the [Food Network](#) has dozens of ideas. I'm hungry just looking at the photos!

“Autumn is a second spring when every leaf is a flower.”

— Albert Camus



F. Scott Fitzgerald

Considered one of the greatest American authors of the 1900's, F. Scott Fitzgerald suffered one hundred and twenty-two story rejections before successfully publishing "This Side of Paradise" in 1920.

It's not difficult to trace Fitzgerald's life – he documented everything, from his first word to his monthly income, in a ledger that is now digitized

and can be found online thanks to the Irvin Department of Rare Books and Special Collections at the University of South Carolina Library. He lived a [colorful and curious life](#) and used it to base the characters and plots of some of his most successful stories. While he is now best known for penning "The Great Gatsby," the book was never a bestseller until after his death at the early age of 44.

"Life starts all over again when it gets crisp in the fall."

– F. Scott Fitzgerald

Autumn at Selma

To view the gallery of photos of Selma in her fall colors, follow the link [HERE](#).





Don't forget to check my [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#) page for details on my #ReadWithSharon reading selections.

My **book club** members read three terrific titles this month, *The Vanishing Half*, by Brit Bennett, *Mexican Gothic* by Sylvia Moreno Garcia, and *Hamnet* by Maggie O'Farrell. Become a member! It's free (and fun!). Sign-up [HERE!](#)





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