

Gazing at Orion
Migrating Through the Seasons of Life
by Kevin R. Allison

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When I migrate back to Arizona in the fall, Orion barely shows itself at bedtime, scarcely visible on the horizon through the mesquite tree behind the house. Now I stand outside in the cold of February, and red Betelgeuse and its companions are overhead. Three months, ninety degrees of turn. Earth spins and time goes with it.

There's a sadness to it, as the season passes and the time I have left here grows short. I am like a schoolchild contemplating the end of summer vacation. I feel a nagging anxiety: the awareness that I still have much to experience, much yet to discover, and the realization that there is little time left to do so.

It seems like only yesterday when Orion was behind the tree and the Sonoran winter had not begun. Yet I am in the twilight of this year's season in the desert, and the twilight of my own years. The moments here are precious and all too few. It is later than I thought, and later than I want it to be.

But this cyclical passage of time is inexorable. Eternity is made of it – relentless iterations that humans divide into fall and winter, into years and decades, phases of the moon, phases of life.

I recall years of toiling doggedly at my job, staring out a window disheartened by the grind, fearing a death in life before a death in death. But I also strove to accomplish as much as possible, to learn as much as possible, to experience everything possible. I dreamed and charted my future and all that I would accomplish then.

And now this season, this phase, the final payoff. I have invested every free moment striving for this: each book I read, each walk I made into the wild, each night I sat beside a campfire under the stars, whether in this season of Orion or the Milky Way of full summer. I am a part of all that I have known.

Now that money no longer requires time, I have the freedom to pursue my bucket list. But I find that I have relinquished those grand ambitions. Results no longer matter to me. There is nothing vital to achieve. I have no list of things that I must do; I choose not to soldier on through that long shelf of unread books. And I feel no guilt: that which I am, I am.

Every day is precious. I will start each one with nothing on my schedule, a blank page on which I can write whatever I wish. I will follow my heart, attuned to *this moment* rather than frantically seeking ever-new experiences. I will count my blessings.

I can always find Betelgeuse in the winter sky. But discovering my own North Star was not so easy. It has been a long trail of learning, of gradual awakening. But I rode it for all it was worth, a good ride all along.

The sky is clear, Orion is there, the Big Dipper stands vertical on the end of its handle in the north. Now the first glow of the moon emerges in the northeast, waxing gibbous on the way to full, mistress of the night sky. It will dim these constellations as it ascends.

Already the stars begin to ebb. We all will fade, in time. All of my accumulated knowledge will pass away. My few possessions will be dispersed. The stars will continue to turn and time will pass.

Now the warmth of the day has dissipated into nighttime's chill. I shake, an involuntary shiver. Is this due only to the cold, or more?

I smile; everything is perfect. I understand. Everything is perfect.

Submitted by Kevin Allison, March 22, 2023
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