

An Apple for Remembrance

by
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John bit slowly into the freshly picked apple. Standing silently in his orchard, he remembered planting each tree, about 35 years ago. John had been 15 then, and still had both of his arms. Two years later, he found himself in Vietnam, and a year after that he was back in his apple orchard. John's arm went MIA in the war, and shortly afterwards, his faithless fiancée had left him, as well.

But the apple orchard remained. Back in the 60's and 70's, most American consumers liked their apples juicy and tart. But in the later part of the twentieth century, tastes had changed. People now liked their fruit sweeter. So John moved with the times and hired a woman who had a gift for grafting a sweeter variety of apple onto older trees.

It took a few seasons for his trees to adjust to the new branches, just as it had taken time for John to adapt to his prosthetic arm. It all takes time, thought John. It took time to adjust to losing his girl, finding another, getting married, raising a family, watching the children grow, seeing his first grandchild arrive, and now grieving the death of his wife of 25 years.

Mary died too young at age 51, but at least she died peacefully. An unexpected heart attack took her in the middle of the night, as she lay cradled in her usual position under John's remaining arm.

Could it be that Mary had been gone exactly a year already? A year today? How could time pass so quickly and so slowly at the same time?

It must be the newness of everything, John thought. New century, new grandchild, new apples. Or was it rather the sweetness of everything around him? Not just the baby and the fruit, but the lifetime of choosing kindness and patience instead of the bitterness and despair he felt after the war?

John took the final few bites of his apple, swallowing the seeds and core along with every last bit of fruit. Like the many people who bought his bountiful harvest this year, John decided that he usually preferred the sweeter things in life, too. But he'd also take on all the rest, just as he'd always done.

