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purple, the unique tone of sugar maples turning scarlet and plum.

The drama is heightened because time takes it all away, in a flash, and we find ourselves in the sudden nakedness of November. Autumn represents a shout before winter barrenness and the stark silence of hibernation. It is timeless because it marks time and change so clearly.

Another thing that marks time so completely and irrevocably—but is not nearly so seasonal but rather timeless—is the birth of a child. From the moment of birth, parents step on to a one-way roller coaster. Every day that child is changing, forever pulling parents along a fast track with no turning back. Eager parents follow so completely at first, and then one day, parents suddenly see that the train is perpetually pulling out of station at an ever-increasing speed and they realize they will spend the rest of their lives trying to catch up. A harsh but fundamental rule of childhood is that the child does wait for you to catch up. As much as any parent might want more than anything to slow time down, to savor the baby stage, toddler time, or the first day of first grade, time,

like the colors we chase each autumn, marches on with a keen, detached ruthlessness.

Plus, as intensely as we love our children, they are, by nature, always experimenting with pushing us away, as their means of this incessant habit of growing up. I had reason recently to read my husband's account of a moment when I was participating in a fashion show with my 2-year-old daughter. I held my daughter's hand throughout rehearsal. Then, just as the curtain went up, something told her this was the moment that counted. She turned and said, "I can do it myself." So begins the wrenching process of un-doing that primal connection, of learning to let the child go, to allow the child a certain amount of freedom, so that child can become.

Then there is the "blink" of childhood, the fact that babies turn into toddlers overnight, that first graders become awkward 12-year-olds before a parent has time to breathe, much less comprehend. And the inherent poetry of childhood. Like the wild but disappearing colors I chase on a sunny October day, children speak poetry every day, if we are listening. A child's innate curiosity and wonder propels

Children are always pushing the envelope, always thinking about many things at once, and consequently putting things that don't "go together" together. This juxtaposition of opposites—speaking of one thing in relation to another—is a casual definition of poetry itself. I will never forget another such moment when my 5-year-old son said something to me that made "magic" for me, words I hold dearly and hope to write about one day. These sudden moments are gifts without strings that happen in the blink of an eye and disappear if not acknowledged.

In fact, most of the time, we adults miss seeing that a child's curiosity is attached to a wisdom we adults possess, but mostly forget we know. In *Walking On Water*, Madeleine L'Engle wrote: "When I am grappling with ideas which are radical enough to upset grown-ups, then I am likely to put these ideas into a story which will be marketed for children, because children understand what their parents have rejected and forgotten."

This special "knowledge" of children teaches us about openness. L'Engle: "A child is not afraid of new ideas, does not have to worry about the status quo or rocking the boat, is willing to sail into uncharted waters. Those tired old editors who had a hard time understanding A Wrinkle in Time assumed that children couldn't understand it either...That is the typical underestimation of the adult as to the capacity of the children to understand philosophical, scientific and theological concepts."

In the wink of an eye, another topsy-turvy moment of change happens and some of us get to dip back into a child's

scarlet maples appeared at every bend in the road. I realized later that the poem I wrote that day is a thanksgiving prayer:

### Maple's Song

*Born on a sunny, sugar  
maple day  
when scarlet maples  
beckon you to stay  
and October sun makes  
green disappear,  
Maple sings her song  
like a balladeer.  
Conceived up north  
where red maples blow  
before Canada's hills  
fill up with snow,  
Maple thrives in the  
cold, sleet, snow, rain,  
dappling red from Min-  
nesota to Maine.  
She keeps a rainbow  
hidden deep inside  
then hurls surprise  
across the mountainside.  
On hillside palettes  
where colors have bled,  
only green maples  
merge purple and red.  
Each day, Maple's song  
brings forth something  
new  
so hillsides form a psy-  
chedelic view.  
A quick frost, damp fog,  
wet spring—anything—  
can change the way  
Maple's colors will sing.  
She weaves time and  
space to make colors  
dance—  
her wildest shades hap-  
pen when change meets  
chance.  
Orange turns cherry  
and lime fuses rose—  
Maple flashes joy wher-  
ever she goes!  
Kaleidoscope colors  
run wild and free  
in Maple's crazy au-  
tumn tapestry.  
Maple's palette holds  
every last hue—  
resilient, spontaneous,  
bold and true.*

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