

2025 **CEL Annual Convention** November 23–25 | Denver, CO

**ABUNDANCE** #CEL25



I recently took a two-week solo road trip from New York to Canada, half-seriously calling it my pilgrimage into Nature. My goal was to have a rousing adventure amidst unfamiliar landscapes and as-yet-unknown people, and in doing so, to transform both into friends.

My first stop was Tarrytown—more specifically the area of Sleepy Hollow made famous by Washington Irving in his short story referring to that same name. To make the drive more meaningful, I decided to relisten to that short story, remembering it to be the tale of a superstitious Ichabod Crane falling prey to the trickery of the town ruffian Brom Bones.

What startled me in the story was not what I had remembered, but what I had forgotten (as is so often the way of being startled). After a quick introduction laying out the geographic area (“there is a little valley or rather lap of land among high hills, which is one of the quietest places in the whole world”), and the key players of the story (including “a worthy wight of the name of Ichabod Crane”), Irving takes a complete break from the narrative and spends a page or two describing the abundance of the New England fall through the eyes of his protagonist. I reproduce this section for you here:

It was, as I have said, a fine autumnal day; the sky was clear and serene, and nature wore that rich and golden livery which we always associate with the idea of abundance. The forests had put on their sober brown and yellow, while some trees of the tenderer kind had been nipped by the frosts into brilliant dyes of orange, purple, and scarlet. Streaming files of wild ducks began to make their appearance high in the air; the bark of the squirrel might be heard from the groves of beech and hickory-nuts, and the pensive whistle of the quail at intervals from the neighboring stubble field.

The small birds were taking their farewell banquets. In the fullness of their revelry, they fluttered, chirping and frolicking from bush to bush, and tree to tree, capricious from the very profusion and variety around them. There was the honest cock robin, the favorite game of stripling sportsmen, with its loud querulous note; and the twittering blackbirds flying in sable clouds; and the golden-winged woodpecker with his crimson crest, his broad black gorget, and splendid plumage; and the cedar bird, with its red-tipt wings and yellow-tipt tail and its little monteiro cap of feathers; and the blue jay, that noisy coxcomb, in his gay light blue coat and white underclothes, screaming and chattering, nodding and bobbing and bowing, and pretending to be on good terms with every songster of the grove.

As Ichabod jogged slowly on his way, his eye, ever open to every symptom of culinary abundance, ranged with delight over the treasures of jolly autumn. On all sides he beheld vast store of apples; some hanging in oppressive opulence on the trees; some gathered into baskets and barrels for the market; others heaped up in rich piles for the cider-press. Farther on he beheld great fields of Indian corn, with its golden ears peeping from their leafy coverts, and holding out the promise of cakes and hasty-pudding; and the yellow pumpkins lying beneath them, turning up their fair round bellies to the sun, and giving ample prospects of the most luxurious of pies; and anon he passed the fragrant buckwheat fields breathing the odor of the beehive, and as he beheld them, soft anticipations stole over his mind of dainty slapjacks, well buttered, and garnished with honey or treacle, by the delicate little dimpled hand of Katrina Van Tassel.

Thus, feeding his mind with many sweet thoughts and “sugared suppositions,” he journeyed along the sides of a range of hills which look out upon some of the goodliest scenes of the mighty Hudson.”

Remember, this is a *short* story; yet, for a whole page Irving halts the forward momentum of the narrative to ruminate on abundance. Even rereading this now, it feels luxurious—yes for the colors, and flavors, and sensuousness of the descriptions—and, for the sheer length. It feels like an excess just to take the time to read it, or to make the space to reproduce it here. I find myself torn between the pure gooey gloriousness of this passage—and the pressure not to *tarry* too long here. To, instead, be productive, get to the “good parts” of the story, move on with the narrative and the rest of my day. Another part of me wants to analyze, to explore, to appreciate, to make new meanings by connecting motif and sound device, allusion and history; to come to an understanding for how and why Irving has cast this little sleepy spell in the middle of his story. But the task that most challenges me, and gives me greatest pause, is the seemingly simple task of witnessing: to, as a blind Milton put it in Sonnet XIX, “*only stand and wait.*”

We’re going to be thinking about abundance throughout this Convention; and, after so many of its iterations are unpacked, the one that’s come to really mean a lot for me is this sense: as a pause, a witnessing, a lucubration; as a break from the demands of productivity, of work, of efficiency. Abundance as an excessive moment of overwhelming and pleasurable stasis.

I hope that in this Convention, as with every year, we have created that pause: a place in which vibrancy and lassitude, inspiration and repose, are celebrated and welcomed. I know that we will be grappling with, responding to, and (I hope) resolving incredibly challenging moments. I know too well, and feel too well, my vulnerable flesh in this callous world: the terrifying, the scarce, the overwhelming. I stop to stand, and wait, and witness that too. And, I hope at some point in these three days, you also take a moment to pause, to break, to look around, to find yourself in community with friends: those friends you haven’t seen in years; those new friends you’ve never known. I hope you find a moment for a walk through

the beautiful streets, for an adventure in Nature, or even just for a perambulation through the now-abandoned floors of the conference center. I hope you find a moment for the tears to come, for the deepest of belly laughs, for sitting on a bench and staring off into the Universe. . . It's likely you really, really need that. . . I know I do.

Amidst all these wishes for you, I wish most that you get exactly what you wanted out of this Convention; and I also hope that you are surprised by what you didn't know you needed.

May this year be a pleasurable pilgrimage into abundance.

Yours always,  
Matthew Helmers, PhD  
2025 CEL Annual Convention Program Chair