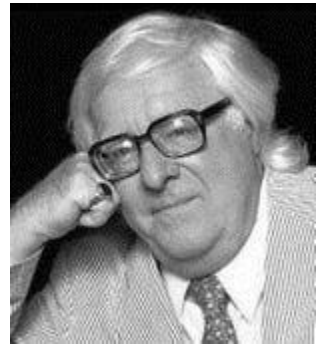


*One of America's most popular writers of science fiction and fantasy, Ray Bradbury has been entertaining readers for almost 70 years. Many of his novels and stories--including Fahrenheit 451, The Martian Chronicles, Dandelion Wine, and Something Wicked This Way Comes--have been adapted into feature-length films.*

*In this passage from Dandelion Wine (1957), a semi-autobiographical novel set in the summer of 1928, a young boy describes the family ritual of gathering on the porch after supper--a practice "so good, so easy and so reassuring that it could never be done away with."*



#### Summer Rituals from Dandelion Wine\* by Ray Bradbury

About seven o'clock you could hear the chairs scraping back from the tables, someone experimenting with a yellow-toothed piano, if you stood outside the dining-room window and listened. Matches being struck, the first dishes bubbling in the suds and tinkling on the wall racks, somewhere, faintly, a phonograph playing. And then as the evening changed the hour, at house after house on the twilight streets, under the immense oaks and elms, on shady porches, people would begin to appear, like those figures who tell good or bad weather in rain-or-shine clocks.

Uncle Bert, perhaps Grandfather, then Father, and some of the cousins; the men all coming out first into the syrupy evening, blowing smoke, leaving the women's voices behind in the cooling-warm kitchen to set their universe aright. Then the first male voices under the porch brim, the feet up, the boys fringed on the worn steps or wooden rails where sometime during the evening something, a boy or a geranium pot, would fall off.

At last, like ghosts hovering momentarily behind the door screen, Grandma, Great-grandma, and Mother would appear, and the men would shift, move, and offer seats. The women carried varieties of fans with them, folded newspapers, bamboo whisks, or perfumed kerchiefs, to start the air moving about their faces as they talked.

What they talked of all evening long, no one remembered next day. It wasn't important to anyone what the adults talked about; it was only important that the sounds came and went over the delicate ferns that bordered the porch on three sides; it was only important that the darkness filled the town like black water being poured over the houses, and that the cigars glowed and that the conversations went on, and on. . . .

Sitting on the summer-night porch was so good, so easy and so reassuring that it could never be done away with. These were rituals that were right and lasting: the lighting of pipes, the pale hands that moved knitting needles in the dimness, the eating of foil-wrapped, chill Eskimo Pies, the coming and going of all the people.

\* Ray Bradbury's novel *Dandelion Wine* was originally published by Bantam Books in 1957. It is currently available in the U.S. in a hardcover edition published by William Morrow (1999), and in the U.K. in a paperback edition published by HarperVoyager (2008).