

My Favorite Season

I've had a favorite season in every place I've lived. Spring is easily the favorite everywhere: the dogwoods in eastern Tennessee, the azaleas in North Carolina, the Queen Anne cherries in Oregon, the bluebonnets in Texas, and the multitude of blooming things in Virginia. Fall is a close second in Virginia when leaves turn enchanting colors of red, yellow, and mahogany. I remember with fondness the mild, if wet, winters of Oregon, as well as the delightfully mild, sunny summers there, too. As an adult I do not like summer in North Carolina, Virginia, or Texas; however, if I go back to my childhood in Dallas, I can easily identify summer as the very best season of all.

Summers were great not just because school was out. Summer was the season of my birthday; just adding another year in those days was a matter of great importance. But there was more. The typical activities during the hot months made that an important season, really defining summer in those days before air conditioning in houses and automobiles changed our way of life.

Household chores were not onerous, and they could be disposed of early in the day before the heat became oppressive. I remember frequently finding my way in the morning, preferably alone, to the unsodded, shady area beside the west side of our house. It extended the length of the house and was about five or six feet wide, a tunnel limited by the moderately dense privet hedge which separated our property from the driveway of the Derbys' house next door. It had a lacy ceiling of several hackberry trees that arched over the hedge. It was my private paradise. I don't remember sharing it very often with anyone. My principal occupations were playing with my collection of celluloid dolls and reading. I made elaborate floor plans for my dolls, tracing the walls with pebbles supplemented by the dark purple fruit of the hackberry trees. The tunnel was a wonderful place to read, uninterrupted by siblings or neighborhood children. I was able to work my way through the whole series of *The Five Little Peppers and How They Grew* and most of the Nancy Drew books. I even wept my way through five dismal Elsie Dinsmore books. I especially enjoyed *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* in that dim, secluded hideaway.

After lunch the whole neighborhood joined in boisterous play – on foot, scooters, skates, and bicycles, although why we chose the heat of the afternoon for our vigorous activities I can't remember. It was just the right part of the day for communal play. We especially enjoyed using the sturdy play equipment which Daddy had built in our backyard. It was a large swing set constructed of four-inch pipe, almost as tall as the swings in the parks. We had contests to see who could "pump" the swing closest to an arc that brought the swinger parallel to the ground. We vied to see who could hang by the knees on the swinging trapeze, or twirl the longest on one knee around and around the fixed bar next to the trapeze.

About four-thirty everyone would go indoors to take baths, put on fresh clothes, and sit on the shady front steps waiting for the various daddies to come down the street from the streetcar with their ties loosened and holding their coats over one arm.

Supper usually consisted of food which Mother had prepared early in the cool of the morning. It was special because it was different from the food we had the rest of the year: cold sliced roast

beef, cold fried chicken, corn on the cob (it cooked in a hurry and didn't add too much heat to the kitchen), sliced tomatoes, potato salad, and bananas rolled in crushed peanuts. Sometimes we'd end the meal with a cold slice of watermelon, but that treat was usually reserved for later on in the backyard. After the dishes were washed, dried, and put away, the whole family drifted to the back yard. Mother and Daddy and any visiting adults sat in chairs in a semi-circle, while we kids spread quilts on the ground and stretched out at their feet to listen to the adults reminiscing about their "good old days," such as when Daddy's Uncle Rufus had run through the middle of a campfire when he heard his first hoot owl, or when Mother's brother Laurence had come home from his days in the Marine Corps, all grown up. As the evening wore on, we frequently turned to the stars, picking out the North Star and the Big and Little Dippers, identifying Orion and other constellations, marveling at the cloudy Milky Way, and in August counting the falling meteorites. Often my brother, sister, and I were allowed to put up army cots, shake out the quilts, get ready for bed, and at least begin spending the night outside. Frequently, we did indeed spend the whole night. I've always been curious about time at night, and on moonlit nights I learned to estimate the time to my satisfaction by the rising of the moon or by its position in the sky.

I've often thought of those leisurely summer days, mostly spent out of doors. I don't remember the prolonged days of hundred-degree heat; I just remember the relaxed fun of playing, hearing the parents' reminiscences, and learning some of the obvious mysteries of the sky above. When our children were young, I always regretted that air conditioned, TV'd houses stood in the way of our having similar outdoors evenings.