

The Ice Cream Man

And other favorite summer evening rituals from our readers.

On summer evenings we take a simple walk around the block. We live in Hornell, a small upstate New York town where many of the houses were built before 1900, so a lot of them have front porches. Rather than retreat to their family rooms to watch TV, many of our neighbors sit on the porch, read the local paper, and chat with people who are out walking. It's a great way for neighbors to see our children—Keely, 8, Marly, 5, and Gavin, 3—year after year.

One of the neighborhood jewels—his house is about a two-minute walk from ours—is Mr. June. He's in his mid-80s and has been selling ice cream out of his garage for about 30 years.

Our kids just love it. We go probably three times a week in the summer. We started the kids on vanilla Dixie Cups (30 cents), and they've expanded from there, to Bomb Pop Juniors (25 cents) and Nutty Buddies (35 cents).

Mr. June has been doing this for so long, parents who grew up in the neighborhood are now bringing their children for an after-dinner treat.

—Garrett McGowan, NY

Since my children were small we have celebrated the **"Night of the Fireflies."** We choose a night, make Mexican food, and then light sparklers as we dance around the yard with the fireflies. We don't catch them, just watch them blink in the night.

—Sheila Augustine, OH



Mr. June: A man of good humor.

Last summer I was pregnant with our first child, Cameron. Every night my husband and I sat in the backyard and ate ice cream and read children's books to each other, practicing for when baby was born. Now that he's here, **the three of us sit outside** in our backyard every night, eat our ice cream (Cameron drinks his bottles), and read to each other.

—Michele Benson, FL

At dusk on summer nights we play **"Monster Mama."** Hannah, 6, and Lily, 4, hide their eyes while I sneak behind a tree. They try to find me as I go from tree to tree. I make silly monster sounds as I go so it's never too scary. When they find me I snatch them up for hugs.

—Wendy Hilgenkamp, NE

After dinner our family likes to **shoot hoops in our driveway**. We make up different games, such as who can throw the highest or make the most accurate shot. For us and our kids, ages 4 and 6, this is a great way to burn a few calories and spend some time together.

—Erin Barrette, CO

In May, with plans in hand, we visit our local nursery/garden shop. My three children pick out **the seeds of what they would like to plant.**

Each person is responsible for cultivating their chosen vegetable. We do it as a family every summer evening. We suffered

some damage from Katrina, so this year we're calling it our victory garden.

—Laurie Emerson, MS

Every summer evening, with Sam, 7, Emma, 5, and Grace, 3, we take our bedtime stories outside to **the "reading tree"** in our backyard.

—Brittany Maxwell, ND

I take one of my 3-year-old triplet boys' favorite activities, finger painting, outside. I put the paper and paint on their plastic picnic table and **let them go wild**. When they're done, cleanup consists of running through the sprinklers.

—Karen Vavrick, MI

We have **neighborhood water balloon fights**. The rules are simple: you have to run up and smash the balloon in your hand, no throwing, and only one balloon at a time. Abby, 2, loves just walking around holding a couple of wiggly jiggly balloons.

—Tamara Wahlquist, CA

When the rain starts falling, we head straight outside, if there's no thunder or lightning. My sons, Justin, 3, and

Christopher, 2, slip on their sandals, run around in their clothes, and get as wet and muddy as they want. When we come in, they strip down and head for the tub.

—Judy Reed, MD

Summertime means nighttime walks with our son and our beagle. **We walk about a mile** each way to the Dairy Queen. The talks we have on our walks are more revealing and intimate than those we have the rest of the day.

—Cathy Sthay, IL

My father asks my 5-year-old triplets, Catherine, Caroline, and Douglas Jr., if they would like a bonfire. Then they run around the yard **collecting sticks**. After dusk Grampy lights the fire, and we roast marshmallows and sing songs.

—Mary Beth Stevenson, MA

Summer evenings send our family out to the fields and nearby farms to pick the **fruits of the season**—wild cherries in late May, then strawberries, raspberries, and more. Even the youngest, Orion, 4, can have a little bucket to fill (and empty).

—Pamela Willett, NY

WE WANT MAIL

Wondertime would like to hear about your own family traditions. For our next issue, please share with us your favorite ways to adapt Halloween celebrations to younger kids—for whom traditional festivities can be overwhelming. Do you trick-or-treat at just one home? Skip the costumes? Host a daytime party? E-mail us at familytraditions@wondertime.com.