

Ray Bradbury: October Wings, Autumn Breathings.

First of all, let me tell you that I am unashamedly, proudly in love with Ray Bradbury.

I live in a sleepy town just fifteen minutes to the west of Waukegan, Illinois, Mr. Bradbury's legendary, mythical Green Town. For me, Mr. Bradbury is the absolute pinnacle of American fiction writing, edging out Hemingway and Mark Twain and the reasons are many, some of which I'll explore below.

As a science fiction writer, he has been one of my greatest influences. There was a childlike joy in his writing, and passion for the craft – lots of passion, even at the end, while well into his nineties. This passion is what I cherish about him the most.

For seven decades, Mr. Bradbury had unselfishly given to the world so many priceless, memorable moments, so many amazing images. Who can forget the heart-hammering moment when Montag sets his captain on fire in *Fahrenheit 451*? Or the wonderfully ironic moment at the end of the *Martian Chronicles* when a father shows his children real Martians – their own reflections in the waters of a great Martian canal? Or how about the blind witch marking the tops of houses with paint as she hangs from the basket of an air balloon at midnight in *Something Wicked This Way Comes*? I could go on and on but if you'd read even one Bradbury story, you get the picture.

And his uniquely *Bradburian* way with words is and shall always remain unparalleled. Here are some shining examples from *Something Wicked This Way Comes*...

“Somewhere, not so far back, vast lightnings stomped the earth. Somewhere, a storm like a great beast with terrible teeth could not be denied.”

“...and looked at the salesman with a single eye open, bright and clear as a drop of summer rain.”

“Going away, away, the calliope pipes shimmered with star explosions...”

“...and Will further back, gasping, shotgun blasts of fatigue in his feet, his head, his heart.”

“Will’s father noted the muscles cord along the arms, roping and unroping themselves with a writhe like the puff adders and sidewinders doubtless inked and venomous there.”

It’s like this on every page of that amazing book. Where does writing of such quality and beauty come from? Thank God we’ll never know because if we did, everyone could write like that and that would be a terrible thing; Mr. Bradbury would seem a little less special.

What about all those short stories? Hundreds and hundreds of them, many of them considered mini-masterpieces...*All Summer in a Day, The Scythe, The Man Upstairs, The Lake, Skeleton, The Emissary, The Fog Horn, The City, The Veldt, There Will Come Soft Rains*...the list could go on for pages. Everyone has their favorites, the ones listed above are some of mine. Gems in the soil is what they are, Mr. Bradbury dug them out, polished them up and gave them to us, bless him for that.

The great Mr. Bradbury passed away in June of 2012 and I was crushed emotionally, not only from grief at his passing but by the fact that I’d never had the opportunity to meet the man himself. I wish I had. I can only hope he was the great, warm, kind man I’ve always envisioned him to be. I’ve visited the actual “Green Town” ravine (in Waukegan), I’ve driven past the house Mr. Bradbury lived in, I’ve even seen the library he wrote about so eloquently in *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, the very place where Mr. Bradbury spent countless hours and became the man, the writer, he was destined to become.

So, how does a writer (me) in love with a writer (Mr. Bradbury) who has passed on after giving the world so much of himself for so long, properly thank him?

The answer is that he returns the favor. He writes a book *for* him.

I first read Mr. Bradbury’s 1957 novel, *Dandelion Wine*, when I was in high school and it’s been influencing me ever since. I even wrote a book of my own titled *32 Terrific Tales of Lake County, Illinois (published in 2008 and re-published by Belanger Books in December of 2017 as 33 Terrific Tales of Lake County, IL – go to gcrosenquist.com for details)* that’s very much in the vein of *Dandelion Wine*, though I didn’t realize it at the time I wrote it.

And when I found out in 2006 that Mr. Bradbury was releasing a long awaited sequel, *Farewell Summer*, forty-nine years after the original, my blood ran with electricity. I loved that new chapter of Douglas Spaulding’s life so much I bought a copy for my son, a firefighter in Fox Lake, Illinois, hoping he would see the amazing things in it I had. He did.

And I remember the deep sadness I felt as I read that last page of *Farewell Summer*, realizing I would never see Douglas continue to mature, become a man. I would never see new adventures in Green Town, meet new people that lived there. I always felt that there was more to be told about Douglas' year of self-realization and self-discovery so, after Mr. Bradbury passed away, I immediately began jotting down ideas for a sequel to *Farewell Summer*. This novel would take place in autumn, Halloween and Thanksgiving specifically, and the metaphorical implications were countless. The result was a 57,000 word novel - *October Wings, Autumn Breathings* (from a line in Mr. Bradbury's wonderful book, *From the Dust Returned*).

Just to be clear, I didn't write this novel because I think I'm as good a writer as Mr. Bradbury or to make a buck. I could live and write a thousand years and never touch his greatness. And poverty? Well, I'm pretty much used to it by now. I understand I'm not Mr. Bradbury and will never be. No, I wrote this novel for two simple reasons, the first is that it's a tribute to a true literary master who made my life better through his writing; a personal thank you to him to offset the deep grief I felt at his passing. The second is that I love Douglas Spaulding, his family and friends and I love his Green Town of 1928. I missed them and dearly wanted to visit them again.

It's ironic, I think, that the book *Dandelion Wine* has, for me, become like a bottle of dandelion wine is for Douglas – an encapsulated way to relive the summers of my own youth. All I have to do is open the pages and read.

Style-wise and structure-wise, *October Wings, Autumn Breathings* resembles more *Dandelion Wine* than *Farewell Summer*. I even re-visit some of the same secondary characters, trying to finish their stories. For example, I've always wondered how Miss Lavinia Nebb dealt with what had happened in her living room that night when she returned home alone from a late movie at the Elite and found the Lonely One standing there ready to kill her. And how did Bill Forrester move on with his life after ninety-five year old Helen Loomis passed away? He clearly had deep feelings for her, and she for him, but both knew they'd each been born at the wrong time and it just couldn't be. I thought that, perhaps, Bill Forrester and Miss Lavinia Nebb deserved some sort of lasting happiness in their lives, could it be found with each other? And what ever became of the Tarot Witch or Douglas' Cream-Sponge Para Litefoot sneakers? All of this is answered in *October Wings, Autumn Breathings*.

I also introduce some new characters to the mythical Green Town rolls, such as the dreaded Neil Hagen, whom turns out not to be so dreaded after all. And Grandpa Spaulding's younger brother, Harland, a man who looks like Moses but acts like Bugs Bunny. A man that brings with him all the way from California, a wild turkey little Tom Spaulding names Sophie Jr. Sophie Jr. turns out to have such a short temper that she eventually escapes and turns downtown Green Town into a federal disaster area on Thanksgiving morning.

But more importantly, I reverently focus on Douglas Spaulding's resistance to growing up and how he finally comes to terms with it.

After two long years nipping and tucking and performing metaphorical brain surgery on the manuscript, I finally sewed the final draft together. Then I sent a query letter about it to Michael Condon, Mr. Bradbury's agent and now executor of the Bradbury Literary Estate, to see what his impression of the book might be. Though, he was sympathetic with the two years of my life I spent devoted to the project, he couldn't see how any publisher would be interested in *October Wings*, *Autumn Breathings*. He went on to say that a sequel to *Farewell Summer*, would negatively affect the prospects of any movies being produced concerning the *Dandelion Wine* series (though, he didn't say exactly how). A brief reminder about the copyright infringement of using the Green Town characters followed and that was that.

Believe me when I say that I understand copyright law (I've had a dozen books previously published), and I meant no disrespect to Mr. Bradbury in writing *October Wings*, *Autumn Breathings*. It was written with the deepest respect and love for him and his family in Green Town. It's a celebration of his life and legacy. My only wish now is that I can get the manuscript into the hands of one or all of Mr. Bradbury's children, as a gift to them, but finding any contact information for any of them has proved very difficult.

If I ever do manage to send them the manuscript, I hope they'll find at least a little of that childlike joy and passion that their father never lost, in its pages.

And who knows? Perhaps I'll visit Douglas Spaulding in the winter – see what he learns there. And the spring?

Thank you for your time,
GC Rosenquist