

I have always loved the smell of lamp oil. My wife loves to have scented oil lamps, but for me, the pure smell of kerosene oil is perfect. It is a smell that reminds me of my childhood and my grandfather. I could wish for no better smell on a late evening as I sit here and look out at the woods.

You see, I used to sit with my grandfather near an ancient oil lamp. It was one of those antique lamps that is in families for generations. It must have been well over a hundred years old, but it looked almost new. He would always burnish the silver of the lamp base, clean the oil lamp chimney, and change the wick whenever it needed it. It was always filled with lamp oil, and it made a clear, bright light.

My mother looked down on that oil lamp. It wasn't so much the lamp itself, but she was sort of worried that accidents might happen. My grandfather was getting older, and I was just a kid. She knew that, with all that lamp oil around, something bad could go on. Oil candles and lamps, after all, have been known to cause tragedies before. Nonetheless, we were always vigilant with it. You see, we did nothing but stare at it and talk to each other the whole time.

It was sort of the centerpiece of the evenings that we spent together, as a matter of fact. My grandfather loved to tell stories, and having a fire to sit in front of when you are telling stories always makes them better. He would refill the lamp oil, check the wick height, light it up, and start talking immediately. Sometimes, he would tell me true stories about his childhood. I enjoyed those a lot, but they were not my favorite. My favorite stories were the ones that he made up as he went along. I don't know how he did it, but they were absolutely fantastic. They took place in far-off mystical places, involving creatures, monsters, and heroes that I had never seen. I even half believed him, although on some level I knew that they were just stories.

Nowadays, I use oil lamps less often. My own children are only just getting old enough to hear those kinds of stories - the kinds the last a long time and don't always make sense. Still, every time I smell lamp oil, it does take me back.