

A NEIGHBORHOOD PARK
POEMS AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY RJ ERHARDT



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A Neighborhood Park

by
RJ Erhardt

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In September, 1992, a dream came true when I moved into my new home in Maplewood, Minnesota. I searched for months to find the right place to build the house I had designed to be beautiful, functional, and handicapped accessible for my patients, friends, and my aging self. Finally, as if waiting for me, the perfect lot appeared, adjacent to a city park, with an amazing view.

Since then I have taken many photographs of "my" park in every season. After a few years, it started to inspire something new . . . poetry. Words insisted on taking form, compelling me to pour them out on paper immediately after my walks. I simply could not do anything else until that creativity was expressed. Some of the poems were written first, with groups of photos taken afterwards. Other photographs inspired the writing of new poems.

Should I pair my photographs with my poems or allow the reader's mind to create whatever the words evoke? I decided not to rob you of that opportunity, but to present poems first without photographs. Then, when you do turn those pages, you may find it interesting to compare your own mental images with mine. Another decision: Some poems describe people in the park, playing tennis and basketball, walking their dogs, and enjoying the playground and picnic area with their families. But I like to think of the park as my own special place, not unlike a secret garden. So, by not including anyone in the photos, it is easier for me to keep that illusion, for readers to visualize themselves there, and to avoid permission issues.

Unexpected benefits of this long creative process:

- Sharpening of the senses, visual, auditory (sound), olfactory (smell), and kinesthetic (touch)
- Increasing gratitude for how the park feeds my soul
- Evolution of the content into something more than translation of feelings into words, perhaps a metaphor of life lessons

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