

The Medford I Know*

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Cherry blossoms near Hickey Park;
Apple blossoms near our home;
Teenagers playing ball in Gillis;
Young'uns yelling joyfully on tire swings
At merry, madcap Carr Park –
Where, years ago, our toddler
Imagined space-ships and sea-ships on
The swaying ramp, as we created sea-storms,
And penguin-rescue stories on wind-churned oceans,
While Dad prowled below, a sea-creature,
Roaring out “Ragnarok!” and “Ygdrasil!”
And she'd shrieked, delighted, mock-fearful,
As Daddy-sea-beast barked esoteric music theory,
““Hen-decaphonic invertible second-species dissonant counterpoint!”
And she'd race from ramp to deck, laughing;

Carr Park,
Where I'd make up songs while
Pushing her on the swing:
I'm swinging in the sky
I'm swinging in the sky
I feel I'm flying high
As I'm swinging in the sky
I'm swinging in the park
I'm swinging in the park
It's always such a lark
As I'm swinging in the park!
I'm swinging in the trees
I'm swinging in the trees
I feel a lovely breeze
As I'm swinging in the trees!

Carr Park, where children play,
Faces and forms silhouetted by joy,
Soccer at McNally, where dogs roam
And sniff and yearn to chase the ball,
But stay, faithful familiars beside their
Fond watching families –
Young and old alike
Walking the paths
So bright with trees and skies

And springtime birdsong –
This, the Medford I know.

As the Mystic threads her dark silver
Through my city, gaggles of geese
Follow each other in bold formation.
Mallards mind their business close by,
As an occasional swan glides over
From the Somerville side,
A stately white bird ignored by geese and ducks,
While a lone cormorant gazes
Into the mazes of the current below.
This, the Medford I know.

Fellsway West, and Fulton Road,
Elm Street, and Fern Road,
Foss Street and Gordon Road,
Forest Street and Sherwood Road,
St. Francis Street and Ridgeway Road,
And Route 60, that meandering road
So friendly and changeful –
All these roads so well-walked on
Have borne the weight of our bodies
The press of our feet for many years;
We approach the intersection where
City Hall defies grey clouds with gold.
Where decisions are reached,
Amid arguments in full cry,
And good people speak for those
Who have no voice.
This, the Medford I know.

And, as we walk down Ashland
And return via Oakland,
I note that communities
Within communities exist, insular,
Faith-bound, culture-linked, and recall
Again what I know – that we know nothing
About all the different lives weaving
And interweaving along the roads
To the Mystic, and yet we live –
Parallel lines with many intersections –
Like the roads we walk every day,
Where we breathe the same air,
See the same skies,

Feel the same earth pulse somewhere
Beneath our walk-worn shoes –
This, the Medford I know.

On our return home, we see
St. Francis, elegant and reverent,
Down Fellsway West, close to home;
The spire, steep and sudden against
Blue skies and grey, red and gold
And most mysterious against
Midnight black and moonlight;
And St. Mary Queen of Peace Parish
With promise of comfort to all who seek her;
As the red-gold-streaked traffic zips by,
My family and I, walking our dog
After spotless snow- or tawny leaf-fall,
In spring bud- or summer leaf-time,
Building memory upon memory –
This, the Medford I know.

These bricks we lay atop each other,
To build the collective history of
My little family, with happy times, and talks
Both serious and silly, laced with songs, puns,
recollections, plans — and love.
Across the highway, watching over us
Solemn and still, that stone face –
Wright's Tower – rises on the hill-top,
Looking over the trees, holding back the sky.
Beckoning us to the woods where we
Wandered for hours day after day,
Discovering caves, and deer, and
Turtles, toads and frogs,
And little emerald-gold garter snakes.

I remember these places,
And log them all, for Memory's sake.
And list them here, reliving them –
Change always happens, never stops.
Buildings come and go, store-fronts
Rise up, bright props to city life
Miracles of neon and chrome;
And restaurants and cafés pop up
With Spanish, and Creole, Korean
And Chinese, and Punjabi, spoken

Like music and clashing gongs,
And suddenly vanish, like mirages.

Human lives last a while
Some for hours,
some, days,
some, years.
Some places last, then turn to embers
Cities might endure longer,
Countries last longer still, then fall.
The Earth outlives us all,
And there's no one left to remember,
Perhaps, these words of mine, or ours,
Will exist in that space we haven't seen—
A space where words go to live
Long after their human makers leave.
And the hum of our memories might
Re-create that world in another universe,
Where, perhaps, we can begin again.

This, the Medford I know.

(*This is a bespoke poem which I wrote for the poetry event on April 25th, 2024
at The Medford Historical Society Poetry)