

Dee Park Delivers My Childhood Delights

Memories suppressed
beneath all of the high-school-
and-soon-going-to-college stress.

My family has moved
around constantly:
Park Ridge, Park Colony Condominiums,
Honey Bee Oaks, and
the 9232 skunk spot.

The one constant
through all these transitions
just happened to be
Dee Park, where I lost
my two front baby teeth.

Dark green rails and poles,
black floors and vitchips,
inviting hyper little kids
through invisible doors.
Two slides, one spiral and one curved,
the best part was when I swerved
on the spinning ladder and
on the swinging wheel,
playing for hours
and missing a meal.

I used to spend more time
with my dad at Dee Park;
I rode my two-wheeler bike
as he used to walk,
me always racing:
on your mark, get set, go
to reach that oak
tree near the corner of
the black, dented-in,
prison fence.

When I was little,
my dad gave me baby
pushes on the swings.

Soon, I learned to
pump my legs by myself,
reach for the sky
without relying on help.

They were simple, black-seated,
slightly rusty-chained swings
that creaked continuously,
making parents and kids alike
wonder whether there's
any danger they'll bring.

The monkey bars were

the circular kind.
My friends and I
always climbed up
to sit on top of the bars:
pushing up our bodies
through the small space,
locking our legs into place,
and using our arms
to pull ourselves up
with a steady pace.
The humid area above
seemed to be that
of a different world.

Clusters of mosquitoes right above
taking shade from the heat.
Once sick of being stung,
we jumped off
seven to eight feet
through the middle,
down to the ground.

Other times, with a back flip from the bars.
If dark, passing the sight of stars.

Hot, intense, summer days;
the sweltering heat

strangely made me want to stay.

Slipping off our flip flops
and running through the warm sand
tempted us to play volleyball;
bumping and setting
the uneasily-rented ball
over the seven-foot-high net
until our wrists and hands
glowed red in the sun
without any regrets.

Tag, Vitchips, and Hide and Seek

brought a chase,
me always “it”,
through a maze
of playground equipment decays.

I used the green poles
to make quick turns,
running and running
until everyone else’s legs
started to burn.

Favorite hiding places
included the preschool basement,
where we used to run,
avoiding the karate

and dance classes
to the too-high-for-us
water fountains,
the kiddie tunnel slides,
and behind the bleachers close by.

The water from the fountains
was icy cold and pure,
giving us cramps,
which made running any more
impossible to endure.

The best activity
was saved for last.
Bike riding along
the nature trail
around the back in a flash.

We sped along,
passing the picnic tables
designed like chess boards,
black and white
gleaming in the cheerful sunlight.
Through the grassy meadow we went,
it seemed as if
all the rules for bike riding
were commonly bent:
riding with one hand,

no hands, no helmets,
knee or elbow pads,
we raced six verses six
back to the preschool parking
lot and made fun of
each other's wind-stricken,
bride of Frankenstein's hair.

As evening approached
and the weather cooled down,
childhood friends
went "homeward bound,"
leaving the park with
mysteries unexplored,
left for the next afternoon
to discover and more.