

JOURNAL OF ORDINARY THOUGHT

Different Doors

Fall 2003



DIFFERENT DOORS

JOT Writers on Place

Writing from Bezazian, Hall, Humboldt Park, King, Mabel Manning, and Rogers Park Branch Libraries; The Blue Gargoyle; Deborah's Place; Inspiration Café; and Project Hope, Pausa

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Photography by John Brooks, Jennifer Moran, and José Rojas.

Introduction by Chicago historian Dominic Pacyga.

INTRODUCTION

Chicagoans have always had a strong association with place. We tend to identify with our surroundings and make them a part of ourselves. Even though I have not loved there for thirty years, I am from the Back of the Yards. I will always be from Back of the Yards. My accent, the way I carry myself, the baseball team I root for, all give me away. West 47th Street, Davis Square Park, De La Salle Institute, and Sacred Heart Church are as much a part of my DNA as any gene inherited from

my Polish mountaineer ancestors. This is not strictly “only” a Chicago thing, but it is a very Chicago thing. Chicago writers from Theodore Dreiser to Richard Wright, Stuart Dybek and beyond have always focused on the realities of place to make their tales come to life. This is true for the writers featured in this edition of the *Journal of Ordinary Thought*.

As you make your way through these poems, stories, and musings you will get the feel of Chicago both past and present as seen from the neighborhoods. You will also get a feel for the reality of past places as remembered by Chicagoans, including a long gone park in Mexico, a city devastated by an earthquake in the Philippines, and Capetown, South Africa. The Chicago centered pieces are most evocative of place. Sandra Gildersleeve-Freeman recalls a 63rd Street special to her life and quickly asserts, “There is no place like 63rd Street in Chicago, Illinois.” Sharon Warner mourns the closing of Gerri’s Palm Tavern, and Pat Aitkin evokes a sense of place when she describes the “secret view” of the church steeple that catches her eye through the windows of the courtroom. Once again people and place come together to create a portrait of Chicago. Even public housing is evoked to create a sense of place. We often forget in our determination to quickly destroy the projects that they too offered home and place to many. Adrienne Kelly’s portrayal of Stateway Gardens richly evokes both joy and sorrow of public housing. Felicia Madlock and Clarence Rogers look angrily at the projects that were once filled with hope. Elaine Roberts celebrates the green space not far from the projects, Washington Park, as a place of joy, then fear, and now joy again. Mildred King remembers the kindness of a woman during the Bud Biliken Day Parade. Mayi Ojisua discusses another type of green space and reminds us of cemeteries as urban places, too.

Streets, housing projects, parks, buildings, and cemeteries all come together in these pieces to give a fascinating overview of the city and its history. The work of these writers, like the work of generations of writers before them, is firmly rooted in Chicago’s texture, in its sense of place. It is a place sometimes shrouded in a nostalgic longing for the “golden” neighborhoods of our youth, but most often in the reality of life on the city’s streets. Most importantly these writers, and others like them, make it unlikely as Donna Kiser laments in “Uptown Square” that history will be “...buried beneath Starbucks coffee cups and Gucci shoes.” We have

these writers and the legions of Chicagoans who remember the special sense of place that is Chicago to thank for the preservation not only of history, but of a city rich in memory and still capable of creating a sense of place for generations to come.

Dominic A. Pacyga
Columbia College Chicago
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Dominic A. Pacyga is a professor in the Liberal Education Department at Columbia College/Chicago and has authored, or co-authored, four books concerning Chicago's history, including Polish Immigrants and Industrial Chicago (1991), Chicago: City of Neighborhoods with Ellen Skerrett (1986), Chicago: A Historical Guide to the Neighborhoods (1979) with Glen Holt, and Chicago's Southeast Side (1998) with Rod Sellers. He is currently working on an urban biography of Chicago. Pacyga has lectured widely on topics ranging from urban development to labor history, immigration, and racial and ethnic relations, and has appeared in both the local and national media. Pacyga has also worked with numerous neighborhood organizations, student groups, and ethnic, labor, and fraternal groups to preserve and exhibit their histories.

POINT OF VIEW

Sharon F. Warner

The Wrigley Building never looks quite real to me.
It's built at odd angles,
So even if you're standing in front of it,
It still looks slanted.
You never see it straight-on.
It looks especially unreal at night.
It really seems, then,
Not to be a building at all,
But only a cardboard cut-out,
A huge cardboard cut-out.
You can look at it and believe

That if you walked behind it
There would be nothing there,
Except maybe a couple of tabs
Holding it up.
Now, I have been inside the Wrigley Building.
I've entered it from different doors,
Been in it in the daytime and at night.
So I know it is
Full, complete, three-dimensional, substantial.
But still, when I'm outside of it,
The Wrigley Building never looks quite real to me.

MORNING IN THE CITY AND THE WINDOW IS OPEN

Michael Brownstein

We wake to a singe of cloud light,
the humid smell of humans,
a slush of cars on wet asphalt.
Rain puddles into rainbows.
Late, we rush to dress and shower,
hail a cab too bright yellow,
and thinking missed breakfast, ask,
"Can I have Avers and Clark, please?"

RUNNING IN THE PARK

Ursula H. Zdanowski

My Saturday morning ritual begins with a run in the park. I've been running along the lake almost religiously for sometime now. Once I enter the pristine park, the aroma of lilacs greets me.

I spend more time running in the park on Saturday mornings. I either go by myself or with friends depending on the day. The park really comes alive on the weekends. Everyone is out there running, biking, walking, and simply enjoying the outdoors. I love seeing all the action and hearing the birds and children at play. I think they

all feel it's a special place like I do. It almost becomes another world, where the stresses of life are not allowed to enter.

My run begins at the runner's starting point in Edgewater Beach along the lake, which is marked by a tall sign. Here, I stretch and get my mind and my body psyched up for the run ahead of me. I tell myself, "You can run a long run today. You can do it and you will do it."

On nice sunny days, it's easy to convince myself to go running. Those are the best days for me, because the weather is nice and I'm feeling good. Yet, on days when it's gloomy, it seems a bit harder to get myself motivated to even go for that run. On those days, when my emotions are heavy and sad, I try harder to find the power within me to just do it. Once I'm between Irving Park and Montrose, the peace garden meets me on my path. Here, I take a breather, listen to the water coming down in the water fountain, which is decorated with shiny stones. It's quite a beautiful place. Ahh...it feels like serenity. After a few moments of rest, I start running again. A soft breeze joins me at times, which is comforting. It pushes me to want to run faster and be better.

When my run is completed, I return to where I started. I jump up to the sign, which marks the end of my run. I feel liberated and ready to take on whatever comes my way. It's a quite a rejuvenating feeling, because my spirit is uplifted after my run in the park.

It's my special haven.