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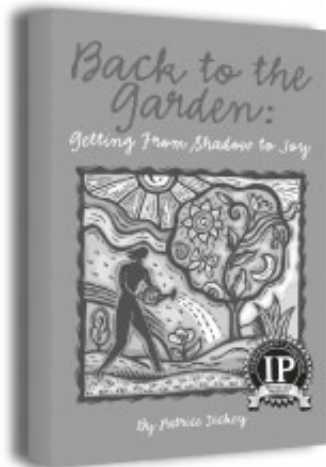
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## Park Pride Brings Nature & Neighbors Together

by Patrice Dickey



Heal Center



As a child in Chicago I met nature up close and personal. Who'd think that a lifelong love of nature would result from a big-city upbringing?

Actually, our family lived just beyond the city limits—a suburb enlivened by parks, aptly named Park Ridge. Across the street stretched a public park with tennis courts, mini-golf, ball fields and freshly planted trees.

Although we weren't tennis players, for kids a miracle occurred every winter. Park crews boarded the ground edge of the courts, flooded them for an ice rink and created a winter wonderland where we built forts in gigantic snow piles in the corners. Or we scooted across the ice while showoff teenagers on hockey blades

effortlessly sliced around the rink – always careful of us bundled-up snow chubbies playing in our icy fairyland.

And the hot chocolate they served in that warm-up shack! This was truly heaven!

What better place to burn excess kid energy and build strength and skill – while at the same time providing a sanity-saving break for our mother, at home just across the street?

Paradise to us was a public park. After all, every child doesn't grow up in a swim and tennis community.

### Tree Hugs

Adjoining our springtime lilac and peony-scented yard lay “The Girls School” – its campus laced with winding pathways perfect for biking and endless outdoor adventure. Gigantic hardwoods offered secret spots where my sister and I hid our dolls in crooks of limbs for a cross-species game of hide ‘n’ seek. Graceful willows sheltered elaborate pretend tea parties. A friendly crab apple with low-slung limbs was the perfect place to relax in a tree crotch and read the latest adventures of Nancy Drew or Mrs. Coverlet’s Magicians.

After discovering the delights of tree-climbing, the magic of flowers exploding into

bloom, the joys of running helter-skelter across open fields at twilight in pursuit of fireflies, and the reveries induced by dabbling a stick in a flowing rivulet for hours on end, I've been drawn to places where I could be at home with nature ever since. Everyone deserves such a sanctuary.

### **Greenspace: As Key to Wellbeing as Greenbacks**

Park Pride's quest to bring parks and green space within walking distance of everyone in metro Atlanta provides a spectrum of benefits.

Parks offer serenity for healthy minds and healthy bodies. Exposure to nature improves mental health, decreases fear and anger, and enhances cognitive performance.

Studies show that contact with nature helps lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels, aids more rapid recovery from surgery, and reduces minor medical complaints and stress. Research suggests that exercise is more beneficial when it occurs in natural settings like parks, leading to enhanced tranquility and more relief from anxiety and depression. Our connection with nature deepens our respect for our place in it—as well as for ourselves and others.

We don't need wilderness to discover nature. My childhood in suburban Chicago proves that.

### **Advocating a World-Class Park System**

Founded in 1989, non-profit Park Pride leads and inspires action to create new parks and greenspace and improve existing ones.

In 2005, Park Pride developed master plans for three new parks, organized a dozen "Friends of Park" groups, successfully advocated for \$105 million for park improvement bonds and a \$2.6 million increase in the annual parks budget. Park Pride volunteers invested more than 23,000 hours cleaning and maintaining parks.

Park Pride also successfully advocated for funding the Atlanta Beltline, which will create 1000 acres of new parks and 33 miles of trails in Atlanta, leading the metro area to a world-class park system.

### **Getting Back to the Garden**

In the quest for parks and greenspace, Park Pride has invited me to team up with them to donate a portion of the proceeds from my new book, *Back to the Garden: Getting from Shadow to Joy*.

Employing a nature/gardening metaphor, the book is filled with riveting stories of real people who have used simple secrets I've taught for seven years in 'Get the Life You Love' at Evening at Emory. People learn to free themselves from shadow issues and self-defeating behaviors that hold them back.

"Patrice's book offers formulas for mental serenity and for achieving healthy emotions and minds, and we believe that parks do as well. That's why this partnership is a perfect fit for us and our efforts," said George Dusenbury, executive director, Park Pride.

Published this spring, *Back to the Garden: Getting from Shadow to Joy* has won an international IPPY (Independent Publishers Assn) award in the Spiritual/Inspirational category and First Place for Non-Fiction from the prestigious Atlanta Writers Club.

*To learn more about Park Pride and support them through purchasing the book, contact [parkpride@parkpride.org](mailto:parkpride@parkpride.org) or call 404-817-7969.*



*Contact speaker, author and coach Patrice Dickey at [pdcom@mindspring.com](mailto:pdcom@mindspring.com) or*



404-294-9333. "Get the Life You Love" begins at Evening at Emory on Tuesday, July 11.

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