

June 3, 2020

I need a little distraction today, so I am going to tell you about my favorite park in Paris, the Park Square du Temple, more recently known as, Elie Wiesel Park. If you are so inclined, you can Google it and see terrific pictures of what I am talking about.

In this park as in all parks there are two memorials, one to the neighborhood residents who died in World War II and one to the Jewish children deported from that neighborhood to their deaths in the Nazi concentration camps.

I have spent hundreds of hours in this small but multi-use little park of about one square block and I have told you about some of it before and I will miss it should I never get to go back to Paris.

There are many little parks like this in Paris and they all have a certain charm and different wisdoms to share with their visitors when you take the time to listen and learn from the park.

This park has a wonderful play area about three feet below the grade filled with sand for little ones with all kinds of climbing stations and slides and a few swings and nooks and crannies to hide in. There are children playing there all day but in early evening in the summer months it gets filled with kids brought by their parent's home from work before supper as supper in Paris is not until 8 or 9 in the evening.

There is gazebo like bandstand where I have occasionally heard music but mostly it is used by little kids attempting to play soccer and young adults learning martial arts or boxing, quite often, all of this takes place simultaneously.

There is a lovely lawn filled with couples and families and young and old friends where no teen or adult does anything with a ball because it is for relaxing and visiting or making out as there is little romantic inhibition in Paris.

Picnics and suppers and after work drinks and smokes are common but there is no loud music or talk, very civilized and calming and no one leaves litter.

While France certainly has social problems, issues, and divisions, there is a remarkable diversity in friendships and socializing and shared use of common space with racial, national, gender/sexual orientation, and religious differences playing little or no factor as is not very often the case in my experience in our country.

The park is humanly landscaped and there is a pond with resident ducks and one crabby goose that rules the park who has been there for years that loves to be fed bread by anyone and poses for pictures.

Lots of people sit in the park for long periods every day even in the winter and there are always people eating lunch, sharing drinks, or pizzas in the afternoons and lots of seniors visiting at all times as the park is a neighborhood social center and the apartments are generally small and air conditioning is scarce.

In the evenings when the families and young people go home as nightfall nears, older Vietnamese adults gather on the lawn for a kind of exercise that I suspect might be similar to Tai Chi.

There is a darker history to the park as is the case with much of Paris, it was here in the dungeon and tower of a medieval castle built by the Knights Templar that Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette and their children were imprisoned for months after they were taken captive during the French Revolution.

The ten-year-old Louis XVII died in the prison tower of tuberculosis after being held for three years.

The parish of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary is across the street and that is where I got the idea to dismiss the children during the 10:30 Mass.

I find it helpful in these days of affliction to think about small islands of respite and refreshment for my spirit. Try to find your own memories of calm and serene and untroubled times and places, it will do you good.