

# The Lesson in the Park

Gerald J. Troiano

Retired Police Officer  
Mount Olive, New Jersey



I remember the park that I used to play in,  
Back when the Dodgers were still in Brooklyn,  
And one day I asked, "daddy, who's that man with that gun?"  
"He's a soldier, son, from World War One."

The soldier stood tall and he looked so proud,  
And so young in the uniform that is now his shroud.  
And I wondered to myself if he had a name,  
And what happens to him when it snows or rains?

Then we went to the swings and daddy pushed me a while,  
And I remember that always made him smile.  
And while walking to the duck pond, another soldier I saw,  
"Daddy, did that man also fight in a war?"

"Yes, son, he fought in World War Two,  
And I and many others were there with him too."  
"And what did you do with him in the war?"  
"We did our duty, son, and a whole lot more."

Looking up at the soldier it was hard for me,  
To imagine he fought along with my daddy,  
Who is a very loving and caring man,  
And I just couldn't see him with a gun in his hand.

So, we continued to the duck pond to watch them feeding,  
And behind some bushes I saw a soldier kneeling.  
I tugged on daddy's hand and we walked round a tree,  
To where the soldier was hiding where no one could see.

The soldier was kneeling and holding a flag,  
And his uniform looked like a tattered rag.  
"Daddy," I asked, "was he in World War Three?"  
No, son, he fought so all in our country could be free."

And as we walked back to where our car was parked,  
I spotted a soldier who looked new to the park.  
"Daddy, that soldier looks new and clean,  
He's not like the others who are all green."

"He fought in Korea, across the Pacific, son,  
In a very strange war that we never won.  
And I pray to God you will never have to fight,  
But if you must, make sure the cause is right."

And I remember our flag flying high above a wall,  
With names on it that now few can recall.  
"Daddy, did all those men die in a war?"  
"Yes, son, they did, and there were many more."

Then, many years later on a bright spring day,  
"Son, let's take my granddaughter to the park to play."  
"That's a great idea, dad, I wasn't much older,"  
When we went and you told me all about the soldiers."

And as we passed the wall inside the front gate,  
No flag was flying and it was painted with hate.  
And in my father's eye I could see a tear,  
And as he looked at my daughter, in his eyes I saw fear.

Well, the swings were gone and the duck pond filled in,  
And no soldiers in sight was the final sin.  
Dad said, "let's get the heck out of here, son,"  
"Just a minute, Dad, I want to check on someone."

One section of the park was now overgrown,  
But I remembered it was once one soldier's home.  
So, I moved through some bushes and around a tree,  
And there he was with his flag and still down on one knee.

I went back and said, "Dad, "everything's all right,  
There is still one soldier left to continue the fight,  
So, maybe our parks will come to symbolize,  
What's happening in our Nation, and will open some eyes."

**Previous page:** *Remembering the Fallen*, a life-size bronze sculpture that depicts a modern-day soldier holding a U.S. flag, honors the military's fallen brothers and sisters. This sculpture was installed in May 2018 at the Fremont Veterans Memorial Park and Avenue of Flags in Fremont, Nebraska. (Sculpture by Sutton Betti; used with permission)