The Garden

Richard Wehrman 2003

Ricky Wehrman, 1950

When I was 6 years old, I had a friend who lived across the street from me. We lived in an old frame house, fourth from the corner on Connecticut Street. This was in 1950, in the humid, not yet air-conditioned world of South St. Louis. My friend's name was Adair. He was a beautiful boy with sensitive eyes, and not knowing otherwise, I loved him.

Adair sounds Persian to me now. For all I know it's English. But then, Adair was just his name. I have no memory of his Mother or his Father. I remember only him, and the yard behind their house where we would play. There were tall trees near the house, and open rough green grass between the house and the garage. And under the bright white sun back by the alley was a sandbox with rotting wooden sides. There we tried to dig our way to China. I recall a multi-leveled hideaway

that I designed on paper - a hole of a home, dug deeply in the sand, with ladders leading always deeper down. On the southern side of the yard, in the northern shadow of his house, was a large round mound of moss and magic rocks at the base of a large tall tree. There flowers bloomed in the warmth of Spring and early Easter.

But most beautiful, most desirable of all, was the mystery behind a tall and solid wooden fence that ran the length of the eastern yard. Somewhere in the back there must have been a loosened board, or an open tunnel dug by a dog. For that was the way we got through to the other side.

And there we found the Magic Garden. Like Adair's name, this too seemed to have come from the Arabian Nights. I had never before seen a formal garden – with winding stones and perfect gravel pathways, great green-leaved plants protecting living, brightly blooming colored flowers, tall stalks of seeds and chirping birds. All in harmony with sun, blue sky, white clouds and water. Even water! A little footbridge arched a pond where

goldfish swam. Gold fish! Who could imagine such a thing – bright and glittering – a treasure walled and hidden, there in the midst of our somewhat grey and dingy street.

I remember little more than secretly visiting several times, sitting quietly in the sun, amazed by the jeweled silence that overlay that beauty. Adair moved away when I was 7 or 8 years old; I haven't seen him since.

But the memory keeps floating back to me from many years: a vision of peace in Allah's Garden, visited with my friend Adair. A memory that comes today, as I read with amazement from the poems of Hafiz and Rumi; as tanks and guns and armored soldiers surround the minarets of Baghdad. A memory that comes of love in the garden, and of love for my long lost friend, Adair.

Adair Andrew, 1950