

Mufty's Musings: My Memories of Hawrelak Park

Winter 2023

I'm one of many Edmontonians who is enjoying the last of the glorious winter days at Hawrelak Park. It will soon be closing for three years so the City can rehabilitate the utilities, facilities, open spaces paths and roads. I use my eyes and my camera to capture a few memories to last me during the closure.

There is a beautiful panoramic vista before me. A rich deep layer of snow to the lake edge, perfect pale blue ice on the lake for skating and the three roofed building on the plaza across the lake with a fire burning in the new fireplace. The buildings welcome skaters with an indoor place to warm up and change into their skates. To the west, the lake is edged with green spruce and to the north, in the distance, tall apartments on the edge of the North Saskatchewan River in the background.



The noon sun is shining while a water truck drives by on the south ice edge of the lake with jets of water spraying out. It leaves a wide track of dark blue ice behind it. I watch skaters of all kinds gliding by on the fresh ice. The white booted figure skates, black ice hockey skates and long-bladed racing skates all have silver blades that flash in the sun, on beginners and experts alike. One young girl in a black jacket is practicing her figures, gliding on the outside edge of the blade, then switching to the inside blade as she changes direction. Meanwhile, a young woman skates by, her long grey skirt swaying gently from side to side.



A weeping birch tree by the lake edge stands tall, its white bark bright against the muted blue of the ice behind it. The tree's angular branches gracefully rise creating a round canopy that supports last year's slender weeping branches. I have photographed this lovely tree so many times in my years visiting this park. Sometimes with geese resting in its shade, sometimes with children feeding the ducks nearby, sometimes at night with the lights of Edmonton's skyline reflected in the lake behind.



Today, I also photographed another two of my favorite trees. One is on the north side of the 1st Picnic Site parking lot, its arms outstretched in snow creating a beautifully balanced image. The second, at the south end of the same parking lot, has fascinating bark patterns on the trunk. I'm afraid we will lose all three of these old trees that I shot today. The plan is to remove at least 220 trees during the renovation. The City says it will plant many new ones, but these old friends of mine will be missed. Will the park's remarkable spring-blossom trees also survive the makeover?



I wonder too where the geese will go during the renos? Will the City drain the lake first? And then remove the old weeping birches on the islands? There are two major islands in the lake, one at either end. They are covered with spruce, rocks and bushes; perfect places for geese to nest and raise their families.



There is a bronze sculpture at the entrance to the park. The young woman holding a baby up over her head is called "New Life, New Beginning," created to recognize the pioneer spirit that blossomed in Edmonton. The \$400,000 cost was a bequest in the will of Pearl Hawrelak Porter, wife of William Hawrelak.

There are smaller, but just as important, memorial bequests sprinkled throughout the park. In front of me, an old couple rest on the park bench donated by a family to remember a loved one. What will happen to these memorial benches after the park renovations? The little plaque on the nearby bench reads,

HELEN JANE SCOTT 1925 - 2009

She lived with courage and grace.

May you too enjoy rest and peace here.

I'd love to be a drone that prowls the sky over Hawrelak Park as she gets her new makeover. I want to ask the architects to be gentle and thoughtful with our Mother Earth. She will care for us and nourish our spirits, if we care for her. I long to be at the park re-opening in three years. It's a big wish because I'm 89 now and have lung cancer.

I let the future go and focus on the skaters in front of me as they shift their body weight effortlessly side to side. A little boy skates urgently to keep up with a bigger brother. A loving young couple hold hands and skate in perfect synchronicity.

I will miss you Hawrelak Park, you bring me such peace.