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Urban Dwellings: A Cincinnati Love Song

Urban Dwellings

A Cincinnati Love Song



Katherine Durack



Synopsis

Urban Dwellings: A Cincinnati Love Song is the ideal introduction to the Queen City of the West. Each of the 57 vignettes in this small volume reveals an aspect of city living that inspires, amuses, or informs: From the sound of a jazz septet in the public library to an encounter with city wildlife* From the spontaneous actions of neighbors during Hurricane Ike's damaging remnants to the courageous response of citizens to bank failures and credit abuses during the Panic of 1837 Writing with a passion for intriguing, little-noticed details, author Katherine Durack vividly captures the everyday extraordinary of the people, the history, and the environs of Cincinnati.

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Customer Reviews

Painting a beautiful picture of her surroundings in down town Cincinnati, Katherine Durack has captured something priceless that all Americans should see: In the midst of discouraging times, we all need to practice seeing the beauty that still exists around us.

Urban Dwellings, more than any book of its type, perfectly captures the spirit of downtown

Cincinnati. It is meant to be read in small bites and is quite satisfying.

"No place is a place until it has a poet," wrote Wallace Stegner. By which I think he meant that writing the stories of a place immortalizes it, lending it life beyond the every-day ordinary reality. And that we can each be the "poet" of our places, immortalizing the places we love by observing and writing about them. Katherine Durack gracefully dons the mantle of "poet of her place" in her new book, *Urban Dwellings: A Cincinnati Love Song*. This slim volume began as an occasional series of essays for Cincinnati Public Radio chronicling the stories Durack discovered behind bricked-up windows, in private gardens, and through encounters with other residents in her downtown neighborhood in the "Queen City of the West." It's not that she set out to be the chronicler of a city neighborhood. Quite the contrary. An avowed suburbanite fond of her lawn and garden, Durack and her husband moved to the city as "an experiment," with no commitment to stay in the concrete jungle and no sense of what they would find--or how entranced they would become by downtown life. As she writes in "From the Suburbs to the City," It was the promise of park views that attracted us to the apartment building in which we live. That, and square footage. While we had downsized significantly during our moves from state to state and from suburbs to the city, we still had more stuff than would fit into most of the apartments that were available downtown. We simply rented the first affordable place that would accommodate our too-large furnishings and our too-numerous possessions: a corner unit on the rear of the building. It wasn't long before we discovered the unexpected pleasures of living above an alley and a parking lot. These brief essays celebrate "the joy and richness" of a Midwestern city with a long history and a lively community. There's the legend that Henry Ford built his first assembly line in Cincinnati before moving on to Detroit, which turns out to have some truth to it, but not what you might think; the parade celebrating opening day of baseball season, complete with bagpipers playing "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" and a precision lawn-mower troupe; the tale of the Cincinnati premiere of Aaron Copeland's "Fanfare for the Common Man" deliberately scheduled at tax time; and the street-person sewing who reminds Durack of her mother and aunt, only this seamstress is seated "on the edge of a planter on this city street corner, the sunshine her sewing lamp, the city street her sewing room." Durack's eye for the unusual and her delight in finding and fleshing out little-known facts and stories, plus her love for research and stylish writing voice make these brief essays a pleasure to read. My only quibble: Because the essays began as scripts for a radio commentary, they are very short: most are one to two pages. Sometimes I found myself disappointed at their brevity, wanting to know more. But despite their brevity, the essays are a treat, illuminating as they do the "joys and richness" of close

observation of a place and its community. by Susan J. Tweit for Story Circle Book Reviews reviewing books by, for, and about women

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