**Paths lead here
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**by Karen Fitz La Barge, as published online in** [**culture is not optional.**](https://www.catapultmagazine.com/my-third-place/article/paths-lead-here)

The gazebo was new when we discovered it. It was new, just as you were in my life. Across the street from your college apartment, grandly dominating the north end of the city block that was reserved as Centennial Park. Its metal arms proudly stretched upward from its brick base, nested into the hillside there. With path, flowers and trees and the grotto framing it, it spoke without words to our souls.

I remember the nights when we were dating. The night that my blue Impala broke down and I walked to your apartment, cutting through the park, it was so odd to be there without you. The paths were meant to be walked together with you up to the gazebo. Our gazebo. There we would cradle each other, and I would rest my head in the curve of your neck. My green army jacket collar tickling you. There we would kiss, and you would hold your breath while we did because your nose was stuffed up from the pollen. Even though it was a room without walls, and the world could see us, we didn't care. We made there a room for each other in our hearts and with our commitments. In our gazebo, there were only two people in the world.

After you proposed to me, and the family arguments began; the gazebo came to our rescue. We decided to be married in God's church: out in the world in our gazebo; and the Catholics and the Baptists who had their rules for membership would be left behind. As I got out of my parents’ white Oldsmobile and walked up that park path, with my white chiffon dress sweeping the dust and the spring pollen away, I saw only you at the top of the hill, next to our gazebo. You were laughing at my hat; pinned on at an attitude angle; and the afternoon light flashed off of your glasses. As I took your arm and you led me into the gazebo where the string quartet played, I ignored the honking horns and the catcalls from passersby. You were nervous, and you forgot your vows. But once whispered, you spoke them with your eyes softly brimming with love. That is my favorite picture of you; the picture of you with your melting eyes on our wedding day.

I drive past Centennial Park sometimes now. Our daughter sits with her head against the side of her car seat, looking out the window at the flowers and the tourists with their cameras taking endless shots of the tulips and the fountains. She says, "Mommy! There is the place where you and Daddy got married." And I say, "Yes, there it is." While the garbage trucks rumble on by, and the construction crews are tearing up the street and the sidewalk, repairing the sewers and the phone lines. And the war protesters hold up their signs on Wednesday afternoons asking supporters to honk. The gazebo sits there still, grand and proud and symbolic. Distant from the everyday changes of time and seasons, it just waits for us to come back. Somehow our paths don't seem to lead to the gazebo any more. Perhaps this evening, they should.