



Erika's Dream Park

By Doris Lemke and Charlotte Mae Sheppard

(Based on a true story)

"There is a resurrection, therefore the grave hath no victory, and the sting of death is swallowed up in Christ"
(*Mosiah 16:8*).

"Look at how squished together the houses are!" Richard's younger brother, Michael, said, pointing to a row of matching doors. "Are there any kids my age around here?" he asked.

"I'm sure there are," Mom said, pulling another box from the car.

"Yeah," said Richard. "Look at all the toys and bikes in the yards."

Erika stroked Jewel and tickled her tummy as she carried the purring cat to the front door. "I think Jewel likes it here!" she said.

Richard knew why his family was moving here. It was close to the

hospital where Erika was getting treatments.

Even though Erika was older than Richard, she looked smaller and skinnier because of her cancer treatments. The treatments also made her hair fall out. That's why she always wore a bright yellow hat.

"Almost as sunny as her smile," Mom sometimes said.

Suddenly Michael yelled from the hill up the street. "A playground! We have a playground!"

"A playground?" Erika started walking up the street, her smile even bigger. "Let's go see it!"

As they got closer, Richard saw a big sign on the fence: "UNSAFE—DO NOT PLAY." The swing set was broken, and a few rusty pipes were lying around.

"That's sad!" Richard said. "I bet there

are lots of kids around here who would love a place to play.”

“We could fix it!” Erika said. She sounded excited, like she could already see the way it would look.

“Could we, Mom?” Richard asked.

Mom shrugged. “I don’t know, kids. That would be really difficult.”

Erika looked at the playground. Her smile had faded, but her hat still looked bright and sunny.

Richard turned back to Mom. “Can we *try*?”

Mom finally gave in. But it would take lots of work.

After they got settled in their new house, Richard and Michael started looking for neighborhood kids to help. Mom

called businesses to ask for donations. Before long kids were cleaning up trash and planting flowers. They painted benches with castles, spaceships, and dragons—Erika’s favorite. The whole neighborhood was helping make Erika’s dream come true!

As months went by, Erika got sicker and sicker. But even when she couldn’t help fix things up anymore, she and Jewel came out to cheer the helpers on.

“Remember, we want plenty of ramps for wheelchairs,” she said. “This will be a playground *everyone* can play on!”

On the day the playground was finally opened, Erika wasn’t there. She had already returned to Heavenly Father. But Richard, Michael, and Mom were there—along with tons of other kids. There were kids in

wheelchairs, kids on crutches, and even kids from other neighborhoods!

A new playground sign said “Erika’s Dream Park.”

Richard sat on a bench covered with paintings of dragons and watched everyone run and jump and swing. He knew Erika was in heaven and that she wasn’t sick anymore. But it was still hard watching all those

kids play without her there.

The sun was bright and yellow like Erika’s hat. Richard could feel it warm him from head to toe. He thought maybe he was feeling warm for another reason too. Like maybe the Holy Ghost was telling him that things would be OK. He knew he would see Erika again. And when she was resurrected, her body would be healthy

and strong. A smile spread across Richard’s face.

“Come on, Richard!” Michael shouted from the top of the slide.

Richard jumped off the bench and ran into the sunshine to play. ◆

The authors live in Saskatchewan, Canada, and California, USA.



“There is life after life, first in the spirit world and then in the Resurrection, for each and every one of us.”

President Russell M. Nelson, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

“Life after Life,” *Ensign*, May 1987, 10.