



Max Ehrmann

September 26, 1872 - September 9, 1945

Terre Haute, Indiana

Max Ehrmann died in Terre Haute, Indiana, on September 9, 1945. He was seventy-two. Born there on September 26, 1872, he studied at DePauw and at Harvard in philosophy and law, practiced briefly, worked in the family meatpacking business, and then spent decades writing poems and essays that Terre Haute knew better than the coasts did - until one prose poem escaped.

Desiderata, written in the 1920s and later circulated in ways that sometimes stripped his name from it, became a mid-century talisman: placid counsel in plain American sentences. Ehrmann had to contend, posthumously, with myths that the text was centuries old; scholarship and his widow's care restored the authorship. The poem's fame can overshadow a quieter body of work and a civic life rooted in Indiana.

He was a lawyer-poet of the old provincial kind - not provincial in mind, but loyal to a place. Terre Haute's libraries and streets held him. The counsel in Desiderata - to be on good terms with persons and with silence - reads differently when you know it came from a Midwestern desk rather than a monastery wall.

Highland Lawn is the resting place. The misplaced legend finally lost; the byline remains.

Services

Died in Terre Haute, Indiana, on September 9, 1945. Interment at Highland Lawn Cemetery, Terre Haute.

NN-OBIT-2026-H048

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