

What Value Do You Place on the Memories of Granny and Papa?

Jackie Layne Partin

When the memories fade, and you close your eyes to recall lost loved ones' faces, their withered hands, their loving touches and their sweet voices, where do you go for comfort? Many find solace and closeness by visiting the gravesites of resting ones. For a few, the burial sites become a daily place to visit, accompanied with a heart-wrenching talk of endearing love and loneliness, of repentance or begging for forgiveness. For others, the visits are simply to assure the loved one, "I will be with you soon." Then there are those of us who rarely visit, rarely have those talks, rarely take flowers, and even rarely recall, remember; we retort, "Granny or Papa isn't really there, so there is no need to carry on so."

Friends, as long as cemetery associations' rules are followed, it is alright to grieve in the manner that comforts your soul. Mr. Joe Lester Meeks placed a tarp tent over his wife, Arizona's grave, and for years, he made daily visits to her little, covered tabernacle. Knowing Joe, I figure he was assuring her that "he'd be there soon." He kept his promise.

"Wrap my feet in my son's favorite baby blanket when I die. My feet always get cold." "Take my ring from my finger; keep it near till we meet again." "Just dig a hole and throw me in; God can find me in the end." "Dress me in blue. It's my favorite color." "Bury me in my pajamas; after all, I am just going to sleep." These are some statements I have heard throughout my nearly seventy years on this earth. In 1922 seventy-one-year old Dan T. Tucker of Monteagle couldn't stay behind to wait on his wife, Belle, so he took a deep breath and said with all the joyous anticipation he could muster, "Jesus Take Me Home!" Death is strange! We tiptoe around it because we can't get a handle on it, can't touch it; it's intangible.

But those headstones with precious names and dates inscribed on them are tangible, are reminders to not forget. Folks, we live in America; we were bred to care, to cherish, to continuing loving, even after death, and foremost, to teach our children to follow our lead in showing respect for the graves of our ancestors. From a recent news clipping we read, "He was stunned by the 'lack of respect' for the dead. He said there are open vaults and human remains exposed." Another one states, "Old gravestone markers, both wooden and stone, disappeared while the property was in private hands during the past century and a half." Now, what about our county cemeteries or

burials—what kind of marks would we be given should one come through and view our burial sites, both professional and private.

Well, we have walked, crawled, climbed and driven in and out of burial sites around Grundy County more than a year and a half now, and this winter will allow us to see more. There are about twenty or so volunteers who are seeking out your “Granny and Papa,” your ancestors. We have worked in the rain, in the snow, in the heat, in the cold, searching out your loved ones. I, personally, have been threatened by a huge dog growling and barking at my heels; bitten by many fire ants; frightened by a pack of dogs; sent into “alert mode” by a creepy, glass-darkened, male-driven van; hung by the seat of my pants on a high, wrought-iron fence; deceived by distance when I jumped from an above ground tomb; befriended by a grave digging dog; checked out by a police drive-by, (I was completely dressed in black with a hood covering my head and face as much as possible to protect me from the elements.); chased by wasp; warned to be careful of a male with a gun who walked a certain cemetery; threatened by “no trespassing signs;” stunned when I slipped a foot or so into a sunken grave; and entertained by friendly, helpful neighbors.

I believe the other volunteers could tell similar stories, so let’s say that we know our burial grounds. For the most part, the larger cemeteries in Grundy County are in good shape. Some of the smaller ones need the Boy Scouts, or those wonderful men with orange vest who have reservations at our county jail, or the owners of the private land, or interested, concerned citizens to volunteer to clean and preserve the graves of the county’s “Grannies and Papas.” George Carrell “Dick” Sanders donated land for a school and cemetery back in the 1800’s. He never thought those buried there would be driven over by four-wheelers, or that trees, bushes and briars would canopy their graves so as to hide them, but it is the case. The Sanders Cemetery at Big Spring and the Caldwell Cemetery in Providence are also in extreme need of care. Bulldozers are a threat to our cemeteries; timber skidders are notorious for destroying graves whether on purpose or without knowledge. I could go on and on, but we all know that these things have happened.

On the positive side, please read the following sent to me by a member of the United Methodist Church of Tracy City.

“The gorgeous tapestry of the Last Supper located above the door to the foyer was donated by Pat Boston and Bill Nunley. It was a gift they received recently, and the history behind the gift of the tapestry itself is quite interesting. The Dove Cemetery is a small isolated

family cemetery surrounded by the farm which belongs to the family of C. W. Nunley. From very young ages, Mr. Nunley instilled in his children the moral concept of respect by having the children maintain this solemn burial place, a trait that has continued all these years throughout their adulthood. Recently, the final living family member whose parents are buried in the Dove Cemetery bestowed upon Pat and Bill the gift of the stunning tapestry. The man, a disabled American Veteran, lives in the northern part of the U. S. A. and greatly appreciated the loving care the Nunley siblings had unselfishly displayed toward his dear family members, thus the gift. The gentleman thought that Pat and Bill might want to hang this work of art in their church, which they generously agreed to do. It is believed that the tapestry was woven in China sometime during the 1930's, a time and place where such a display of Christian belief was not only frowned upon, it was more than likely a death sentence. Yet, this beautiful work of art has survived at least 75 years and has found its way to our humble sanctuary. Thank the Lord that there were people then who were not afraid to proclaim their love of Jesus Christ, no matter the sacrifices to themselves. Thank you, Pat and Bill for sharing your gift and love of the Lord with us."

Yes, those Nunley siblings have it right. Cemeteries are not privately owned unless they are family cemeteries. It is the responsibility of all of us to pick up any trash or debris that hinders the upkeep of our sacred burial grounds. Bob and Bettye Sherwood from Hubbard's Cove are great examples of how it is done. Bob has found misplaced stones and put them back where they first stood. He has worked to repair many broken stones. He mows and trims around each stone as though each was at the head of his own family member. If you are looking for a job for your club, please ask a cemetery association, or city major, or historian about one of our local burial grounds. Let's instill the respect for Granny and Papa's burial spots in all our children as Mr. C. W. Nunley did.

(Call 592-6008, the Grundy Co. Historical Society, to offer help on our cemeteries.)