

Hollywood Forever Cemetery

by Liz Gibbons

At breakfast my son said, "This morning I want to take you to the Hollywood Forever Cemetery, where many people associated with the movie industry are buried." I was visiting him in Hollywood when he lived there in 2006, and every day he was giving me a tour of sights in Los Angeles. As we entered the cemetery grounds I felt as if I was in a park. The lush green lawns were dotted with tall palm and other types of trees. I spied a peacock in the distance ambling among the trees. Many grave sites were marked by small mausoleums.

Our first stop was the Cathedral Mausoleum, a large classic architectural structure made of granite and marble. The entry hall was lined with large white statues of the twelve Apostles. Robert led me along the hallways to the crypt of legendary silent movie star, Rudolph Valentino, which was located at the far end of the building. Across from Valentino is the crypt of Peter Finch, the crazed announcer in *Network* who yelled, "I am mad as hell, and I am not going to take it anymore."

Moving outside our attention was drawn to a long reflection pool. At the head of the pool was a marble sarcophagus surrounded by pillars with the remains of Douglas Fairbanks Senior and Junior. Fairbanks, Sr. was Hollywood's first action hero, and he did all his own stunts. His movies included *The Thief of Bagdad*, *Robin Hood* and *The Mark of Zorro*.

As we walked on we saw the mausoleum of director Cecil B. DeMille who directed *The Ten Commandments*. Engraved on the headstone for Mel Blanc, the Man of 1000 Voices, is "That's All Folks." He was the voice of various Looney Tune characters including Porky Pig, Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, Sylvester, and Wile E. Coyote and later for cartoon characters at other studios. As we continued our walk we saw the graves of many other stars such as Tyrone Power, Nelson Eddy, Janet Gaynor, Eleanor Powell, and musician Woody Herman.

We walked over to the large lake where turtles were sunning themselves on wooden platforms on the edge of the lake and ducks and swans either swam in the lake or waddled in the grass alongside it. There was a marker honoring Hattie McDaniel, who won an Oscar for her role in *Gone with The Wind*, the first African-American actress to win an Oscar. Her desire was to be buried in this cemetery, but segregation laws were still in effect when she died, so she was buried elsewhere.

Over the years the cemetery became run down. When Tyler Cassity bought it in 1998, he restored the cemetery and corrected this horrible mistake by honoring Hattie with a memorial marker. Jayne Mansfield is also honored by a marker, although she is buried in Pennsylvania.

This cemetery dates back to the beginning of the film industry and is on land adjacent to Paramount Studios. It is a fascinating piece of history, and our walk through it brought back many memories of stars and movies from my youth.