

CEMETERIES

by Mari Lu McGinnis

When I was a kid we visited cemeteries at least spring and fall. They were almost gay with peonies and iris and bridal wreath in the spring and asters and brilliantly colored leaves in the fall. We'd take a picnic lunch occasionally, since it was usually a holiday. Memorial Day and Armistice Day were musts. Easter in Iowa was usually chilly, but it too was a day to visit the graves of the moms, dads, grandparents, and sometimes children.

I can't remember any one being especially sad. There were always many others there, clustered about their particular sites. They were days of quiet remembering, and tale telling. Thus visiting cemeteries comes naturally to me and I consider them must, like parks only quieter and more peaceful. The folks that manage Fairmount Cemetery, close by here, must feel the same way, since they have movies and other events advertised on their roster that you can read as you drive by on Fairmount Ave.

My favorite cemetery is the Dixon-Savory, Wyoming cemetery, very close to the ranch I visit. I have known quite a few of the folks buried there and their stories. My husband and I planted a Northern pine tree by the grave of his dear aunt. It has grown quite high and lived because his cousin hand watered it through some dry times. The graveyard is maintained entirely by volunteers and, allowing for the dry climate there and the hard winters, they do a good job.

Nothing like Fort Logan National Cemetery which is very park like. No gravestones to tell tales. My husband and young son are buried there, as I will be since they have a three person niche per plot. It bears a passing resemblance to Arlington National Cemetery, the most moving and majestic of all, except possibly Gettysburg National Cemetery, the first of the dedicated military cemeteries. Before the Civil War there were no dedicated military cemeteries. There were so many casualties during that war that some system of burial became mandatory. Many months and years and much money was spent sorting out remains and trying very hard to identify the men whenever they could.

One of my favorite travel relaxations is to find a small country cemetery. Especially in the East, because they are so much older. The tales they tell! Sometimes very explicit! John Vesey fell out of a tree! This mother and baby died in childbirth. The dates are identical. Once in a while one runs across an old soldier's grave. Heartfelt thoughts are carved into the stones and some of them are very grand. There are usually benches and old trees and one can have a lunch. It doesn't have to be Memorial Day, but it always is to me.