

Cemeteries

It's difficult to say what sparked my interest in cemeteries in these later years. It wasn't some kind of death wish, but as I have traveled I have made an effort to visit a cemetery if there is someone of historical note buried there. So this fascination could be related to my studying history at DePauw or the closeness I feel to my grandparents when I visit them in the Danville, Kentucky cemetery where they occupy a choice corner overlooking the Danville High School athletic fields. It also could be related to the soft, spring evenings I spent in Greencastle's Hanna Street Cemetery as an undergraduate.

I uncovered this passion when I made a business trip to Asheville, North Carolina, and decided I wanted to tour the home of Thomas Wolfe. His novels had helped get me through my first two years in the Army, and after I had toured the house made famous in *Look Homeward Angel*, I decided to go down to the handsome Riverside Cemetery to see his grave. It was a serendipitous journey as I discovered William Sidney Porter (O. Henry) also resided there.

When our youngest daughter, Meredith, married an Englishman and took up residence in London, I visited the home of John Wesley. He is buried in his backyard. But even more fascinating was Bunhill Fields across the street from Wesley's home, the site of a Nonconformist cemetery, open to those Protestants who practiced their faith outside of the Church of England. Today it is a park. Walking around it, you encounter the graves of Susanna Wesley, John Bunyan, Daniel Defoe, and William Blake among others.

Then when Meredith and her family moved to Luxembourg. I toured the magnificent Luxembourg American Cemetery where 5,000 American soldiers are buried row upon row. They died primarily in the World War II Battle of the Bulge, which was fought across the northern part of the country. In the first row--in a grave marked similarly to many others--is General George Patton's resting place. He did not die in the climatic battle, but rather in Germany shortly after the end of the war.

I found a fascinating cemetery in Russia. In Moscow many prominent Russians are buried in the Novodevichy Cemetery, on the grounds of the New Maidens Convent. Here many graves are marked by fascinating sculptures. Those I remember most clearly include the fascinating double profile sculpture at Nikita Khrushchev's grave. Out of favor when he died, he did not make it into the Kremlin Wall. In retrospect I would say this post-modern sculpture available to all citizens to view worked out better for him. Particularly touching was the sculpture of Raisa Gorbachova, the wife of then Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachov. She is shown in full figure like a dancer reaching out to all who pass. She died of cancer while her husband went on to end the Cold War, win the Nobel Prize and oversee the beginning collapse of the Soviet Empire. And his successor, Boris Yeltsin, has a wonderfully modern, wave-like, flowing multi-colored sculpture. More prosaic but

also interesting are the graves of Nikolai Gogol, Anton Chekhov, Dmitri Shostakovich and Sergei Prokofiev. There are also political figures-- Vyacheslav Molotov and Anastas Mikoyan-- who managed to avoid Stalin's wrath and died peacefully,

It is also fun to suddenly come upon someone famous, particularly when their final resting place is so very understated. Walking down the totally engrossing Royal Mile in Edinburgh, I came upon the Canongate Kirkyard, walked into discover there the name of Adam Smith in the far corner on a large headstone. The father of economics is supposed to one day get a more celebrated or elaborate resting place, but for now modesty is the word.

A second surprise occurred in Berlin, when my wife Cathie went to an emergency room. (The experience was a splendid testament to German medicine.) In the course of the visit, I calculated we weren't far from the burial site of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, one of the giants of 19th Century philosophy. (You can see how much fun it is to travel with me.) His grave is in the Dorotheenstadter Friedhof, a small cemetery established in the late 18th Century. I was surprised at how unimpressive his gravestone was; if you were not intentionally looking for it, you could easily miss it. Two other significant Berliners who made their names in literature—Bertolt Brecht and Thomas Mann—were also modestly placed.

One site not to be missed in Berlin is the Holocaust Denkmal just one block South of the Brandenburg Gate. Constructed in 2003, it is a memorial for the Jews killed by the Nazis between 1933 and 1945. A multi-football field-sized space of 205,000 square feet is filled with tombstone-like, polished concrete slabs of different heights. It appears like an ancient field of closely placed steles. You can walk between them and the stone paths dip gradually down and up in interesting patterns. Moving among the field of tablets had the same impact on me as walking along the Vietnam Memorial in Washington D.C.

Okay, this could be categorized as a strange fascination, but as I said the ease and interest with which I explore these resting places of the famous and long departed may have begun at DePauw. It was connected to my dislike of fraternity and sorority bum rooms, those dark dens of communal making out. I found them indelicate and perhaps even competitive as in "why is his date breathing harder than mine?" It just always felt a bit awkward so when the weather broke in early spring I would grab a blanket, a date and head for the Hanna Street Cemetery. There I would find a spot—I could say a "quiet" spot, but they were all quiet—perhaps next to Thomas Johnston who passed on in 1846 or Robert Gilmore whose life ended in the Civil War in 1862, or perhaps Poley Burton who may have christened the cemetery with her burial in 1818. There we would keep company with these folks and celebrate life in a way I know they appreciated.