



NOTRE-DAME-DES-NEIGES  
CEMETERY

Where life is a garden of memories

# Dialogue

*Notre-Dame-Des-Neiges Cemetery Newsletter*

*Vol. 3 No.9 September 2001*

## **The Tale of Notre-Dame-des-Neiges (Part VI)**

**I**t was between 1951 and 1975 that Notre-Dame-des-Neiges Cemetery acquired the configuration that we know today. To begin with, the creation of the Decelles/Côte-des-Neiges intersection necessitated the demolition, reconstruction and modification of the old "maison de la Côte-des-Neiges," erected between 1751 and 1781 by Joseph-Henri Jarry. Considered one of the finest examples of rural architecture of the French regime on the island of Montreal, this house was designated a historical monument in 1957. A few years later, in 1961, the Camillien-Houde Parkway, a panoramic road for vehicles, was inaugurated, replacing the tramway line.

1955 saw the channelling of the Raimbault Creek. The pond, that increasingly resembled a marsh, with all its inherent risks, was gradually drained, a process that was completed in the mid-1960s. However, removal of the pond simultaneously eliminated a small island in its midst, that contained a miniature cottage that doubled as a goose house.

At that time, most of the roads for vehicle traffic were in place while some footpaths disappeared from the oldest islets, including those designed by Henri-Maurice Perrault. As a result, these islets lost their aesthetic qualities with the erecting of modern monuments alongside structures dating back over a century. The 1960s also witnessed other landscape transformations that were more or less successful,

partly owing to declining family size and the disintegration of households. Plots now became smaller, monuments more modest and the alignment more monotonous.

Regarding construction, the Chapel of the Resurrection was renovated by the architect Paul-Marie Lemieux, in preparation for the centennial celebrations of the cemetery in 1955. Two guards resided there until 1994. Architect



Roland Dumais drafted the plans for a crematorium and the Chapels of the Visitation, Annunciation and the Holy Ghost, all four of which were inaugurated on November 17, 1975. However, as the architectural conservation movement had yet to be born in Québec, the landscape of Notre-Dame-des-Neiges once again lost coherence and harmony when several family charnel-houses, many dating back over

a century, were demolished owing to deterioration. This was the fate of that of

**Thanks to all our readers who contribute comments and suggestions. Please keep writing.**

architect Victor Bourgeau who, you will remember, had designed the monumental door of the cemetery on Côte-des-Neiges Road. As for plot maintenance, André Dupré, former foreman of the cemetery, told us that it has been done systematically since the centennial celebrations of the cemetery in 1955

However, this policy resulted in the removal of several posts, fences and small walls that hindered lawn mowing.

It is now 1975. Since its earliest beginnings, the Notre-Dame-des-Neiges cemetery has been the final resting place of 737,717 people, some of whom had been buried in temporary graves on islets recovered by draining the pond. Despite all the improvements made during this period, the

cemetery lost, with the disappearance of Raimbault Creek and the pond, all the aquatic elements which were so well suited to the garden cemetery concept. Fortunately, the wooded zones of the cemetery have been preserved, creating to this day an ambience of calm and contemplation. ♦

**Yolande Tremblay**  
General Manager



CENTRE FUNÉRAIRE  
CÔTE-DES-NEIGES

## Why prepare a personalized ritual?

The phenomenon of personalized funeral services has grown dramatically in Québec. This trend has been fuelled by factors such as the influence of diverse cultures and a need to add uniqueness and significance to the entire process surrounding the funeral.

Indeed, personalization partly enhances the bereavement

experience. Aside from the fact that the grieving family receives condolences from friends and relatives, the use of personal objects to illustrate stages in the life of the deceased stimulates conversations among the visitors as they recollect happy times gone by. Personalization allows transformation of a sad event into an extremely rich moment of sharing appreciated by grieving families and visitors alike.

Evidently, personalization of the funeral service calls for commitment by the family members. Together, the relatives assemble significant items (photos, objects, etc.), tell stories and recall anecdotes. In short, the people who participate



in this process benefit from an exceptional and enriching experience. This process is instrumental in helping grieving families overcome their bereavement.

The family adviser at the funeral home plays a key role in personalized ceremonies. He is there to answer all the mourning family's questions. He reassures them as they make their decisions and helps them plan effectively to

ensure respect for individuals and the law while avoiding excesses of bad taste. He helps the family remain focused on the ultimate objective: organizing a funeral that will pay tribute to the life of the deceased.

In fact, personalization of the funeral ritual is expressed in as many different ways as there are different people. It spans the visitation period to the funeral ceremony and makes the occasion present, unique and inestimable. ♦

**Robert Leblanc**

Director, Côte-des-Neiges Funeral Centre

By Johanne de Montigny, psychologist

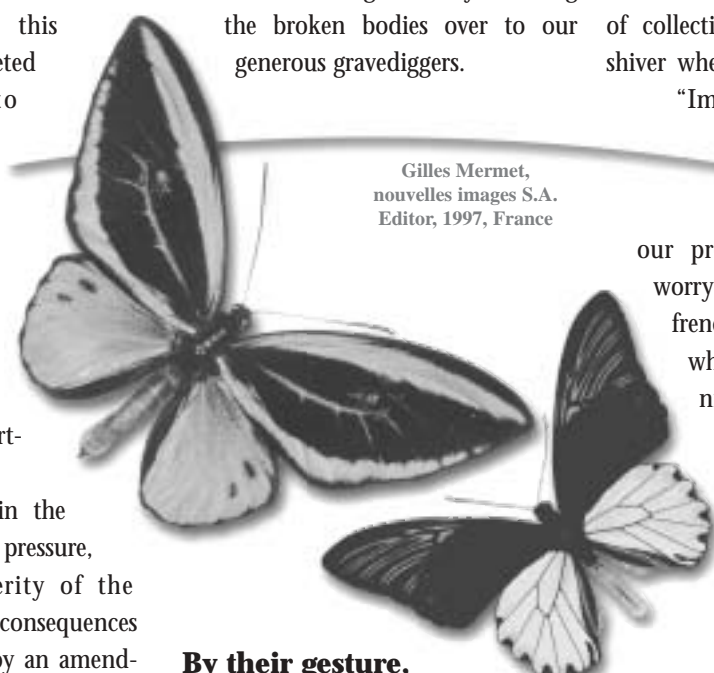
## “The Garden of Angels”

This was the title of a gripping report broadcast on “Le Point”, following the Radio Canada news one evening in July 2001. The documentary was produced in California. We met a woman who, after having made the macabre discovery of a newborn baby dumped in a trash can, bought and developed land alongside her own home, and converted it into a garden cemetery for dead and abandoned children. In this American state, the law meted severe punishment to mothers who abandon their babies on the parvis of a parish church or at the foot of a staircase of a tranquil home. These desperate women surely hoped to appeal to potential adoptive parents by making a heart-wrenching call for help!

The good Samaritan in the report was moved to exert pressure, demonstrating the severity of the problem, and the criminal consequences were ultimately reversed by an amendment to the law. Now, mothers can sacrifice their children in places accessible to passers-by.

The good Samaritan's spouse agreed to lend her a hand and the two volunteers began to hand-make small white crosses, adorned with a heart, to commemorate the fragility of human existence. They also named each baby posthumously. That's right, each baby, because there were more than one. By

the time the report was aired, over 40 abandoned babies were resting beneath the wooden crosses planted in the ground in the Garden of Angels. A garden of babies found here and there like emotional wanderers that could not cling to life. One of them had struggled out its diaper in a vain attempt to escape its horrific fate. The police, well aware of this sacred site, can now fulfil a more honourable obligation, by handing the broken bodies over to our generous gravediggers.



Gilles Mermet,  
nouvelles images S.A.  
Editor, 1997, France

**By their gesture, they have agreed to grieve for abandoned children, to return honour to desperate families.**

The creation of this ritual soothes the harsh memories of wretched lives. The respect that the adoptive parents give these tiny foundlings triumphantly underscores the documentary. The couple have transformed the sordid into a marvel. By their gesture, they have

agreed to grieve for abandoned children, to return honour to desperate families. They confirm to the entire world the need for a memorial, the depth of unconditional love and human solidarity in the worst personal catastrophes.

This uplifting story reminds us that the most powerful way to recover from the affliction caused by grief is above all the force of ritual, the inestimable value of the ceremony and the healing effects of collective support. That is why I shiver when I read in the newspapers,

“Immediate cremation, no coffin, no embalming, no ceremony...” The speed with which we expedite our predecessors is beginning to worry me. Granted, it mirrors the frenetic pace of modern life, but what will happen to a community with no memory for tomorrow? The absence of memories risks accentuating the absence of the loved one.

If the death of a child is more difficult to bear because it represents the loss of a future that we wanted to impart to another before our demise, it also invites

the survivors to render homage to the dead infant by perpetuating its all too brief but inspiring memory on the wings of a historical butterfly between the Garden of Angels and the vast terrain of filiation, a land called “The Garden of Perpetuity.” ♦

## WHO ARE THEY, WHAT DO THEY DO?

The clientele and visitors of Notre-Dame-des Neiges Cemetery and the Notre-Dame Basilica of Montreal are always surprised to learn that over 250 employees work for the Fabrique of the Notre-Dame-de Montreal parish. Given this reaction of astonishment, we have decided to introduce them to you and describe the multiple tasks they carry out.

That is why we are proposing, over the next few issues of Dialogue, a behind the scenes tour of the Notre-Dame Basilica of Montreal and the Notre-Dame-des Neiges Cemetery. Discover the impressive number of people who are all at your service directly or indirectly, and who hold over 50 different positions both in the administrative offices, on the grounds of the Fabrique and in building and equipment maintenance

Among others, we will introduce you to employees who work anonymously, but whose accomplishments you can see each time you visit one of our sites or buildings. You may be surprised to learn that many of our employees have been serving you for over 40 years, and that the members of some families have been employed by the Fabrique for several generations. You will find out the requirements and difficulties



Pavilion of  
Human Resources

inherent in some positions, and we will let you in on the sometimes surprising daily routine of people who work at maintaining and improving the services and activities offered to you by the Fabrique of the Notre-Dame de Montreal parish.

We hope you will join us in our next issue for the first tour of our employees. ♦

**Michelle Bourget**

Directrice des ressources humaines

## September 9 – Anniversary of the Notre-Dame-des-Neiges Cemetery

In most parishes, the month of September heralds the annual pilgrimage to the cemetery. This tradition is a custom anchored so deeply in people's minds that we often talk about Cemetery Day rather than a pilgrimage. Yet at first glance, a cemetery is certainly not a place that would lend itself to a festive day in the usual sense of the term. But why not? Is it not at a cemetery that the living can recapture almost palpable memories of their deceased relatives and friends? That is why for many visitors, these reunions often resemble a party. What can be more genuine and easier to understand? To pray or simply to gather together in this temporal place where our loved ones rest, alongside whom we have lived much of our lives, is well deserving of being called a "festive day."

Gathered at a solemn mass under a tent, mourners share moments of emotion and sympathy by collectively recalling, albeit briefly, the milestones that mark the history of our families and of our own lives.

The discrete and silent paths of the cemetery become, for all

of us, places of remembrance.

The cemetery can also be considered a wide open history book that commemorates hundreds and thousands of lives.

Large and small tombstones recall the passage among us of famous figures, together with day workers, labourers, mothers and fathers.

As surprising as this may seem, it may be at the cemetery that we find our best reasons for living. Why not make a visit a festive occasion? ♦

**Francine Mc Duff**

(Text published on the Internet by Gilles Boileau)



by *Christian Biot, Priest of Diocese of Lyon, France*

## “L’Autre Rive”

For the past few years, funeral homes, both municipal and private, have been building funeral complexes. These sites include funeral salons along with cold storage rooms to conserve remains. Families and friends can gather in special halls to pay their last respects to the deceased. Services are held in multi-denominational salons.

It was in response to the demand for funeral complexes that Jacques Faivre, Archdiocese of Lyons, today Bishop of Mans, founded a Christian team in 1990 that adopted a name “L’Autre Rive”.

This team is currently made up of 20 people, including one priest. Its role is simple. Someone is on duty every morning, to receive calls from funeral homes. This person is in charge of reaching one of the team members. The designated team member then co-ordinates the meeting with the persons who request the service (family, friends of the deceased, guardians) and oversee the organization of the service.

In 2000, L’Autre Rive held 1,002 services.

Most of the services are Catholic: reference to Christ dead and resurrected, a link with the Catholic community, even if this link does not lead to a service in a parish church. In fact, the Catholic Church has set forth guidelines for the preparation of such services.

Often the reference is solely religious. By celebra-

tion, we want to make a “link” between the living and the deceased that are departing, and we want to refer to God, who is not recognized as “the Father of Jesus Christ.”

But more and more often, families request that the service unfold uniquely in the human sphere, without reference to religious beliefs or expressions of faith. People will say outright, “We’re not observant but we do not want to bury the person like a dog!”

The L’Autre Rive team has chosen not to turn down these types of requests that cannot be honoured elsewhere. As long as civil society, be it through funeral homes or municipal associations or initiatives, does not provide animation of services, the onus is on Agents of churches to guide families in the prepara-

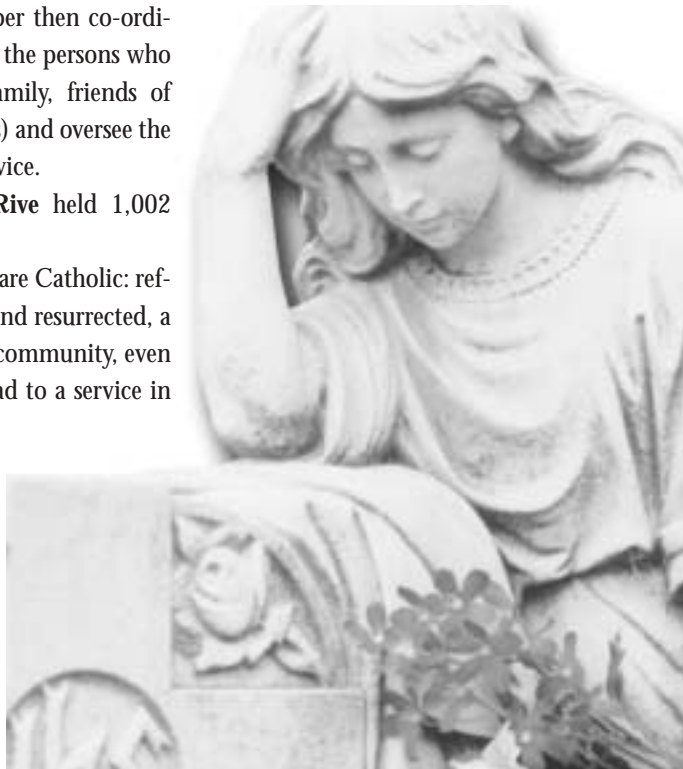
ration and presiding over of services that are not reduced to a minute of silence.

Members of associations such as political parties and unions sometimes call on the Animators.

For others, refusal is tantamount to denying them funeral rites. We know this deprivation has a negative impact on the grieving process: it hinders acceptance of the separation and recognition of the place of the deceased in the social chain and in the chain of generations.

In most situations, what is most remarkable is the capacity of people involved in funerals to take an active role in the service: choice of text, composition of poems, musical selections, use of objects with symbolic value, participation in reading. With encouragement and reassurance, people are usually able to find something that gives the service a personal touch.

The vitality and competency of members of L’Autre Rive are guaranteed: not only do members dialogue and support each other; but they also meet monthly to explore issues related to reception and services. There is also a “reservoir” of written services. Moreover, the animators participate in three annual meetings proposed by the Sacramental and Liturgical Pastoral of the Diocese of Lyons entitled “Evaluons,” which allows the revisiting of work accomplished. ♦



## Bronze lanterns

### *Prolonging a prayer in memory of a loved one*

**W**hen you enter a church you will often see people approach the lampion stands and bend down to light a candle or two. Some say that this helps the souls of their dearly departed rest, others wish to obtain the grace of God or to give thanks for favours received.

In most mausoleums of the cemetery, lampions are prohibited for safety reasons, in particular fire hazards, but we have recently begun offering our clientele bronze lanterns. In our mausoleum La Pièta, we have recently completed the installation of a complementary electrical system that offers each concession holder the possibility of installing a lantern that represents the eternal flame to adorn the marble of their crypt.

The La Pièta is the first of several mausoleums to benefit from these new electrical installations. The systems are in place at the Ste-Claire D'Assise and Ste-Marguerite D'Youville mausoleums, and the St-Pierre and St-Paul and Marguerite-Bourgeois mausoleums will soon join their ranks.

Custom dictates that when there is a deceased person present, the lantern must be lit. It symbolizes the eternal flame, the extension of thought beyond death. It denotes a presence, a soul that is resting in peace. Moreover, this cherished person has not been forgotten.

The lantern that we offer our clien-



tele is a hanging bronze flower vase, with two pieces forming a set. The fabrication technique of these pieces is called the "lost wax process." From the original part designed by an artist, a mould is obtained, from which a hollow wax copy is made. The hollow section of this copy is then filled with a solid paste made of refractory material. Wax rods are then attached to allow the regular flow of the molten bronze. The whole object is covered with a new layer of refractory material, and the resulting form is baked in the oven for six days at a high temperature. During the firing, the wax copy melts (hence the term lost wax), leaving an imprint, that will be filled by the cast liquid bronze. The lantern and the bronze vase along with a large quantity of ornaments that we offer our clientele originates from France, where the quality of bronze is superior to that of many other countries.

Choosing a bronze urn also guarantees that time will not alter its appearance, and that the memory of the loved one will be preserved for eternity. Our display cases on the first floor and the ground floor offer a vast array of urns and bronze ornaments, and you can find more unique choices in our second-floor salon.



Our consultants would be glad to offer you more information. Better yet, come see for yourself the originality and beauty of these items offered at a very reasonable cost. ♦

**Johanne Duchesne**  
Director, Marketing

**TO ACCOMPANY THE VOYAGE**

Editorial taken from "Actualité des religions"

– death -its gestures, its rites.

Not long ago, existence from birth to death was marked by rites that were more or less assumed. Modern man no longer wants any impositions. Free to make choices throughout their lives, people also plan to leave life totally free and to decide their fate for themselves.

But death in the first person does not necessarily mean passing away in solitude. On the contrary, the final moments are a time for sharing, exchanging words, looks and gestures. It is a time for accompaniment, and a need for the utterance of spoken rituals. The rite is part of the singular destiny of the human species. It is what allows people to project themselves in the memory of their loved ones or in the great beyond.

When it comes to giving meaning to death, families are powerless. Caregivers are



ill equipped to make the final gestures, in keeping with the convictions of their deceased patient. People yearn to better spiritually accompany their loved ones at the end of their lives.

A project has ensued from the conference on "Religious traditions and death" organized by the magazine "Actualité des Religions" and the General funerals at the Fontfroide abbey near Narbonne, in Aude. Welcoming all spiritual paths, it grants a place to agnosticism and atheism as well. A voyage through cultures and spirituality, a preparation and help for the Great Voyage.

**Jean-Paul Guetny**

Director of "Actualité des Religions"

## A GARDEN of memories

### Day Lilies Ease and Diversity



Originally yellow or orange in colour, day lilies are available today in an endless array of hues and heights.

Their ease of acclimation to any type of soil makes them an easy to grow annual that requires practically no maintenance.

The most critical period for the day lily is planting. The bed must be properly hoed and weeded. Because day lilies adore compost, it is recommended that some compost be mixed into the soil during planting. Regular watering in the first two weeks following planting will ensure that the plant thrives. Then, except in cases of extreme dryness, day lilies can store the necessary reserves.

At the cemetery, two varieties of day lily are commonly planted. The first, Stella de Oro, a dwarf variety 45 cm high whose flowers blossom from June to September, is visible in front of the Jean-Paul II mausoleum. The second, Summer Wine, flowers in mid-summer and can reach 60 cm in height, and can be seen close to the Decelles entrance.

Therefore, if you are looking for a plant that is easy to grow, requires no maintenance and that comes in an unlimited choice of colours, the day lily is a fine choice.

**Yvon Pagé**

Superintendent, Notre-Dame-des-Neiges  
Greenhouses (514) 735-1361



### Guided tours of the cemetery

Art and history lovers take note, there will be a guided tour on Sunday, September 9, at 12:30 p.m., the day of the annual commemorative mass of the cemetery. Register today by contacting Ms. Christine Latour at (514) 735-1361. Don't wait...

In case of rain, the tour will be postponed until the following week, Saturday, September 15 at the same time.

If you are a member of a group and would like a guided tour of the cemetery for your group, please contact us and we will be glad to send you all the pertinent information.



## *New at the Notre Dame Basilica: Special visits for elementary schools!*

Beginning in December 2000, the team of guides at the basilica will welcome classes of fifth grade students as part of a tour specially adapted to the criteria of the Ministère de l'éducation du Québec. The tour lasts 90 minutes, and is intended to help students discover what differentiates a church from other types of buildings, along with the distinctive characteristics of Notre Dame. In addition, this visit is an opportunity to rediscover Catholic thought, which plays an important role in our cultural and spiritual heritage.



To prepare groups for the tour, we are sending teachers a guide that contains introductory activities and that initiates the students to the vocabulary of uniquely Catholic concepts. We are thus poised to welcome a diversified clientele, regardless of religion.

To date, over 1200 students in the Greater Montreal region have visited the Basilica. Most of the visitors were fifth graders, but we also have welcomed classes from the third, fourth and sixth grades, with slight changes in the content of the activity. Over the next few years, we will extend the range of services offered to school groups.



**Annual commemorative mass will be celebrated outdoors under a marquee on September 9, 2001 by Msgr. Yvon Bigras, priest of the Basilique Notre-Dame de Montréal, at 11:00 a.m.**

Light snacks will be served, starting at 10:00 a.m.

*All are welcome.*

### **Monthly Masses**

All masses are celebrated on Saturday:  
September 1, October 6 and November 3, 2001  
and take place at 10 a.m. and 11 a.m.  
at the Chapel of the Resurrection.

**FREE PARKING**

*This poem was written by a terminally ill young girl in a New York Hospital*

### **SLOW DANCE**

Have you ever watched kids  
On a merry-go-round?  
Or listened to the rain  
Slapping on the ground?  
Ever followed a butterfly's erratic flight?  
Or gazed at the sun into the fading night?

You better slow down.

Don't dance so fast,

Time is short.

The music won't last.

Do you run through each day  
On the fly?

When you ask "How are you?"

Do you hear the reply?

When the day is done

Do you lie in your bed

With the next hundred chores

Running through your head?

You better slow down.

Don't dance so fast,

Time is short.

The music won't last.

Ever told your child,

We'll do it tomorrow?

And in your haste,

Not see his sorrow?

Ever lost touch,

Let a good friendship die

Cause you never had time

To call and say "Hi"?

You'd better slow down.

Don't dance so fast,

Time is short.

The music won't last.

When you run so fast to get somewhere

You miss half the fun of getting there.

When you worry and hurry through your day,

It is like an unopened gift...

Thrown away.

Life is not a race.

Do take it slower

Hear the music

Before the song is over.