



NOTRE-DAME-DES-NEIGES  
CEMETERY

Where life is a garden of memories

# Dialogue

*Notre-Dame-Des-Neiges Cemetery Newsletter*

*Vol. 2 No. 4 April 2000*

## *The Tale of* **Notre-Dame-des-Neiges**

Since the very beginning, human beings have been fascinated by stories, from early childhood right through to old age. What child, no matter where in the world, has not been filled with wonder by a story, tale or fable? What adult would deny himself the pleasure of being drawn into the lives of the characters, be they real or fictional? From the age of oral tradition to the days when film and television made their debut, we have always loved to identify with people from another world, whom we tend to transform into heroes or heroines.

Because imagination is one of humanity's most valuable gifts, we decided to tell you the story – in a few instalments – of one of the most beautiful cemeteries in the land: your very own Notre-Dame-des-Neiges.

It is the middle of the 19th century, in 1852 to be precise. The Fabrique, which was already in existence at that time, decided to make Notre-Dame-des-Neiges Cemetery a place inspired by the most famous French cemeteries, not only in

terms of size but also with regard to the layout of its various sections. At the same time, closer to home, everyone was talking about the concept of a garden-cemetery, made popular by American James C. Sydney, who ended up at Mount Royal Cemetery. To learn more about this type of cemetery, a man named Henri-Maurice Perrault was sent to several cities in 1854, including New York and Boston, where he visited the Mount Auburn Cemetery.

In that same year, 1854, the Cemetery Committee drew up the first plans for the Notre-Dame-des-Neiges Cemetery. The layout was designed to allow for future expansion without affecting the existing cemetery. In 1855, the caretaker's house, which would also serve as a chapel, was built. It was a fair distance from the building that had formerly belonged to Dr. Beaubien, the land's original owner. This



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◀ "VERS LE CIEL"  
BY LAURENT LAFLEUR

building was being used as the residence for the Sisters of Providence, who were working on-site at the parish's request. It was demolished in November 1857 following the nuns' departure.

The various pathways running through the cemetery existed well before the Fabrique acquired the land, except for the one that runs crosswise and provides access to the ossuary and the oval-shaped island at the entrance, whose wooden cross gives the cemetery its distinctive Catholic character. Speaking of islands, those on flat

ground are arranged in a checkerboard pattern, while others along winding pathways are laid out in a more random fashion. It was this irregular landscaping that most attracted Henri-Maurice Perrault, since it followed the contours of the land and blended in with the natural growth of trees. He was convinced that a cemetery that looked like a checkerboard would be equally distasteful to the public.

Notre-Dame-des-Neiges Cemetery was still in its infancy in 1854. Its future would include myriad transformations, and many influential person-

alities would make their mark, giving it the stately appearance that we know and love today. ♦



**Yolande Tremblay**  
General Manager



## Côte-des-Neiges Funeral Centre **Respecting Your Wishes**



“Different times, different measures,” as the saying goes. At the Côte-des-Neiges Funeral Centre, we believe that funeral services must keep up with the times.

More and more people today are feeling the need to personalize the rites and ceremonies surrounding the final farewell to their dearly departed. That is why the concept of the Côte-des-Neiges Funeral Centre was created.

Here you can find a complete range of products and services designed to meet the needs of every individual, all

under one roof. No matter what your cultural background, the Centre offers a spirit of openness that helps create an atmosphere conducive to celebrating funeral rites, whether traditional or non-traditional.

The Côte-des-Neiges Funeral Centre is a place where people gather together and contemplate, a place where services are geared toward those left behind, to help them deal with the grieving process and start looking toward the future with serenity.

## Our Mission

In the spirit of openness that is the defining feature of the Côte-des-Neiges Funeral Centre, our mission is to offer families in mourning a place where they may gather together to say their last goodbyes and celebrate funeral rites reflecting their own particular cultural tradition, religious belief or individual preference: a place that helps families and friends honour the memory of their loved ones and turn their grief into hope.

**Robert Leblanc**  
Director

By Johanne de Montigny, psychologist

## Postcard from Japan

I have just returned from a wonderful trip to Japan, which came about through my work in palliative care. In a place 100 kilometres from Tokyo, a meeting between Japanese caregivers and two Quebecers – Dr. Anna Towers, director of the Royal Victoria Hospital's palliative care services, and myself, as a psychologist for terminal phase patients – was held to exchange views and ideas on our respective and collective approaches toward those who are dying, those who look after them, those who live in anticipation of mourning, and those who are experiencing actual grief. The meeting was overflowing with human compassion, our mutual goal being primarily the spirit of care and concern for the terminally ill. There, at the foot of spectacular Mount Fuji, a man coming to the end of his life shared these beautiful thoughts with us from the “House of Peace,” where he was living his last days: “Tell them that I die at peace, in love, surrounded by emotional warmth from wonderful caregivers, in a place blessed by the gods, with my wife beside me, such a devout believer. Know also

that I am honoured to receive you here in the anteroom of my death, you who have come from afar.” These words, worth their weight in gold, were uttered in a foreign tongue and translated simultaneously into the language of Shakespeare by an expert in discreet tears. To this day, they still move me deeply...

When someone close to you loses a loved one, she sheds tears for all she experienced while her beloved was alive and all she went through when he died; she sheds tears of joy and tears of

Death on earth is birth in eternity; each mortal ending is an immortal beginning.

*Doris Lussier*

sorrow; she also sheds tears for all she has lost, for the mystery of death as much as the enigma left by his dying. What the loved one feels when faced with his own imminent death cannot easily be put into mere words. The experience –



Postcard theme: Voyage to the snow-covered north.

both cruel and awesome – of one who is dying appeals to our imagination, our interpretation, our observations, doubts and certainties. I think those who are dying before our eyes are courageous; they have the spirit of pioneers opening up the frontier of our broken hearts, faced with the presence of menacing, permanent absence.

When we are given that one chance to hear the last words and share that final moment, perhaps our grief is less obscure. Death surrounded by tension, anxiety, dissatisfaction and discomfort is hardly easy, and the act of leaving, of going toward the unknown does not appease the grief of the survivors. It is important to

remember: the more optimal conditions for mutual comfort put in place, the more significant the connection between death and grief, as much for the one leaving as for the one left behind.

This man gave us the gift of his tranquillity before dying – a gift to cultivate over time and throughout our remaining years. Was this a lesson on the art of dying or the art of living? On the art of loving or the art of leaving? True love is also blessed with this ability to relinquish a loved one into the arms of a new universe, secure between a desert island and a deserted island, naked, the dying stripped bare, the bereaved stripped bare. “Death on earth is birth

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## Death: Meeting God Our Father

**In** the last issue of *Dialogue*, I said that, for human beings, death requires an answer because it asks a question. Continuing from where we left off, are we not always in search of the infinite? For example, there are moments in our lives when we have known great joy – weddings, births, successes. Is not our greatest desire that these moments of happiness endure forever, for all eternity, becoming even more exquisite, growing even more powerful? And then anything could happen – disaster, illness, even death. Is there any sense in this? Christian faith has an answer. In the Bible, in the Book of Wisdom, chapter 1, verse 13, it is written, “God takes no pleasure in the extinction of the living.” When God created the world, his plan was not thus. Sin entered into the world. The Book of Wisdom continues: “Yes, God did make man imperishable, he made him in the image of his own nature. It was the devil’s envy that brought death



into the world as those who are his partners will discover” (2:23-24). Christ conquered sin and death, its consequence. That is what we celebrate at Easter – Christ’s Resurrection, and our own that is to come. “Jesus loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father” (Rev 1:5-6). When death looms over us or threatens a loved one, it is our faith in Christ’s salvation that lightens our despair. Experiences of people who come into daily contact with death – those who work in a hospital, for example – show how much religious faith helps those who are touched intimately by death.

“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth. Blessed indeed... that they may rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them!” (Rev 14:13).

Yes, God is our Father who awaits us with open arms. ♦

**Msgr. Yvon Bigras,**  
p.s.s., C.S.S.



*From page 3 - Postcard from Japan*

in eternity; each mortal ending is an immortal beginning,” philosopher Doris Lussier loudly proclaimed just before her own death. Accepting things left undone, mourning all that could not be born of a meaningful encounter, abandoning the corporeal and arising to embrace the spiritual with courage and simplicity – how can we not bow before what comes after? And so we go home, thoughtful and silent, gratified by the sacred experience.

The death of others makes us rethink our own lives. It makes us set out once more in search of a larger life, because those who have passed on ask us to return to a deeper place within

ourselves, they being unable to come back to us. They are the reason for this quest, this unquenchable, unshakeable thirst, the thirst for life... right up until the very end. The ordeal of loss can thus be transformed into the gift of living. As Francine Chicoine so rightly expressed in her book, *Caresse de porcépic*, “You remain thunderstruck, even to the point of asking yourself if this reaction is normal. You feel so carried away by a higher power that you become invested with it. And even if your amazement takes your breath away, the power breathes for you. An unexpected plenitude heightens your appreciation of things. During life’s worst moments, when Grace is with you, it’s so that you know to remind yourself to say... thank you.”

All of this is possible when misery is transformed into discovery. For grief consists of three stages, three movements: the shock and the void created by the loss; the pain and suffering resulting from the emptiness and the absence; and the redefinition of the self that is vital to living a life without the loved one. This redefinition of the self is the only consolation on the horizon, and this perspective gives me the strength to listen day after day to the agony of the grief-stricken, living in the shadow of their sorrow and in the hope of healing.

To those who are in the midst of such sorrow, know that our fondest thoughts are with you, as are the thoughts of our readers. Until next time... ♦

by Christian DeCacqueray, editor-in-chief, *Le Passage*

## Ministry in Transition

**AS** in most Western countries today, the Catholic Church in France is currently faced with a society that is becoming increasingly dechristianized.

The principal rites of passage – birth, adulthood, marriage – are being celebrated less and less in the context of Christian faith. Death, however, remains the exception.

In a society where less than 10% of the population actually practises religion, 80% still request a religious funeral ceremony. This statistical reality is even more surprising when you add the fact that the proportion continues to remain stable. How can we interpret this constant? More importantly, how will the various religions handle it, especially the Catholic Church, which is most affected?

Obviously, even if such an acknowledgement is not always easy to make, rediscovering religion in mourning has become more of a cultural phenomenon than a true sign of spiritual commitment. The fear of “nothingness” or even of being “buried with a dog” very often influences this decision. People want a frame of reference, a rite with which they can associate their pain – one that harkens back to their childhood, to the religious context of their past.

President Mitterrand’s state funeral is a good example of the French people’s ability, no matter their lifestyle or choices, to indulge themselves in the ritualism of a Christian funeral.

The difficulty for the Church of France is how to respond to this demand while the number of priests continues to drop. The answer to this current quandary lies in the increasingly important role of the laity in the ministry of funerals.

Thousands of men and women, mostly retirees, are currently training and beginning to undertake this aspect of the ministry that is so important to the connection between the Church and society. Their role begins with receiving families to prepare for the service. More often than not, it then extends to actually presiding over the entire funeral ceremony. This sometimes raises the question of whether a liturgical habit should be worn. Some laypeople wear an alb for the service, while others simply don the same special attire to indicate their specific role.

Sometimes, families in mourning feel scorned by the fact that a priest is not present to receive them. “The priest is not here to greet us,” they think. “It’s because we don’t count for much in their eyes.” Once past this initial reaction, however, the simplicity of the meeting erases their preconceptions.

In France, funerals have become a time when the Church presents itself most as a community in which the laity plays an essential role. Is this a transitional situation or the new face of the French Catholic Church in the 21st century?

One thing is certain: funerals, because they do not constitute a sacrament, are undoubtedly the most important link in the development of this new path. ♦

### QUESTION: Why do people in mourning experience such strong feelings of guilt?

**ANSWER:** One of the most common, most important and, without a doubt, most difficult reactions following the onset of grief is the feeling of not having loved the departed enough, of not having given enough of ourselves, of our time, of our kindness. And, because death is irreversible, the idea of carrying on, forever stripped of the power to change the situation, leaves a lasting mark that is called mourner’s guilt.

This feeling is a powerful symbol of regret and remorse. To be able to experience it, there must be some measure of love unfinished, love left hanging, a love devastated by illness, accident, misfortune, helplessness. The feeling of guilt is a barometer that enables us to explore the path travelled, of course, but this also inevitably leads to letting ourselves be overwhelmed at the distance still left to travel, mourning over the paths wide enough for two that have been closed off to us. In the medium term, self-reproach can paralyse our own survival instinct.

Striving for perfection throughout life is a very commendable, even empowering, ideal, but expecting results to be just as decisive leads to the very real problem of being unable to fulfil every desire, large or small, on this great adventure called life, especially a life lived for two. The desire to love better, the need to love stronger, are both positive feelings, but all dreams, however realistic they may be, are not necessarily achievable. Hardship shatters dreams. Nevertheless, as difficult as the ordeal of death may seem, nothing is worse than the death of our desires.

Feelings of guilt enable sorrow to express itself. They translate the words that replace or accompany tears. In other words, tears and words are not always enough to express the feelings toward the departed. And so terrible feelings of guilt rise to the surface, demanding to be heard by a witness, a listener, who will understand the immensity of the mourner’s sorrow, the sheer volume of regrets and remorse, the unconscious quest for the forgiveness, sympathy and tolerance of those who surround the grieving. Feelings of guilt sometimes serve as a pretext for saying the name of the departed over and over again, for repeating the name of a loved one who is gone forever.

To a woman who had lost her husband to suicide on the very morning they’d had a normal couple’s quarrel, I said, “Unlike we, who also sometimes quarrel before leaving the house, you did not have the chance to welcome your husband home that same night, to talk with each other about what was wrong, to make up with each other. Death stole your husband and your dreams. Such a thing adds weight to your grief.”

It takes time for feelings of guilt to dissipate. It takes a patient listener capable of absorbing and understanding the grieving process. If such feelings are ignored, the person in mourning risks being devoured by them more through a lack of understanding on the part of his or her support group than by the actual pain inherent in the feelings. It is these feelings of guilt that cause sufferers to give more of themselves. They have come through their ordeal with a stronger desire to love more intensely, which is directly due to the fact that they have recently experienced loss.

*Dear readers, please send your questions to the following address:*

Readers’ Forum, Bulletin Dialogue

Notre-Dame-des-Neiges Cemetery

4601 chemin de la Côte-des-Neiges, Montréal, Québec H3V 1E7



## Notre-Dame-des-Neiges: *Rediscovering Its Beauty*



**A**fter repeatedly questioning and reflecting on our human hopes and fears, we have finally crossed the threshold of the 21st century... and the world did not come to an end. Like any ordinary New Year's Day, the one we had this

The Notre-Dame-des-Neiges Cemetery has seen three centuries pass, and one of its

sizes have been stipulated based on the size of the concessions. We would therefore ask that you respect these

arrangements by telephone or in person. In addition, if you need help pruning shrubs or cleaning out flower beds before Mother's Day, our groundkeepers are at your disposal. Then, on the day itself, you can join us for a very special service at the Chapel of the Resurrection.

On a final note, our booklet listing all the famous people

buried in Notre-Dame-des-Neiges Cemetery has recently been updated. If you are interested in taking a walk around the grounds, please contact us and we will be happy to send you the booklet along with a map of the cemetery. ♦

**Johanne Duchesne**  
Director, Customer Service

### **One of its projects for the year 2000 is to transform its grounds into a place of incomparable beauty.**

guidelines so that our personnel may provide better maintenance of the grounds.

For gardening enthusiasts, our team of horticulturists suggests an assortment of annuals and perennials. For those with less time, we provide different choices of flowers in our Floral Arrangement information folder. You can order these

projects for the year 2000 is to transform its grounds into a place of incomparable beauty, an oasis whose every detail is tended to with the utmost care. To achieve this, we need your help and participation. We recently sent you a copy of our new regulations and, with the arrival of spring, we would ask that you pay particular attention to the section regarding the decoration of concessions. Specific floral arrangement

year came in as discreetly as it possibly could have, even though it did plunge us into a new century and a new millennium simultaneously. As expected, most everyone around the world celebrated this great event. For my part, I am delighted to belong to a generation that will have the pleasure of hearing its grandchildren whisper, "They were born last century!" What stories we will have to tell them!





**Vivre auprès d'un proche très malade**  
*(Living with a very ill family member)*

One day, everything is turned upside down: a feeling, a sign, a symptom... Illness doesn't just turn one person's life upside down, but also the lives of everyone in the family. When faced with a serious situation such as this, one that brings out feelings of fear and doubt, it is sometimes difficult to carry on alone.

Dr. Christophe Fauré, a psychologist who specializes in providing care and support for the ill and their families, writes about the pain and suffering of those who live with the very ill. The book is geared toward family members, and helps them to:

- understand each person's feelings;
- recognize the impact of the illness on relationships and intimacy;
- communicate with medical staff;
- remember not to "forget oneself";
- help a child whose parent is seriously ill;
- prepare for the end, when it becomes inevitable...

With the characteristic sensitivity featured in his first book, *Vivre le deuil au jour le jour* (Dealing with grief day by day), Dr. Fauré covers every aspect of this subject, even the most painful.

A unique work that offers practical, sincere help.



**Le deuil impossible**  
**Familles et tiers pesants**  
*(Impossible grief: Families and pivotal people)*

At one time or another, we all deal with abandonment, separation, absence and death. The grief that we go through is not just an individual experience – bereavement within a family means getting all of its members to deal with the space left by the one who has departed.

Impossible grief – the pain that nothing can relieve, the void that nothing can fill – can be approached in different ways in psychotherapy.

Edith Goldbeter-Merinfeld chooses to focus on the empty space left by the deceased and the manner in which the survivors attempt to exorcize that void. What she calls the "pivotal person" represents a family member who appears to play an essential role within all the intrafamilial relationship combinations. In this book, Goldbeter-Merinfeld shows how her concept of "pivotal person" can become the catalyst for therapeutic progress by facilitating the grieving process.

A GARDEN  
of memories

## Easter: In Celebration of the Resurrection



In the eyes of all nature-lovers, Easter heralds the beginning, or the coming, of another gardening season. Like salve to a wound that has ached for too long, the first days of spring give us a brand new lease on life.

At Notre-Dame-des-Neiges Cemetery, nature is both delicate and welcoming, offering visitors an exceptional show. Trees are exploding with new buds, perennials are awakening from their long winter slumber, birds and small animals are composing their own



ode to spring, and the greenhouses are bursting with beautiful spring flowers.

While the hydrangeas are busy sprouting pretty multicoloured flowers to delight and inspire, the lily, noble and proud, surveys its

kingdom from its long, thin stem. Of course, hydrangeas and lilies are not the only harbingers of spring. Crocuses, narcissuses, tulips and hyacinths are springing to the surface in great clusters, both in the flower beds and in the greenhouses, offering up their colours, shapes and scents as symbols of the gentleness and fragility of a season that passes too quickly.



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



### Monthly masses

All masses are celebrated on the first Saturday of every month: April 1, May 6 and June 3. In addition, two special masses will be held on Mother's Day (Sunday, May 14), and Father's Day (Sunday, June 18). Services take place at 10 a.m. at the Chapel of the Resurrection.

**FREE  
PARKING**

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Place Alexis-Nihon:  
March 6 to 12, 2000

Les Galeries d'Anjou:  
March 20 to 25, 2000

Flower, Plant and Garden Show:  
April 7 to 9, 2000

Côte-Vertu Shopping Centre:  
April 10 to 16, 2000

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SPRING CARD  
"VERS LE CIEL"  
BY LAURENT LAFLEUR



## • CALENDAR NOTES • ANNUAL SEMINAR



**November 10 and 11, 2000**  
**Four Points Hotel Dorval**

Theme

### *Between Grief and Hope*

For a list of conferences,  
please contact Francine McDuff  
at (514) 735-4590



NOTRE-DAME-DES-NEIGES  
CEMETERY  
*Where life is a garden of memories*

### *For more information...*

**Would you like to receive a free information folder about**

- our services
- our book of remembrance
- our mausoleums and columbariums
- our flower arrangements
- our monuments

**Also available free of charge**

- folders about the grieving process
- our quarterly newsletter, *Dialogue*

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