



NOTRE-DAME-DES-NEIGES
CEMETERY

Where life is a garden of memories

Dialogue

Notre-Dame-Des-Neiges Cemetery Newsletter

Vol. 2 No. 5 September 2000

The Tale of Notre-Dame-des-Neiges (Part II)

We pick up our story where we had left off: 1854, and Henri-Maurice Perrault's wish that the Notre-Dame-des-Neiges cemetery not "look like a checkerboard," with its islands and plots laid out in neat rows and columns. Perrault's letter of complaint to the secretary of the Fabrique on April 28, 1868 reveals that while the plan of October 22, 1854 had come at his insistence, it was probably the superintendent of the Cemetery who saw to its implementation over the next few years.

During that time, many sections were added, including Section N, to the north of a small pond. There, at the border with the Mount Royal Cemetery, was an "un-blessed plot"—which served, it is thought today, as the final resting place of children who had never been baptized, the excommunicated, and those who had committed suicide. The multiplication of other new lots continued apace, and the aspect of the headstones and monuments—their arrangement either in

parallel bands (and most often facing away from the outermost path of the island) or independently of the contour of the islands—again revealed without doubt that this could not possibly have been the work of a professional planner such as Henri-Maurice Perrault.

Among the buildings included in this early plan was, of course, the chapel, which as mentioned in our last instalment also served as the caretaker's quarters. Messrs. François Soucisse, Clément Larivière, G. Ward, Louis Dalpé (known as Parizeau), Francis Clerke, B. Marceau and John Ostell (the architect) were among those who took part in its construction, which was completed in 1858. The charnel-house, for its part, was first used on January 10, 1857, even though it was not quite finished at the time. This structure was built by Messrs. François Boucher, Joseph Brunet, François Beauquaire and Antoine Lapointe with materials from contractor L. Compte & Peel. As for the stone wall enclosing the

grounds, it was already in place when the first plans were drawn up in 1854. Another fence, made of wood, was erected between August and November of 1854 by Peltier & Lafleur, Carpenters.

The very first burial in our cemetery took



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place on May 29, 1855. On that day, Jane Gilroy was laid to rest in the McGready family plot, and 1979 souls were to follow hers by the end of that year.

Some of the oldest monuments at Notre-Dame-des-Neiges came from the former Saint-Antoine cemetery, whence they were transferred up till about 1871, when the Saint-Antoine site was sold: part of it to the City, for the construction of Dominion (now Dorchester) Square, and part to the Roman Catholic Archdiocese, to build Mary Queen of the World Cathedral. The first in a long line of exceptional funeral monuments that would come

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

to enhance the Cemetery's heritage value was that dedicated in 1855 by the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste of Montréal, in honour of its founder, Ludger Duvernay, who had also been manager of the newspaper La Minerve from 1799 to 1852. When his remains were carried from the Saint-Antoine cemetery to Notre-Dame-des-Neiges, a crowd of more than 10,000 turned out to witness the ceremony. Quebeckers

still commemorate his passing every year on November 28.

It would be many years yet before our cemetery began to resemble the one we know today. We will return to the Tale of Notre-Dame-des-Neiges in the year 1856: the beginning of two pivotal decades that would establish the layout style of the grounds and set the course for the cemetery's future development.. ♦

Yolande Tremblay
General Manager

The Côte-des-Neiges Funeral Centre

Coming to grips with the sudden loss of a loved one, comforting a dying patient, helping our children through the difficult task of grieving – these are all situations that we most often have to face without really being prepared to do so.

A Human Approach, A Variety of Services

Although never claiming to have all the answers, the team at the Côte-des-Neiges Funeral Centre understands the difficulties faced by grieving families. Each of its members has the gift of compassion, and begins by lending an attentive ear and taking the time to understand the situation as it is faced by the whole family.

Besides their professional expertise, the Centre's family counsellors rely on a comprehensive, one-of-a-kind family support program.

The program features a series of video-cassettes that address the most sensitive matters a family faces, offering advice from specialists as well as people who have experienced similar situations (the grief process in children, sudden passing of a loved one, comfort to the dying).

Special Care and Respect of Dignity

The program is coupled with concrete actions designed to reach out to the many people who experience great difficulty coming to terms with mourning. This past spring, the Côte-des-Neiges Funeral Centre presented an interactive theatre performance on the subject of ritual and the grieving process, in the company of psychologists and other resource people able to help participants. In fact, the meeting led to the creation of a support group that may become a permanent entity.

In addition, the Centre recently made a reference library available for public consultation along with a directory of associations, a free personal pro-

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By Johanne de Montigny, psychologist

For Jean-François, beloved of Ernest, of Édouard, of Charlie, of Sam...

“Words are like us, living beings; they come into the world one day and grow, they become popular; after a time, they are used less often and, finally, are utterly forgotten.”

Those are Achille Hubert's words, written in the prologue to Sébastien Cyr's glossary of Magdalen Islands vernacular, *Le sel des mots* (“The Salt of Words,” Éditions Le Lyseron, 1997). Mr. Cyr unearthed a wealth of old words from the Acadian language, Island expressions, and Old French terms when, at the young age of 17, he compiled his glossary. The lexicon was created “to keep the words of the shared *madelinot* heritage from being swallowed up forever by the sands of time,” to again quote Achille Hubert, a well-known writer for the Magdalen Islands newspaper *Le Radar*.

On the evening of May 19, 2000, an entire room full of people was spellbound by the testimonial of one Magdalen Islander: the father of Jean-François, who had died in a traffic accident on June 7, 1993. The host of the evening had introduced him

by saying: “You will now hear the words of Ernest, beloved of Édouard, of Charlie, of Sam.” I was struck by this extraordinary way of underlining the filial bond by repeating the ancestral names.

As soon as the father began to share his thoughts with us (it turned into an incredible



Sculpture d'Ernest Langevin à l'Étang du Nord, aux Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

bly moving address), I could feel the impact on the family of the loss of their son. Like the young researcher, Sébastien Cyr, Jean-François had been 17 years old. The impact on the father, on the extended family of Islanders, and on those who had come from afar was enormous, both in terms of the personal and collective upheaval it represented, and how it so suddenly and firmly uplifted those of us who were listening. This father put into

words – both old and new – his helplessness, the void left by his departed son so full of promise and talent, and his private thoughts about the healing journey that followed that loss. He read aloud to us the words he had composed on the occasion of Jean-François' death, so as not to drown in his own sorrow,

and he

also shared a few letters from relatives, friends and even strangers who had expressed their condolences in short syllables, broken up by eloquent spaces, like moments of silence on paper – fragmented, but remarkably comforting sentences. When those called upon to grieve don't know what to do or say, it is easy to understand why they suddenly put pen to paper.

Our faces were stained with tears as he spoke. Jean-

François, beloved of Ernest, of Édouard, of Charlie, of Sam, had been literally ripped from the bosom of his family, but not from their memory. Yes, Jean-François was gone, but he would never be forgotten. Thanks to the force of his life story, that of his ancestors, and that of Islanders' pride. On that evening of May 19, Jean-François would live again in the memory, in the hearts of

those who survived him, his extended family, those who witnessed his tragic death, those who witnessed the horror of a loss so incommensurable for his loving parents and the brother he left

behind. For Alexandre, and for Denise, his mother. Jean-François, beloved of Denise!

Without warning, sudden death had claimed a son, a brother, a child, a builder of the future. Jean-François, beloved of Denise, of Ernest, of Alexandre. Ernest, who had also been my student at the Centre for the Study of Death and Dying at Université du Québec à Montréal. A distinguished notary, enrolled as a mature graduate

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Christian Faith and Death

In my column for this issue, I would like to try and answer the following question: if one has a deep and abiding Christian faith, does this help to ease the great voyage into the hereafter?

Of course, this is not a question likely to haunt us on a daily basis, especially those of us who lead active lives – whether at work, at home raising a family, or engaged in volunteer activities or other pursuits. But it is a good thing, from time to time, to look within and wonder about our individual values in this area, and the occasion of the passing of a close relative or friend is an auspicious occasion on which to do so.

To answer this question, it is worth recalling the words of Dr. Ayoub, the noted oncologist at Hôpital Notre-Dame, first published in the *Revue Saint-Anne* of November 1998. As you may remember, Dr. Ayoub and his skills became well known to the public during the time that he acted as Mr. Robert Bourassa's physician. His words reveal the deep faith that resides in him:

“God does not desire sickness, and He does not desire death. It was the will of Jesus Christ to experience and share with us

the suffering that sickness brings. We can see that throughout his life, he showed wondrous love for those who suffered. Each time, he tried to show compassion in the face of suffering. Suffering is a part of our world. Jesus's message was: ‘I will share with you in that suffering.’ He wished to suffer as we do. He wished to die as we do. He became human so that he might cease to be a God in theory only, and might tell us that He shares and lives our joy and our greatness as well as our misery. If we wish to see and contemplate the Divine Light ... if we wish to meet Our Lord ... then we must come to accept that the road to Eternal Life is Death.”

Personally, some years ago, before my parents left this world, I feared the arrival of such an event. I notice, with hindsight, that in the end I came through that period of grief with a great deal of serenity. I believe that I did so because of my faith. ♦

.....

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



READERS' forum

QUESTION: Should mourning be viewed as a period of crisis?

ANSWER: The loss of a significant other typically engenders either multiple

stages or states, or spontaneous, variable feelings and reactions, or else a period of stagnation followed by one of transition. Most experts agree on three key phases when it comes to describing the grieving process: the shock of reality setting in; then destabilization of the bereaved person; then self-transformation following the adversity. Existential questions and a quest for meaning are the two main tasks that survivors must undertake.

The shock of the news is often verbalized as “I know that (s)he is dead; I just don't believe it.” Spontaneous reactions include a period during which we wait for the deceased person to return. This attitude is a metaphor. It points to the strength of the affective bond, which sur-

vives after the departure of a loved one. Memories are victorious: they are still so very present, so close. The crisis is painful, but will pass. The grieving person then becomes disorganized, not knowing how to get back in step with his or her surroundings, perhaps seeking reaffirmation in the Other. Life goes on, as they say, but a private life has been interrupted.

The emotional support of those close to us is critical to our emergence from this phase. The presence and comforting ear of a relative, friend, natural caregiver or medical professional are essential. That person must develop the virtues of patience and kindness and be ready to provide support spontaneously. The bereaved's sorrow needs to be expressed, though tears, through words, through hugs. Informal assistance is so natural, so essential to the healing process. When it is not forthcoming, the grieving person would do well to consult a health professional to help discover and get in touch with his or her personal resources, the better to bounce back, even though life has taken such a sudden and strange turn.

Finding a new meaning to life, rebuilding a shattered identity and hoping for the impossible are also part of the task

of grieving. In his masterpiece *La plus que vive*, Christian Bobin writes: “I feel like I want to stare the unbearable in the face ... I expect you to return – I can't help it; I expect the unexpected – what else is there to expect; I hope for the impossible – what else is there to hope for? Life, life, life.”

Coming to terms with loss means asking many questions. The answers are not clear; they lead to new questions. Why life? Why love? Why loss? The questions are always the same: it is the answers that spur us to progress along the trajectory of grief.

Why love? Perhaps it is for love of loving, and perhaps we must love as two so that we might discover, in that love, our capacity to deal with transitions alone. Yes, in that sense, mourning is a period of crisis. But “this too, shall pass” ...

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



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tection guide, and other materials.

The Côte-des-Neiges Funeral Centre can also count on the collaboration of committed officiants who are mindful of responding to families' true needs. That commitment translates into several types of special care extended to bereaved families, from our souvenir photomosaic to testimonials, as well as selection of personalized music and texts. These specially tailored commemorative services are regularly held in the Centre's magnificent chapel.

The many facilities provided by this ultramodern funeral complex, which is superbly integrated into the Cemetery surroundings, include direct access to a florist, private salons and receiving halls, but also a drop-in day-care centre, convenient underground parking, and prearranged service.

Dignity Program

Ever mindful of providing the best possible service to families, the Centre is now an official member of the Dignity Program, which offers a 100% satisfaction guarantee, coverage for children and grandchildren, and round-the-clock compassionate care service.

In less than three years, the Côte-des-Neiges Funeral Centre, through a human approach and skilled expertise, has come to offer funeral service resources that ably complement those of the Cemetery. This enabled us to welcome our 1000th family this past spring.

Robert Leblanc
Director



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student so that he might explore the concepts of dying and mourning, try to make sense of the absurd, set things right... "*beausir le sordide*," as a Magdalen Islander might say.* Out of love for Denise and for Alexandre, out of love for a child who had died, and for a father forced to grieve.

Ernest entreated us on the night of his testimonial: for goodness' sake, death makes little sense; the death of Jean-François makes no sense, so why should we not find our reasons to live as members of one family, one society, as one parent deeply wounded by the loss of a son? Because there is sense, there is meaning to our survival of loved ones who depart from this world before we do, and that meaning is symbolized by the one word that Ernest continually repeated to us: "love." To love means to feel "deep affection or fondness for a person," according to the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary*. It is a verb that spans generations, that comes to us from everywhere and nowhere, except perhaps our gut. We redefine our ability to love through the "poetry of our actions," especially in times of great sadness or adversity.

On June 7, 1993, Ernest had helped Jean-François to knot his tie, just before he left to attend his graduation ball. The knot of the tie of Ernest, beloved of Jean-François. A graduation ball... One last night out with his friends. Then on to another celebration with his fellow graduating classmates. For all, it was the end of their studies; for Jean-François, it was the end of life. He was killed on a one-way road. A road from which there was no coming back. A departure with no itinerary, no

direction... only a takeoff, toward the Highest Place.

Toward "Outdoor Paradise," perhaps, for that was the fitting name given to the room in which, the morning after hearing Ernest's testimonial, we were to act as co-facilitators of a training session for some Magdalen Islanders working as natural caregivers, confronted with how they would feel when the time came to mourn their own loved ones, and how their relatives would feel when they themselves left this life.

The day was bright and clear, and so were the Islanders' faces. In spite of their great sorrows – the results of recent or not-so-recent losses – they were there with us, absorbed in "the salt of our words" about the grieving process, and by the salt of our tears on their cheeks, too. The people of the Magdalen Islands know only too well the endless cycle of attachment and separation – they who are accustomed to waiting by the long jetty where their loved ones arrive and depart, taking the time to weigh anchor between water and sky. Time to sing the word love as part of the symphony of family, time to savour the treasures of motherhood. Time to depart again for far shores where the eternity of distance and longing is a reminder of the harsh realities of "time's arrow."

Yes, the people of the Magdalen Islands understand better than most of us the high and low tides of great sorrow, when those dear to them must depart, very much alive, but journeying so far from the radar tower, the windswept buttes, the grassy valleys. And yet ... never so far from their roots, their ancestors, their forebears. Never so far from the hearts of the dearly departed. Perhaps this is another reason



Prearranged Funeral Services: *A Big Decision!*

*It's a question each of us will have to address, sooner or later.
If there is one thing that is absolutely unavoidable, it is that every life must someday
come to an end. Ignoring that fact is hardly a solution...*

Why prearrange one's funeral service?

First of all, for your own sake, because each of us has very specific needs and would like to see our wishes respected by our loved ones. There is the choice of type of burial, and whether a religious service is desired,

Discussing funeral arrangements while one still intends to live for quite some time means respecting oneself and caring about making informed decisions.

for example. Even if these considerations are of no importance to you, making prearrangements will it easier for your loved ones to cope with the situation when the time comes.

I can say from experience that too often, I see people in our offices who find themselves utterly powerless to make the necessary decisions, being overwhelmed by the deep sorrow that comes with losing a relative. It is saddening to see that confusion on their faces, and to hear the words they barely dare utter: *"I just want to go home to sleep and wake up*

tomorrow to find that this was all a bad dream." The decisions they are about to make might not necessarily be those you would have made, and might not even be those they themselves would have preferred—for the conflict between emotion and reason is particularly acute in times such as these.

There is no "right age" for you to prearrange funeral services. It is not unlike taking out life insurance:



you are making things easier for those who survive you. Once the prearrangements are made, you can concentrate on your life, and the quality of that life.

By discussing funeral arrangements while you still intend to live for quite some time, you show respect for yourself: it means you care about making informed decisions. Remember, our advisers are available at any time to meet with you and provide any information you may need about our services.

• Comprehensive funeral arrangements including burial site (plot, niche, crypt) and funeral service, all on the same site. "Take care of your life!" is what the 50-plus generation recommends. Peace of mind can mean helping to ensure a peaceful afterlife. ♦

Johanne Duchesne
Director, Customer Service



L'accompagnement au soir de la vie

When the last curative medical treatment extended to a loved one is interrupted and the hope of his or her recovery is finally past, we can often feel powerless. What can be done for the one we love and cherish so? What words can we possibly find to say to them? How can we support them in this final chapter of life?

Natural caregivers, volunteers and all those working with the terminally ill will find this book provides a wealth of carefully thought-out answers to the questions that arise in our attempt to take a sensitive, human approach to the experience of dying.

**Revivre après l'épreuve:
Un guide personnel qui vous aide à retrouver le goût de vivre après la peine**

Here is a positive, sensitive approach to putting the pieces back together after a painful change, such as the loss of a loved one or a friend, a divorce, a move, loss of employment, retirement, major surgery or the onset of a chronic illness.



A GARDEN
of memories

Our Cemetery and Its Trees

For many decades now, human beings have had a direct relationship with the trees that surround them. Whether for their symbolic value—as a connection between generations past and those to come—or their important role in the ecological balance, trees will always represent security and evoke a sense of wonder among all people wishing to preserve an enhanced quality of life. One can only imagine what state our planet would be in were it not for the trees that live on it ...

At Notre-Dame-des-Neiges, particular care is taken to ensure the upkeep and preservation of our "green heritage." Standing as silent



witnesses to the great events of history, the Cemetery's arboreal population includes more than 9,400 specimens drawn from 58 different species. Many of them can be classified as so-called remarkable trees, having reached the venerable age

of 100 to 125 years. Some 500 of the Cemetery's trees have attained a trunk diameter of 60 cm or more, and about 60 have trunk diameters exceeding 100 cm.

Sugar maple, silver maple, Norway maple, red oak and rosybloom crab apple are just a few of the species that can be found on the grounds.

Since the Cemetery's founding, these many trees have been a comforting presence for bereaved families, and they will be there for many more decades to come.

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

"The motherland was built on the ashes of the dead."



Annual Mass under the Big Top
Sunday September 10, 2000, 11 a.m.

A great collective tribute in commemoration of the Cemetery

In continuation of our traditional remembrance of loved ones interred in our Cemetery since 1855, the commemoration will be marked by a solemn mass accompanied by a choral performance.

A trio will also be on hand to provide musical accompaniment in a spirit of respect and dignity. Refreshments will be served. We look forward to welcoming as many of you as possible!

Note: *If you would like to take an historical tour of the Cemetery on this special occasion, you can pick up our free "famous people" brochure, cataloguing more than 300 names.*

ANNUAL SEMINAR *Between Grief and Hope*



November 10 and 11, 2000
Four Points Hotel Dorval

A complete list of lectures and a registration form may be obtained by writing to:

Ms. Francine McDuff

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

Tel.: (514) 735-4590 Fax: (514) 735-4567

E-mail: cimetierenddn@sympatico.ca

Idol of a People



At a brief ceremony suffused with simplicity – in the image of the man himself – friends and relatives attended the interment of the ashes of Mr. Maurice Richard and of his wife Lucille Norchet on Monday, July 10, 2000, in the Montréal section.

Monthly masses

These masses are celebrated on the first Saturday of every month, January 8, February 5 and March 4, and take place at 10 a.m. at the Chapel of the Resurrection.

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NOTRE-DAME-DES-NEIGES
CEMETERY

Where life is a garden of memories

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Also available free of charge

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

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