



NOTRE-DAME-DES-NEIGES
CEMETERY

Where life is a garden of memories

Dialogue

Notre-Dame-Des-Neiges Cemetery Newsletter

Vol. 2 No.6 December 2000

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

Our story continues where we left off, in 1855, when the Notre-Dame-des-Neiges cemetery was inaugurated with the interment of Jane Gilroy. Remains from various cemeteries continued to be transferred to Notre-Dame-des-Neiges for many years afterwards. It is interesting to note that among these remains, those of the Récollets made the journey from the city's centre to Mount Royal in 1867. It was at this time that citizens asked the Montreal Sanitary Association to intervene, because they feared that exhuming the victims of the 1832 cholera epidemic would cause a new outbreak of the disease. A law authorizing the exhumation and transfer of bodies was passed by the Quebec legislature, however. The last body was transferred in 1892: the remains of François Thoronhiongo, a Huron baptized by Father Jean de Brébeuf, and who died on April 11, 1690.

But what did our cemetery look like in the second half of

the 19th century? The largest paths were already clearly indicated on the cemetery's various plans, but the smaller paths were not created until 1858. The road that currently separates Mount Royal Cemetery from Notre-Dame-des-Neiges cemetery began to take shape in the 1880s. Considerable energy was invested in landscape design during this period, in part because citizens had expressed a wish that their cemetery feature magnificent monuments, more forest trees, and beautiful avenues. Thus, between 1855 and 1875, the Parish Council purchased 3,514 forest trees and 200,000 hawthorn plants for the cemetery.

The buildings were also renovated to certain degree, depending on their condition. The chapel, which was all but completed in 1855, thus underwent only minor work—except, of course, for the addition of electricity in 1872. The charnel house, inaugurated in 1857, continued to experience

numerous problems. Between 1859 and 1861, several repairs were made to the roof, the vault and the frame. The building was also extended for the first time during this period, and again in 1901–1902. The cross that now stands on the elliptical island at the Côte-des-Neiges road entrance was apparently preceded by at least two other wooden cross-



See page 2 >

es: the first was sculpted by F.X. Leprohon in 1856, and the second was erected in 1873. Lastly, there was not a trace of the wooden stable built by one Narcisse Marr in May-June of 1857. This was the approximate state of the grounds in 1875.

But in what spirit did the Catholic clergy of the era perceive the cemetery? In a pastoral letter dated 16 November 1875, Msgr. Bourget, then bishop of Montréal, emphasized the sacred nature of cemeteries and the reserve such sacredness necessitates. He exhort-

ed his diocesans to religious respect for their cemetery, asking them to enter it only with fear and trembling. He asked them to use it as a place of pilgrimage, rather than as an area for strolls and recreation, since he felt it should be seen as the parish and the city of the dead. To reinforce this, Msgr. Bourget offered to erect stations of the cross at all cemeteries in the diocese that requested it, as was done in Rome to render the sacred nature of cemeteries more apparent. Needless to say, the Church Council of the Notre-Dame

parish made this request immediately.

In the next issue, we will pick up the story in 1876, as we stroll through the countless paths that make up our magnificent cemetery in order to highlight the various transformations and improvements that gradually helped turn it into the cemetery we know today. ♦

Yolande Tremblay
General Manager



CENTRE FUNÉRAIRE
CÔTE-DES-NEIGES

Making the Right Decisions When Someone Dies

When a loved one dies, we are confronted with many tasks. The first is to find a funeral home that is reliable, responsible and able to handle all the aspects of a traditional or non-traditional funeral.

Once this has been accomplished, the next step is to arrange a meeting with a family counsellor. This meeting is crucial, for it is the time at which the deceased's last wishes must be made known. It is also the moment we realize just how many decisions there are to be made—decisions for which we were unprepared, and which place us in an uncomfortable situation that can give rise to conflicted feelings.

What Decisions?

Indeed, the family of the deceased must consider a wide range of factors: Will family members be received for one day or for several? What type of

coffin should be chosen? Should there be a traditional or a commemorative service?

When looked at dispassionately, these questions seem fairly simple to settle. When sitting with the counsellor, however, in the first anguish of grief over our loss, we cannot keep ourselves from thinking about what our loved one would have wanted. We may be so caught up in wanting to do everything right, to arrange everything the



way the person would have wanted it, that we may hesitate, no longer knowing what to decide.

A Guide...

Family counsellors are not there to make decisions for us. Their primary role is to welcome people who are grieving and to lend an attentive ear. They can clearly explain all the options open to us.

Drawing on their experience and knowledge of the legal and administrative steps to be taken, whether with the Quebec register of civil status or the Régie des rentes, the counsellors are there to help, to inform us of anything that could assist us in our decision making.

An Invaluable Resource

Of course, if the deceased person has already made his or her wishes clear, especially with pre-planned arrange-

By Johanne de Montigny, psychologist

THE PRESENCE OF ABSENCE... or the absence of presence

Last year at this time, people were worrying about the Y2K bug. They feared the potential for material loss, whether their own or a loved one's, and perhaps even the loss of life itself. Still, the year glided from 11 o'clock to midnight, from sundown to twilight, from day to night, from one year, one century, one millennium, to the next. You and I awoke, parting the curtains to glimpse a stable life, an unchanged universe, time frozen. You and I rose in the light of day under the auspices of a new year, the same as the day before, but still with the expectation that we would no longer suffer so much from absence, whether actual or anticipated.

Some were pushed through, head first! Faced with true loss, against the mystery associated with irreversible departure, confronted with the unknown, in the inevitable search for the lost person, the dead parent, the dead child, the dead friend, capable, in spite of everything, of traversing a millennium with this terrible and tremendous quest to live just a little longer, a matter of functioning through the ordeal, of rejoicing in the spasms of joy—yes,

for the simple joy of living—for the miracle of still being alive, in spite of the gaping chasm left by absence.

And now Christmas 2000 approaches, and a trace of wonder is making its reappearance. It involves memories of yesteryear, psychic traces that dislodge the burden of aloneness. The return of strength, un hoped for until now, only asks to be awakened, despite the dread of never again being what one once was. Mourning, hope, doubt, all take hold at once. The entire self beseeches.

Fall to your knees! Near the crèche, where beliefs cast up against a legendary miracle, the miracle of its own presence in the world, a link that connects us with family and with the shepherds assembled to look at the Messiah, to decipher His message at the

back of the recess, which has remained intact, stationary, reassuring, where silence and peace sojourn, on the straw, where contemplation opens a clear path to self-discovery. It is difficult to turn to external things, although the season promises festivity, while trees shimmer with lights, children scatter in the streets, parents sing Christmas canticles. Difficult, because the celebration of Jesus' birth suddenly becomes a memorial for those who have departed.

Joy and grief clash, the need for contact with others dissolves into another, simultaneous, even paradoxical need, for solitude so as to avoid being distracted by life's commotion, to such a degree does death have its own decibels. All emotions meet, surge, and cancel each other simultaneously, in almost a single

movement, because contradictory thoughts coexist in the deepest Self, then resurface without warning, to the point of challenging the significance of one's own existence, throughout the continuous effort to confide the incommunicable to someone else, with words that even betray the true condition of the bereaved. Thus, one could say: "I'm doing better," "it will pass," "the worst is over." Just to convince oneself, to allay others' anguish, a terrible anguish that is aroused by the words "I no longer know what to say."

Until the tears return, a reaction caused by the fracture of one's life, an invisible fissure, hidden from the rest of the world; that is, from those who have not yet experienced such heartbreak, or who, on the other hand, have learned or been able to rekindle attachment, love, the ability to love anew... and lose anew; yes, until an infinitesimal sign of spiritual healing comes to seal the improbable return of the one who is no more—at least, in a physical sense—because the symbol, like the one that leads us to the figures around the manger, lives on, as the reminder of an eternal story. A ritual centred on the Birth and on life within the crèche to remind us of the impor-



See page 5 >



In Here is our cemetery's newsletter, *Dialogue*, arriving on the eve of the joyous Christmas holiday season. However, this season of ritual can still be part of

your lives even if you have just experienced a loss, or are in a period of mourning. The death of a loved one results in affliction, and we all seek to find meaning in this painful event, even more so because it will inevitably happen to us one day. Saint Paul addressed the Thessalonian Christians (1 Thess. 4, 13–18), encouraged them not to be downcast in the face of death, as their fellow countrymen were, because they had faith in resurrection. Surveys carried out in Europe show that many of our contemporaries do not believe in a hereafter, which destroys any discovery of meaning in death vis-à-vis the infinite aspirations of human beings. Where, then, lie the reasons for hope?

Among the biblical texts offered at masses during this holiday period, there is the one describing Jesus' presentation at the temple, celebrated on December 29. Jewish custom had it

that parents should present their baby at the temple and offer a sacrifice. Being poor, Mary and Joseph humbly offer two turtledoves as a sacrifice. An old man, Simeon, is

there. This aged man is awaiting death, contemplating his demise. He is not sad. Apparently. He is simply religious. Spiritual, he is infused with the Spirit of God. He awaits the consolation of Israel, that is, the Messiah. And the Lord allows him to recognize, in Jesus, the long-awaited Messiah. He cries: "My eyes have seen your salvation: light to bring revelation to the Gentiles." He lived out the rest of his life in joy.

Even in bereavement, faith in Christ the Saviour, born on Christmas Day, is a font of joy and hope for all.

I conclude my meditation with the ending of Saint Paul's epistle, to which I alluded earlier: "Comfort one another." It is together, within the community, within the family, that we fully experience our joy and sorrow. ♦

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

READERS' Forum

QUESTION:

Some people who are in mourning seem to move through the stages of a process that, for me, seems to be taking an eternity. Why?

ANSWER: Because we are all unique, individual, and different from one other. Although researchers have identified the main phases of mourning—shock, disorganization and reorganization—it would be dangerous to set a specific time period for passing through each of these phases. There are multifactorial reasons for the range of reactions in people, and the frequency and duration of each. Among the elements on which recovery and a continued life are based are the type and nature of the

relationship prior to death; the age and personality of the bereaved person; his or her internal and external resources, ability to adapt to major changes, overall health, and eventual capacity to transform the ordeal into future purpose, into a work of art, into greater sensitivity to the sorrows of others.

In fact, we have recently compiled a CD containing accounts of people who have survived the absence of someone important; the people all tell us something about their journey through different moments since their loss, allowing us to grasp the indefinable uniqueness of human beings, despite the universality of grief. I had the privilege of gathering these accounts of grief, and of capturing their impact on the life of Quebecers who have been affected by loss. Voices, words, poems, readings, stories and uplifting music brighten the mourners' stormy path. In moments of distress and great solitude, this document "speaks," salving hearts wounded by loss. Mourners need emotional support, consolatory reading, comforting and enlightening words; they need time to overcome their enormous grief, to carve out a new place in life and get the

most out of it. The personal uprooting caused by the death of a loved one requires seeds to be cast on new ground, a place that can only be discovered in the depths of oneself, in one's own time.

The CD *Entre le deuil et l'espoir* is designed for those in mourning, and is now available at the Notre-Dame-des-Neiges library. Further information appears on the back of the newsletter.

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

Please keep writing.

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

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

Islamic Funeral Customs in France

France, a secular nation, rules out the creation of denominational cemeteries. A cemetery is always the property of the district that runs it. There are no exceptions to this rule. However, this aspect of French legislation is sometimes poorly understood by the members of the large community of Muslims living on French soil (more than five million people). The latter are in fact anxious to respect precepts that, for some, cannot be reconciled with French regulations. Thus, in Islamic tradition, it is forbidden to interfere with a burial place while there is the slightest possibility of human presence. In France, however, burial plots are restricted for a set period. Muslims are thus legitimately concerned by the idea of being deprived of a place they believe should be eternal.

As a result, during the 1960s and 1970s, a period of extensive migration from the Maghreb, families staked everything to return the remains of their loved ones to North Africa. Through communal insurance systems, which left a lot of room for solidarity, Muslim communities helped one other cover the substantial costs incurred in times of bereavement.



Today, things are beginning to change. For third-generation immigrants, who now have a French identity, the natural place of burial is most often in France. What is more meaningful still, these burial places have evolved. While Muslims sepulchres are very simple, Muslim tombstones in France are starting to resemble Christian burial places: epitaphs, flowers, photos, etc. The soberness dictated by Islam is giving way as local traditions are adopted.

The inhumation of Muslims on French soil is thus an important sign of integration. It allows the new generations born of immigration to honour the memories of deceased elders. Those in charge of cemeteries can attest to the visits that take place each Friday, the day of prayer, as well as on the 27th day of Ramadan, the equivalent of the Catholic All Saints Day. In the midst of the cemetery, over a cup of tea and a pastry, the people of the Maghreb affirm their solidarity. When a dispute arises, it is not unusual for those involved to visit an ancestor's tomb. One is thus assured that the person will not lie.

Such realities show to what extent funeral customs are factors of identity to be developed and shared so as to foster greater mutual understanding. ♦



From page 3

tance of the ritual of “un-birthing” and death, or perhaps as the much missed philosopher Doris Lussier said, “To die to the world, to be born to eternity.” Because “every mortal who dies is an immortal born.”¹

But when the wound is fresh, is it possible to believe only in an eventual healing, in the return of joy, in one's reasons for living, in the importance of going on and believing in, asking for, receiving, and giving, elsewhere, in other ways, to someone else that which was abruptly taken from us: love? Yet, love survives death. A love that serves to cherish more deeply. Cherish the departed, who clear tomorrow's path. To bring us back to a fuller life, rich in questions, a life devoid of answers that, otherwise, would quash the eagerness essential to our survival. No death is a waste, even if it serves only to make others strongly aware of the rest of life. In honour of a future that is still possible thanks to history, to the story of those who were role models, our heroes, even the unsung ones, since “the greatest of the living are unknown, precisely because they do not seek recognition.”²

After a time, as you know, the death of a loved one goes unnoticed by all save oneself. This profound solitude, felt particularly deeply at Christmastime, forces us to realize that the chasm of parting is perhaps the only true inheritance, the remaining strength, that of having known and loved someone who is now unknown or unfamiliar, and who survives through thought, remembrance, or better yet, through writing, if only in an epitaph on his or her tombstone, the engraving, the inscription in the world, his or her identity whole on the marble, indestructible, weathering the millennium. In his or her hidden crypt, in a mausoleum, rock-solid despite internal ravages, despite the erosion caused by a deluge of emotion, because the intact part that coils in the heart of the self is able to stand up to all the obstacles experienced at the start, a matter of never forgetting the one who enhanced a life simply by being able to die.

If Christmas and the beginning of a new year seem rash and impertinent to those in mourning, may the beauty of memory triumph over the intermittent evils of life. Have courage! Perseverance is the closest ally of those in mourning.

¹Doris Lussier: *La mort vivante*, in *Le Chant du cygne*, Méridien, Montréal, 1992 (Proceedings of the Agora symposium held in 1990).

²Pierre Bertrand: *Éloge de la fragilité*, Liber, Montréal, 2000. ♦

THE RELIQUARY

An Ancient Custom with Continuing Value



Reliquaries have existed since the dawn of Christianity. Objects and remains belonging to Martyrs and Saints were collected out of respect, and preserved in a container to commemorate them. These containers came to be called reliquaries.

“Holding onto memories”: everyone wants to remember, but there are thousands of ways of doing so. The important thing is to find the way that will bring us the most comfort.

In times past, reliquaries were kept in sacred and holy places, as objects of great value. Today, such a place may be within your home; a reliquary can be placed on a piece of furniture, where you can rest your eyes on it for a few minutes every day, or perhaps kept in a box containing your most treasured possessions. Of course, for many, the heart and mind are the most faithful reminders of all.

In Quebec, cremation is the method of inhumation that will be chosen by more than half of those making such a decision this year, either during pre-



planning, or because of the death of a family member. Although the cremation rate in the United States is lower than it is in Quebec, our neighbours have developed an impressive array of reliquaries, now being sold throughout the world. There are, among other things, jewelry, clocks, eternal lamps, and personalized urns.

The reliquary complements the cinerary urn; it is given to the family, who keep it safe after the cinerary urn is interred or placed in a niche in one of our columbariums. Of course, not all of those experiencing bereavement will



find it necessary to express their closeness to the loved one in this way. The gesture is not lugubrious, but is rather a loving gesture that often assuages the deep sense of emptiness following the loss of a spouse, a sister, a brother or a child.

To better meet our clients' needs, our cemetery offers a new line of reliquaries at very competitive prices. Our reception rooms display numerous reliquaries that are exact replicas of the cinerary urns used for inhumation, along with the new Vega collection.

Each Vega reliquary is a unique glass object. An infinitesimal amount of the loved one's ashes are added to the molten glass, and, once colour has been added, the artist sculpts a shape within the glass. This reliquary is superb.

Remember, a reliquary is a heartfelt choice. I encourage you to meet with our counsellors, who can provide you with all the information you need, and answer your questions. ♦

Johanne Duchesne
Director, Marketing



The holiday season at the end of the year is not always easy, especially for those who have lost a loved one during the course of the year now coming to a close.

The cemetery's management and staff wish you a Christmas filled with gentleness and warmth, as well as a Good and Happy New Year 2001.

between the lines

Children in Mourning: Portraits of Grief

In "Ladybird," by Ken Loach, a character tells the story of a six-year-old child who tries to drown himself by immersing his head in a bowl of water. His mother had died by drowning, and, since then, he has been searching for her in water. Such behaviour may seem odd.

This story, as well as those related in the book, helps us to better understand the fate and behaviour of children and teenagers who are prematurely confronted with death or suicide, or who

discover that they are replacements for a lost brother or sister.

In a bowl of water, in a mirror, through a drawing and its colours, these children are trying to find their mothers and fathers... who have died. These are children in mourning, suffering, questing children who have also created these portraits of grief with their drawings, with their love, and with their hope.



Beyond Death?

Intended for those who want to find comfort in Christ and the Catholic Church by learning more about the communion of Saints, the resurrection of the body and everlasting life, this book, which contains an extensive bibliography, is an excellent starting point for deeper spiritual reflection on our final end, and the Christian faith.

A GARDEN
of memories

• TRADITION •

Christmas: A Time for Tradition and Contemplation

At the Notre-Dame-des-Neiges Greenhouses, tradition means poinsettias!

Once again, our expert horticulturists have outdone themselves to offer our clients the finest specimens in Quebec.

A red, white or pink poinsettia from our greenhouses will provide colour and gaiety for several weeks.

To make your plant last, keep the room temperature between 15°C and 20°C, and water it when the soil is dry. Never leave excess water in the saucer.

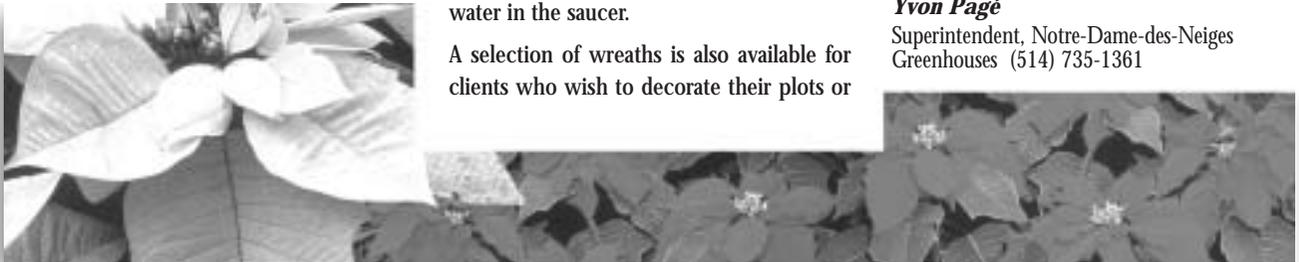
A selection of wreaths is also available for clients who wish to decorate their plots or

monuments during the winter.

Our team of greenhouse horticulturists and cemetery landscape specialists join in wishing our clients and friends a happy and joyful holiday season!

Yvon Pagé

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



From page 2

ments, the meeting with the family counsellor will be simplified; it will primarily serve as an initial contact for implementing the pre-planned arrangements.

Whatever the case may be, the family counsellor's job is to ensure, among other things, that the funeral arrange-

ments are respected, including any special requests.

Through their training and experience, the counsellors at the Côte-des-Neiges Funeral Home strive for the well-being of the grieving family. They may suggest a variety of support activities sponsored by the Home, including support

groups, psychological services, and information programs on important themes such as children and mourning, for example. ♦

Robert Leblanc

Director, Côte-des-Neiges Funeral Home

GRIEF SUPPORT CD

Our fourth annual conference, held November 10–11, provided the occasion for launching our new grief support CD, *Entre le deuil et l'espoir*.



It was in response to our clients' requests that our institution created this CD of accounts in collaboration with Ms. Johanne de Montigny, a grief psychologist with Montréal's Royal Victoria Hospital.

This CD is a valuable resource for those who are currently experiencing bereavement, and is above all a source of hope demonstrating that there is a light at the end of a great sorrow involved in losing a loved one. You can listen to moving accounts, including one given by a 10-year-old girl who lost her grandfather, as well as poems and songs.

Those who are apprehensive about their first Christmas without their loved one will find comfort in listening to this CD, and the hope that, after mourning, beautiful memories will once more take their place in your heart.

Please fill out and return the attached order form.

GREETING CARDS
(BLANK INSIDE)
AVAILABLE IN
THE FRONT OFFICE

WINTER CARD
"À LA BRUNANTE"
BY LAURENT LAFLEUR



WINNERS OF THE "Across the Seasons" PHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST



The photography contest, officially launched on September 12, 1999, concluded as planned on August 1, 2000. The winners claimed their prizes on September 10 at our memorial mass.

The first prize of \$500 was awarded to **Bernard Malchelosse** for his photo, "Autumn at the Cemetery"

The second prize of \$250 was won by **Terry Thompson** for her photo, "The Blaze"

The third prize of \$150 was given to **Yvan Giluni** for his photo, "The Little Angel"

The winning photos were displayed for visitors on September 10.

Monthly masses

These masses are held on Saturdays:
January 6, February 3, March 3
and April 7, 2001,
and take place at the Chapel of the
Resurrection at 10 A.M.

**FREE
PARKING**



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*

4601 chemin de la Côte-des-Neiges, Montréal (Québec) H3V 1E7 Tel.: (514) 735-1361 Fax: (514) 735-3019
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