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NOTRE-DAME-DES-NEIGES
CEMETERY

Where life is
a garden of memories

Dialogue

Notre-Dame-Des-Neiges Cemetery Newsletter

Vol.1 No. 1 May 1999



«Vers le ciel»
1996
Laurent Lafleur

Why a newsletter?

Dialogue, our new quarterly newsletter, is very aptly named, as its purpose is to strengthen the ties between Montrealers and Notre-Dame-des-Neiges Cemetery.

The cemetery, which has always been in the heart of Montréal as well as in the hearts of families from near and far who are woven into its urban fabric, encompasses a vast geographical, historical and cultural heritage. As such, it is only right that it should be viewed in the same way as any institution that has real social value and, more than ever, takes steps to be accessible.

Reflections of renewal

Notre-Dame-des-Neiges cemetery was founded in 1855, but its age doesn't make it an "old cemetery."

Quite the contrary, in fact, due to numerous efforts to raise awareness of its cultural, historical and natural features. These ongoing endeavours include the published directory of celebrities buried here, the inventory of significant monuments (under way), and the restoration of the main gate leading onto Côte-des-Neiges Road. The architectural style of the mausoleums

erected since 1978 reflects the care taken to blend the old and the new here. Another of our main priorities is to enhance this vast green space with even more trees and flower gardens.

All this in the interest of the cemetery's renewal... just like this first newsletter!

A public place

Among our other priorities, we intend to expand the activities and events that allow Montréal residents to discover the rich heritage found in the quiet shelter of Notre-Dame-des-Neiges Cemetery.

Conferences, photography contests, commemorative masses, nature trails and concerts will be added to the list of activities offered to cemetery visitors, who already come here in droves to hike, commune with nature, and study history and art.

Dialogue will keep you informed of all the different activities available. We hope you'll visit us often!

Exchange of views

This newsletter is an expression of our wish to become more accessible to the public and give voice to your opinions.

In fact, we have created a spe-

cial column just for this purpose called *Readers' Forum*, which gives you the opportunity to ask questions about our many services, including psychological support. We have published a variety of brochures on these subjects, which are available free of charge.

Our articles and columns may also generate comments or requests for further information—please do not hesitate to write in! We also have a Web site you can visit and, of course, you can read our newsletter... and keep up the dialogue!



Yolande Tremblay
General Manager

Losing a loved one scares the life out of you!

By Johanne de Montigny, Psychologist

This modern age and the speed at which it hurtles us through life is perhaps the reason we are propelled into a frantic search for companionship, community, support and sympathy. Mass tragedy, communal loss and individual hardships cause us grievous hurt because bereavement tends to lead to self-isolation. You can't reach out to others and they don't know how to approach you anymore.

The first stage of mourning is the "dead end," the emotional void, the loss of the will to live, personal instability, fear of the future—we are seized with these strange yet typical feelings of grief, which are

sometimes voiced as "if I would have known, if I could have known, then I should have known!" As a matter of fact, we didn't know. The only way we could possibly conceive of the death of a loved one beforehand is to theorize or hypothesize any number of scenarios.

And so the inner voice murmurs, "I know she's going to die but I don't believe it.... I know he's dead but I don't believe it." Knowing it is one thing, and experiencing it is another.

Those whom we love, or whom we would have liked to have loved more, cannot train themselves to die any more than we can train ourselves to deal with their loss. Surprisingly, as we go along, we manage to succeed in living a life we know is coming to an end. Only that last breath, and the implausible presence of a lifeless body, brings us face to face with the harsh reality of our loss.

Not only is it a matter of losing a loved one, it is also a matter of seemingly losing your senses and, in moments like these, there is simply no answer to the question, "What's the point of death?"

The only way to reply is through life. The experience of loss subsequently pushes us to concentrate on the reasons to go on living. Loving, living, losing. Living and losing again. The survivor then clings to the strength of the memory as an exit door, as a way out. For love conquers death. Love endures forever. The memory of love, the return of love with its own capacity for loving, this love which exists still. Love! As deep as sorrow, as strong as death. It is only love reawakening within the other mourners.

Pulling away from the other, getting back into your "own skin," as you begin to remember, as you draw the breath of life for two. For the last breath of a loved one inspires us to redefine ourselves as individuals in the renewed effort to live.

To be continued...

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A little history

The parish cemetery behind the old Notre-Dame church used to run along St. Sulpice Street (formerly St. Joseph Street). During construction of the new Notre-Dame Basilica, the cemetery had to be moved along with several others in Old Montréal, although people continued to be buried in the basement crypt of the basilica. Today, only the tomb of James O'Donnel, the architect of Notre-Dame Basilica, remains on this site.

In 1854, the Fabrique (parish council) purchased from Dr. Beaubien a piece of land on Mount Royal bordering Côte des Neiges. This cemetery has served the city of Montréal's Catholic community for more than 140 years.

What is a Catholic cemetery?

The purpose of a Catholic cemetery is to demonstrate our faith in the Resurrection. If Christ had not promised us resurrection and life everlasting, a cemetery would be unnecessary. In Hinduism, for example, the ashes of the deceased are scattered in the Ganges, India's sacred river. For us, a Catholic cemetery is a sacred place, a place that marks the presence of God and Christ our Saviour.

This is the reason most cemeteries were built right next to churches. They also served as a reminder for us to pray for our dearly departed.

The Catholic cemetery is sacred, not only because the grounds have been blessed or consecrated, but also because of the purpose it serves in the Christian community. It houses the remains of the deceased, vessels of the Holy Ghost awaiting the coming of the Lord and his glorious host.

It is sacred because it is a place of prayer, a place where we celebrate the Holy Word by holding monthly commemorative masses in the Chapel of the Resurrection.

It is sacred because it is the tangible sign of a community of believers, a community that Death can never tear asunder.

The children of God are citizens of Heaven and Earth. The cemetery illuminates the paths of our lives. With its

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monuments and spiritual activities, it is an observable act of faith that lights our way and leads us from this Earth to the House of the Lord.

Yvon Bigras, p.s.s., C.S.S.
Parish Priest

*Happy
Mother's
Day!*
It's May 9!

Like many other things, Mother's Day started in the United States. We owe our thanks to feminist Ann Jarvis who, at the turn of the century, focussed public attention on mothers and demanded the institution of a commemorative day especially for them. Thus began a veritable epistolary crusade to win people over to her cause: the local mayor, governors, representatives and industrialists. The success of her initiative was so astonishing that Ann Jarvis was hard pressed

to handle the influx of mail sent by numerous sympathizers and admirers.

In 1909, Mother's Day was officially introduced in 45 American states and, in 1914, it

The birth of Mother's Day

was declared an official holiday by Congress. About the same time, England was experiencing a similar movement funded largely by the Salvation Army and thus introduced Mother's Day to the European continent.

Switzerland has cel-

ebrated Mother's Day since 1917, an occasion when thousands of children and adults bring smiles to their mothers' faces by giving them flowers to show their love and affection as well as their appreciation for a difficult and often underestimated "job."

More and more French talking about death

By Christian DeCacqueray, Editor-in-Chief, *Le Passage*

As we approach the end of the millennium, France is experiencing a renewed interest in death. After decades of socially denying this topic, the public's interest is nothing short of a societal phenomenon. Films, books and television programs are focussing on the end of life, mourning and funerary rites. François MITTERRAND marked a turning point in this issue when, near the end of his life, he wrote the foreword to a 1996 book entitled *La mort intime*, or intimate death, that told of the agony several individuals went through as they died and the support the author provided to them. Several hundred thousand copies of this best-seller were sold. The end of the former president's life itself also helped popularize this taboo subject; nothing from his last days was kept from the French public's view.

A recent poll found that 73% of French people feel that talking about death could help families who have recently lost a loved one. Moreover, 53% feel that medical staff are responsible for providing the public with

information about these matters. Ah, there's the rub. In France more than in other Western countries, most deaths occur in large hospitals where adequate support for the mourning process is not offered. The bodies of the deceased are taken to a hospital within two hours of death and are placed in the morgue, which is often located far from the other departments and where their families cannot truly watch over them. It is the medical staff, headed by nurses and nurses' aides, that is now calling for an in-depth debate on empowering death in the French hospital system.

Concurrently, a rising movement of volunteer teams working in health-care facilities and religious institutions are showing a new kind of social-system solidarity in this matter.

Naturally, funerary services are not to be left out of this growing debate and its tangible manifestations.

This is what led our organization, with branches throughout France, to take the initiative to hold public debates about death. Tens of thousands of people from all walks of life turned out to meet with representatives from

every group that deals with the end of life, funerals and mourning, including physicians, nurses, members of the clergy and psychologists. Another sign of this growing interest is that *Le Passage*, a magazine dedicated to discussing death that was launched two years ago, has seen its print run jump to 50,000 copies!

Debating the subject of death is truly a French way to deal with this crucial issue—after all, what won't we debate? A famous mourning-process psychologist recently sent a call through the media recommending that French families hold inter-generational meetings to discuss this matter. She feels that people who have experience with death have learned lessons that can help others understand it, so long as they don't attempt to sway others' opinions. Discussing death, after all, is one way of preparing to face it.

By Johanne de Montigny, Psychologist

QUESTION: *Is mourning a sudden, brutal death more difficult or complicated than mourning death from a long, terminal illness?*

ANSWER: Some people have experienced both a sudden loss and a gradual loss, and accounts of the mourning processes reveal that these losses can be equally difficult to go through. Take, for example, the case of a catastrophic, unexpected death preceded by a life full of rich relationships and the case of the gradual death of a significant person who was difficult to get along with. In the first case the separation is radical and necessarily painful, but the mourning process can take place with a sense of closure, because the relational dynamic between you and this person is cut short only by death.

In the second case, despite the fact that the death is expected, you might not feel comfort in the person's passing because the conflict was not resolved before the loss. In other words, the relational dynamic that precedes every death, be it premature or drawn out, influences the mourner's reaction. There is good news, however—you can always straighten out a difficult relationship, even in the absence of your loved one, with the help of a natural or professional caregiver who can guide you through the feeling of having missed opportunities, and who can give you the space to find the words you did not have the chance to say before the turn of events. It is never too late, even long after the death of someone you cared for. Finding the words you wanted to say will fill the void of 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**

Certain times in our lives are especially hard to cope with.

This is always the case when we lose a loved one. Memories and feelings overwhelm us as we experience the vulnerability created by the sorrow of profound loss.

The psychological aspect of coping with loss is part of meeting with resource people in our Customer Service department, who will treat you with understanding, sensitivity, empathy and respect for your pain. These individuals know how to deal with the kind of strong emotional impact that can make you hesitant and uncertain. They understand your need to feel secure, to feel that someone is there for you.

Your first contact with our Customer Service department will leave you feeling supported yet free to make the decisions that make sense for you. Our resource people can offer you a wide range of options that enable you to personalize your tribute to your loved one based on your preferences, requirements and budget. They will answer your questions and can provide you with brochures about specific services and

psychological support.

Interested in a tour of our chapel or a mausoleum? Our resource people will go with you. Want a certain lot landscaped? They can make suggestions to guide you. Need to learn more about the books available to help you through the mourning process? They can recommend different authors and works. Wish to make pre-arrangements? Call us to set up an appointment at your convenience. And if you would like a free copy of our newsletter, *Dialogue*, we would be happy to mail you one.

In our efforts to help people like you, we try to play a wide-ranging yet specific role that is marked by a human touch, because your peace of mind is our top priority.

Johanne Duchesne

Director, Customer Service

This mini-column serves to help prepare our journey toward death by drawing on reflections, syntheses and experiences from books that can provide a different perspective.

L'amour ultime
(Ultimate love)

This book is for those who are losing a loved one—those who are caring for or supporting someone who is dying.

The book arose from a meeting between Johanne de Montigny, an air disaster survivor and psychologist who uses her experience to help people who have a fatal illness, and Marie de Hennezel, the first palliative care unit psychologist in France.



L'amour ultime



Mourir en vie!

L'amour ultime, part of the Collection Parcours published by Stanké, explains the foundations and the role of psychology as it applies to the end of life, with a special emphasis on the importance of preparing the mind in order to provide clarity on our way to our final destination.

Mourir en vie!
(Live until you die)

This book is for people who wish to live their last years to the fullest.

Designed as a self-management tool, *Mourir en vie!* tries to alleviate the fear of dying by providing reflections, avenues toward growth and prayer suggestions.

The authors are Jean Monbourquette—priest, psychologist and author of *Aimer, perdre et grandir* (Loving, losing and growing)—and Denise Lussier-Russel—nurse, therapist, professor and lecturer in the palliative care field. Published by Novalis.

A GARDEN

*of memories**Flowers for Mom*

Many people are unaware that Notre-Dame-des-Neiges Cemetery has magnificent greenhouses that are open to the public. It is by far, however, the best place to buy flowers for all occasions, including Mother's Day.

To commemorate this special day, choose from a vast assortment of azaleas, gloxinias, gardenias, hyacinths, violets, tulips, miniature rose bushes and New Guinea impatiens.

Come and see our impressive selection of flowers and shrubs.

A new floral emblem

Our new floral emblem, **Dame des Neiges**, has been meticulously selected not only because of the obvious link between its name and the cemetery's, but also because the simplicity and symbolism of this hardy perennial daisy caught our attention.

The **Dame des Neiges**, whose whiteness represents the purity of the soul, is closely linked with the idea of family, for the petals can be seen as representing family members.

This flower, planted in large, attractive clusters, will also enhance the unity of the cemetery's landscape. It is a great choice as a floral arrangement for your plot or for your own garden at home.

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

On Mother's Day,
packets of daisy
seeds will be
handed out free
of charge

Father's Day Mass

SUNDAY, JUNE 20

You are invited to a reunion in memory of a loved one: your father. Mass to be held at the Chapel of the Resurrection at 11 A.M.

Annual High Mass

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 12

This is a very special mass, featuring a choir and celebrated in several languages, held in memory of everyone buried in the cemetery. Mass to take place outside under a tent at 11 A.M.

Green Day
SUNDAY, MAY 30

During this Ukranian holiday, come and discover the liturgy of this rich culture.

GREETING CARDS (BLANK INSIDE) AVAILABLE IN THE FRONT OFFICE.



Monthly masses

These masses are celebrated on the first Saturday of every month—June 5, July 3, August 7 and September 4—and take place at 10 A.M. at the Chapel of the Resurrection.

FREE PARKING

Information booth

MAY 17-23

Come and meet us at the Carrefour Angrignon. One of our counsellors will answer all of your questions about Notre-Dame-des-Neiges Cemetery's wide range of services.

Honouring sculpture

The cemetery's artistic heritage is growing. May 9 will see the unveiling of Pierre Osterrah's bronze statue of Notre-Dame-des-Neiges. The sculpture, whose elegant, graceful lines express an upward sweeping movement, has a majestic character. Nestled in a snowflake-engraved antique glass alcove, this work will overlook Notre-Dame-des-Neiges' columbarium dome. This is yet another fine example of the dynamic energy of the art at Notre-Dame-des-Neiges Cemetery, whose other works include: Pierre Osterrah's *Transmutation*; Réjean Lord's *Sept tympan*s; and Alfred Laliberté's *Les ailes brisées*.



NOTRE-DAME-DES-NEIGES CEMETERY

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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*

PLEASE PRINT:

Your name: _____

Your address: _____
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CITY _____ POSTAL CODE _____

Your telephone: _____
INCLUDING AREA CODE

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