

## **IF CEMETERIES COULD TALK**

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Cemeteries were always scary spooky places when I was growing up. I remember Halloween nights spent visiting cemeteries when I was a teenager. I really never gave much thought to the people buried in those graves. But every person in that cemetery has a story to tell and a family who misses them dearly.

Now my husband Dan and I spend an hour every Sunday, and most other days of the week at the cemetery visiting our daughter, Amy. Amy died two and a half years ago at age eighteen. I never envisioned visiting my beautiful beloved daughter by going to a cemetery. Visiting a cemetery is an overwhelming experience. It is where we feel the closest to our children because their bodies rest in that plot.

Looking at their names carved in the headstone is an almost impossible task, yet we do it all the time. No one thinks that they can bury a child and live. The worst thing is that we do live. There is no choice. Keeping their cemetery plot cleaned, decorated and maintained is one of the only things left we can do for our children. Now, when I shop I look at something and think about how it would look in front of my daughter's headstone. Would it hold up to the weather? Is it something that is permitted at the cemetery? Strange questions to think about when your child is forever eighteen.

We leave our folding chairs and blankets in the trunk of our car so that we can get out and sit with our daughter for a short while. It's so hard to think of her being alone without us. Crying has become so much a part of my daily life that sometimes I am not even aware that I am doing it. Amy's gravesite is right next to a tree. We watch the tree change as the seasons change. We know that our daughter will never get to see the seasons change again.

Amy, age eighteen died two years ago due to complications of liposuction. She was a young beautiful, healthy athlete who had just completed her freshman year at Penn State University. Amy was a gifted and talented musician and equestrian. She was majoring in Biological Engineering.

On Christmas Eve Dan and I went to the cemetery at midnight and lit a candle at Amy's grave. We also replaced the batteries in her blinking lights. We have met many kind people at the cemetery. A teenage boy is buried in the row behind Amy. He died in a car accident. His father comes every week with a bucket, a sponge and a broom. He sweeps and lovingly washes the headstone. It makes me cry. He leaves birthday candles for every birthday his son has missed. They sit in a row on the edge of his headstone.

An elderly Asian man is buried two spots down from Amy. His family often burns incense for him. One day I arrived at my daughter's headstone and found that the Asian family had left incense burning for her. It means so much to a bereaved family. William, a beloved father, husband and grandfather is buried in the plot behind Amy. We have come to know all his family members. One day I arrived at my daughter's gravesite and found that William's six year old granddaughter had decorated Amy's headstone and had written her a note. The note said, "Dear Amy, I miss you even though I don't know you." It was so sweet and heartfelt.

We met the family of a young woman named Marianne who died a year ago. Marianne died from cancer. Her husband, her friend, and her young son visit often. They take pictures of themselves in front of her headstone. The little boy said to me, "I take pictures here with my mom so that she can see me grow up."

Amy's friend, Andy, is buried several rows across from her. Andy, age 19, died in a car accident on the Blue Route. Andy was an EMT. At his funeral, the Broomall Fire Company created an arch for the funeral procession to drive through to honor him. The Penn Star helicopter came and saluted Andy for his service as a volunteer.

Pat age, nineteen, died from a drug overdose. His family members purchased the plots next to him and behind him so they can all be buried together. Sometimes I see one of Pat's friends with his baseball cap sitting on his head backwards visiting Pat at his grave. I think, what a nice kid to remember his friend. Pat had to be special.

Cemeteries are the place we have left to be with our loved ones when they are gone from this earth. I no longer find them to be spooky or scary. They hold the stories of a life.