



Adam Amato Emerald

Unkempt headstones fill the eerie Masonic Cemetery, Eugene's oldest graveyard, located at 25th Avenue and University Street.

Graveyards

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Some of these graves have birth dates with no death dates, and the mystery of the missing dates makes them chilling. One such marker is a flat grave in the children's cluster dated Sept. 20, 1976, without a date of death. It was put in only 25 years ago, and I pondered whether the grave belonged to a baby who wasn't expected to live and did, or whether the family moved away and forgot to mark the death.

The Masonic Cemetery is Eugene's oldest graveyard. Established in 1859, it is located at 25th Avenue and University Street in a nice residential area and takes up ten acres of hillside. This is a typical scary-looking cemetery, with grave sites spotting the hillside, some overgrown with ivy, grass and weeds. As I walked down the gravel and bark-dust-paved paths on a rainy evening, every sound made my heart skip a beat as I looked around to see if there was really anyone there.

But Eugene resident Betty Taylor enjoys the cemetery and said it is a great place to walk her dog, Toby.

"I love cemeteries," Taylor said. "I think they are peaceful places, and they are a great place to take my dog for a walk. Whenever I go on bike rides in the country, I always look for cemeteries to have lunch in."

Taylor also said she used to hang out and read books in cemeteries as a child.

The Masonic Cemetery holds quite a bit of Eugene history. Eugene Skinner, the city's namesake, and his wife, their children and her second husband are all buried toward the top of the hill near the massive cement mausoleum of Oregon's first governor, John Whiteker, and the University's first president, John Wesley Johnson. As I explored the cemetery, I saw a number of names that adorn University buildings as well.

According to Taylor, there is a family plot in the cemetery where a mother and all her children are buried following their drowning

while crossing the Willamette River. The father was the only survivor. At another plot rest a family's five children who died from diphtheria.

But unlike the Masonic Cemetery, some graveyards are almost welcoming.

Rest-Haven Memorial Park and Funeral Home is laid out to create a more park-like atmosphere. In 1921, the founder wanted the cemetery designed after a memorial park from the East Coast, said Karen West Burford, a funeral service practitioner at the cemetery.

The grounds are well-groomed, with flat markers and bright red-colored conifers. The pretty setting almost misled me into thinking the graveyard was a place to play catch rather than reflect on life.

"When you first see it, it looks like a golf course," Eugene resident Arron Boham said. "Cemeteries are not supposed to be inviting, as this one is. It is kind of eerie to me this is so nice."

Burford said graves and urns serve to represent how the person lived his or her life while they were still alive. Some grave markers have a multitude of sayings on them. One of Burford's favorites is: "I told you I was sick," from a person who lived to be quite old despite being perpetually ill. Another was for a person who spent his time clipping coupons; on his headstone says, "My coupon expired."

The only time I felt uneasy in the memorial park was when I went in the mausoleum. As I entered the building, I saw doors lining the walls that open to reveal spaces for caskets — which means the walls are partly made up of corpses. There are three such halls full of bodies.

There is also a room lined with niches, where cremated remains are placed. There are niches with glass covers that allowed me to see the urns. Some are decorated as bookends with fancy writing, and others are shaped like beautiful bottles. Just as there are grave plots for husbands and wives to rest in peace together, there are urns for the same reason. The remains can be mixed together or they can be

left in their plastic bags and kept separated, Burford said. Some niches are marble-covered so the urns are hidden, but the names and dates are visible on the doors.

Oak Hill Cemetery is about 19 miles west of Eugene. Near the entrance of the gate to the cemetery is the historic graveyard from the later part of the 19th century. At the top of the hill is the caretaker's house, and around back is the more modern part of the cemetery, which contains more recent graves.

In the modern part of the cemetery, I found a grave belonging to a girl named Angle Jewel Standifer, who was born in 1978 and died in a car accident in 1995. The grave is decorated with a school picture of Angle flanked by pine trees. A rose frames the bottom edge of the picture, and a horse is in mid-stride on the left side. The trees, horse, rose and picture gave me a sense of who she was, but they also reminded me that this spot is the resting place of the dead.

Since cemeteries are a reminder of death and of people's own morality, they can be scary and aren't a place to visit for fun.

"People who are not comfortable with the idea they are going to die are scared of cemeteries," Burford said. "I have accepted the idea that I am going to die one day and think that acceptance just comes with age."

University sophomore Melanie Wilson and University junior Carolyn Snarskis believe the reputation cemeteries have are due to the media's portrayal of them.

"I think of vampires and bad and scary things," Snarskis said. "But I think that is just from what I see on TV, and society impresses upon us the evil side of cemeteries."

Wilson attributes the scary stories she heard as a child to her fear about cemeteries. They have a reputation for being dark and lonely, and when Wilson thinks about them, the first thing that comes to her mind is the "big tombstone that reads R.I.P."

Allyson Taylor is a freelance reporter for the Oregon Daily Emerald.

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