

Thoughts from the Graveyard

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It's cold outside, really cold, so when heading out on my journey I was sure to suit up in the winter regulars: long pants, long-sleeved shirt, winter coat (the really heavy kind), hat, gloves, and scarf as well as snow boots. I pretty much looked like a marshmallow, except blue. Over the last few weeks I had been on so many journeys, and after each I felt that I had been changed in some way. Thinking about journeys, I began to think of life, just the mere act of living, as a journey. Consider: after each second of breathing we are changed in some way, even if we sleep or remain in a frozen state for hours on end. There will always be some obstacle to overcome, some boundary to cross, and it's all just a part of living; something so common to each of us, that unless sensational, isn't normally even noticed. This got me to thinking about the end of a journey, and if a journey ever truly ends at all. I guess if a journey is superficial and only spans from point A to point B, then maybe it does indeed have an end. But what of the journey that transcends one person and touches many? I believe that the journey of life is just that, transcendence; for when someone dies, they do not end. Their memories and legacy are carried on for years, maybe even forever.

With all this in mind, I decided that the best place to go on a journey would be to pay a visit to one of my favorite locations, the cemetery. Now let me clarify; I don't love the cemetery because I have some close relative or friend that has died whom I like to visit, and I really have no particular favorite. I am rather drawn by an atmosphere which I have not been able to find in any other location. Since I was young, I have always seen some sort of magic in the graves, been interested in the stories lurking beneath the ground. There is a sense of calm and serenity which draws me in. That, and the lovely trees. Cemeteries are even more hauntingly beautiful in the winter, despite feeling more "dead" than usual. But in some ways, that only makes them more alive. The fallen leaves strewn beneath the snow are just like the bodies planted under the ground. They are individuals, unique, but with the passage of time break down until they are all part of Earth. It is an image echoed in the hibernating trees, in that, though the life may have left them for a time, it promises to return again, perhaps in an even greater capacity than before. In fact, maybe the life never leaves at all, but is always just dwelling quietly beneath the bark. In spring, as everything grows anew once again, the beauty and life are restored, only to enter the cycle of living and dying over and over, again and again. Sometimes that can be a hard thing to remember, especially in the midst of winter's despondence. The life cycle after all is a complex system and can be quite a demanding journey. As sad as they may be, illness and death also often-times work to bring people together. I have witnessed people unite in the face of death and it helps shed light on a dark situation to see loved ones doing what the deceased

would have wanted. On the flip side, I have seen people crumble in times of inexplicable tragedy and there is nothing more heart-wrenching than that. Cemeteries are places for people to come together at the instance of being torn apart, but they can also serve as a place to come alone, to be with your thoughts and with those who are now only in your heart. The graveyard can be more than just a place of the dead. It has the potential to be a place to learn from yourself or from those whom you love. It can be a place of emotional release, a place of history, a place of death as well as life. Cemeteries are an integral part of the journey, neither end nor beginning but instead a part of the body, a part of the life. It is not the granite gravestones, nor the cold hard ground which hold the keys to the past, the keys to our ancestors, or the keys to humanity. They just help us to unlock the door within ourselves, with the keys we have been in possession of all along.

For going somewhere that I frequent often, thinking about journeys really added a new level to my exploration of the cemetery and made me more driven in my purpose. It made me think about the journey of life and my place in this world, as well as my duty as a human. I found myself thinking about the vastness of the amount of people touched by death, and reminded me of the importance of being respectful to both the deceased and their survivors. Sometimes there are stories buried in cemeteries which need not be uncovered, having been laid to rest for a reason. I have learned that some things are better left untouched, for all that lies beneath the surface to be discovered is pain and tragedy. A place that had started as an end for me had proven, over the course of my musings on my Sunday afternoon walk, that it could be equally considered a beginning. If I go and remember those who have passed, even without knowing them, their legacy lives on and they are not forgotten. There is a strange sort of mutual benefit from the exchange. My journey helped bring back the true meaning of the cemetery that I have grown to romanticize over the course of my lifetime. With one of my worst fears being to have a meaningless life and be forgotten after I die, it is comforting to know that the graveyard is much more than a bottomless pit. As someone who wants to impact the world for the better, I have come to view the cemetery as a place which offers its inhabitants the chance to live on, through the graves which on the surface may seem to contain them. There is not an end in death, but a new opportunity; cemeteries invoke belief at their core and show me that if I still care, others will too. Some shy away from death, but I don't think that's what scares me; it's the vastness of the cycle and getting lost in the masses that are most frightening to me. But like I've learned, it's all just a part of the journey. It will not be me who decides my life, but the journey of life that will take me, wherever that may be.

Ultimately, I got what I came for. Peace of mind, solace, and shared memories. I reached my destination, but as usual wound up much deeper than I'd ever have imagined. The cold didn't faze me and wasn't even close at hand once I really opened my

6 ♦ Non-Fiction Prose

eyes to the power of the place I was in. This journey was for him, but I ended up being the primary beneficiary. There is comfort in knowing he still matters to me, matters enough for me to trek out in the snow just to pay a visit and contemplate life for a while. For the man who taught me to think, to question, and to find the meaning in everything around me, I think I did him justice in my journey today. I softly uttered the words I had come to say: "Thanks for the inspiration," to the stone, to the past, to anyone bothering to listen. Purpose fulfilled, I turned on my heel and returned the way I came, following in the footsteps of those who came before me.

Dedicated to Daniel Horyn, 1979 – 2013.