

# Along the track

## Visiting the Family

Just about all my ancestors are buried alongside each other in a quiet spot in a country cemetery. It suits them. Here they are, these rather quiet, shy people who shunned publicity or the spotlight – these quiet workers who came in poverty but made their mark. This spot seems just about right for them – a long way from their native Ireland but tucked away under a gum tree in Australia in the farthest corner of the cemetery. Some had long lives, my great grandfather died at a hundred and eight, the oldest man in the colony at that time. On the other hand my brother died at eighteen, and the other two before their time and my nephew did not even make ten years old. My mother died before I got to know her. My sister is at rest there – she looked after the family when our mother died and her husband who brought a lot of joy to our family. And here is my father, that rather stern man with his extraordinary sense of duty and commitment to continuing the legacy he had been given. There are others too with just a few words to describe who they might have been. So I visit them.

I know that they are not there but I am always reminded on my visits of the final words of the burial service: *In peace let us take our brother/sister to his/her place of rest.* So here they are at rest, in peace.

They deserve that – to be in peace and at rest. The few words on their graves do not really describe who they were, what they were to others, what they contributed to their communities, their families. But when they are gone, who will remember them but us? Who will pray for them but us? Who will give thanks for their lives, for them and for who they were? I know we don't need to go to the cemetery to do that, but there is a connection there, a time to remember and give thanks.

I appreciate that today more and more people do not believe in an afterlife but rather 'that this is it.' I don't believe that. I have no idea what an afterlife looks like, feels like, is like. And neither does anyone else really, including those who deny that an afterlife exists.

Nevertheless, in the words of John: Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. (1 John 4). If that is so, why would that end at death?

Why would all that finish when our life changes? Why would God who planted within us this life force we call love just cut it off when life changes? Much of our life is about forming relationships that last, relationships that give meaning and purpose to our lives. Why would that just stop at death? It's more a question posed by songwriter Nick Cave, "When will I awaken to your love?"

Life is about how we love and how we have found love. Love is the very thing that gives life its meaning, its satisfaction, its direction, its purpose. We are better people when we love, more authentic, more true to who we are and what we are meant to be. We find purpose and fulfilment in genuine love. Yes, there are people for whom finding love in life is difficult, some who do not enjoy its comfort, security, its challenges and that reminds us that part of our purpose in life is to bring that love to others. That doesn't mean that some of us don't face death with fear or uncertainty, despite the depth of our faith. Why wouldn't we as we face the unknown.

Do I need to go to the cemetery? Probably not but when I do, I visit those who have gone before. Someone remembers them, someone prays for them, someone appreciates what they did. Did their life matter? I visit them to tell them that it did! I am here because of you, because of what you did, because of who you were.

The words of the final ceremony of burial have special significance:

*As we go our separate ways, let us take leave of our brother/sister. May our farewell express our affection for him/her; may it ease our sadness and strengthen our hope. One day we shall joyfully greet him/her again when the love of Christ, which conquers all things, destroys even death itself.*

I guess that is why I visit my relatives.

Regards  
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