



Weep not

Story and photos by Lara Hartley
Staff Writer

Are cemeteries haunted by the dead or the living? Do marble angels watch over the souls who search among silvery tombstones for names, dates and stone flowers?

Call them grave hunters, genealogists or historians, graveurs, tombstone tenders, stone strollers or death hags. Just don't call them morbid. Or ghouls. Or heaven forbid, necrophiliacs.

Technically they are called taphophiles — people who love cemeteries and funerals. And they are just like you and me. They could even be your neighbors.

Fascination with death and dying has been part of the human psyche since early man. A cemetery, old or new, is a peaceful place to contemplate our small place in the universe.

With Web sites devoted to who, where and when someone died, finding famous graves seems to be a growing hobby. Yahoo forums are there to discuss the finer points of grave hunting, and people make special vacation plans to visit their idols, whether movie stars or past presidents.

Cemeteries like Holy Cross Cemetery in Culver City are open to public exploration and even offer guides to where celebrity residents are buried. Others, like Forest Lawn in Glendale, won't answer questions about who is buried where, and many areas are off limits to the public.

Mark Masik's "Hollywood Remains to Be Seen" is the definitive guide to the final resting places of Hollywood's elite. Detailed walking tours lead you to the graves of hundreds of stars. Just don't have the book visible when you visit Forest Lawn — a female employee at the Great Mausoleum was seen confiscating a visitor's celebrity grave reference book.

The many Internet sites that foster the growing hobby of driving back roads and searching out the dead include Steve Goldstein's "Beneath Los Angeles" — an irreverent look at "the famous, the infamous and the just plain dead."

"Hollywood Forever is one of the 'friendly' cemeteries that have no problem with us taking pictures or wandering the grounds," Goldstein says. "They celebrate the fact that there are famous folks buried on their grounds. They even provide helpful maps of the stars' graves, which used to be free for the asking, but now I think they sell it."

"Other cemeteries that fall into the 'friendly' category include Hillside and Holy Cross in Culver City, San Fernando Mission in Granada Hills, Home of Peace in Boyle Heights, and Angelus-Rosedale in downtown LA, which puts on an annual 'Living History Tour' with volunteer actors portraying historic figures at graveside and recounting their life stories."

Goldstein's favorite grave is that of Douglas Fairbanks.

"In the days of neglect at Hollywood Memorial, when his rather impressive monument was covered in moss, I would stand there and picture Charlie Chaplin visiting the grave of his best friend," he says.

"To go inside a mausoleum that holds Valentino since 1926 is spine tingling"

Burbank's Dawn Wirth, a member of Hollywood Underground, has been going to famous gravesites since 1977.

"I visit the famous, because some of them seem forgot-

GRAVING/D2

Cemetery visitors
celebrate life
not death

*Do not stand at my
grave and weep.
I am not there,
I do not sleep.*

*I am a thousand
winds that blow.
I am the diamond
glints on snow.*

*I am the sunlight on
the ripened grain.
I am the gentle
Autumn's rain.*

*When you awaken
in the morning hush,
I am the swift,
uplifting rush
of quiet birds in
circled flight.*

*I am the soft stars
that shine at night.*

*Do not stand at my
grave and cry;
I am not there,
I did not die.*

.... Mary Frye



Too much thinking goin' on

Here it is almost 3 o'clock in the morning and I am still awake.

"Why?" you may ask.

"I am thinking," say I.

One of my friends says I think too much.

I think she is right because right now thinking is keeping me awake.

I am thinking about the recent story we ran on handwashing.

And it suggested that not shaking hands as part of our social ritual would be sad.

I don't think so. I think we should eliminate handshaking as part of our greeting or parting rites all together. Besides passing germs it can be



The Duck Pond
by Lara Hartley

painful when someone squeezes too hard or icky when someone doesn't grasp firmly enough. Or holds on too long — eewwww.

So in lieu of shaking hands how should we greet each other? I like the idea of a bow. Rather as they do in Asian countries like Japan. It is simple and respectful. Think of it as the ultimate gesture of respect.

You respect the person enough to not give them your germs and the germs of your kids who happen to have nasty colds even though you yourself are not showing any symptoms yet. (Yes, this is a run-on sentence, but you catch my drift.)

Historically women didn't always shake hands. This is a fairly recent occurrence, when women wanted to be seen as the equal to men in the workplace. A good thing at the time.

Handshaking is not a worldwide custom. In some countries, even men greet each other with a kiss on the cheek. (But oh my, think how many germs THAT would spread.) And frankly, I doubt that would catch on here in the High Desert.

Realistically there are simply too many of us folks in the world for kissing and handshaking at every social occasion. Even though we need germs to develop a mature immune system, we can do without a few here and there. Like the ones that cause avian flu and other viral nasties. Someone suggested a return to the curtsy,

perhaps. I dunno. A nice balanced curtsy is hard to pull off without falling over — especially the older one becomes. And if women were to curtsy, would men have to do that deep bow with their leg stuck out and their foot pointed? Without a hat to sweep off, it just wouldn't have the same effect.

No — I think we should just do the little bow from the waist or even a slight nod of the head if we are feeling really royal.

Now that I have solved that little conundrum, perhaps I can go to sleep.

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Lisa Robinson, formerly of Apple Valley, makes an image at the Victor Valley Memorial Park. Robinson has friends and relatives buried at the cemetery.

GRAVE HUNTING LINKS

- **Find A Grave** – find the graves of the famous and not famous. <http://www.findagrave.com/>
- **Beneath Los Angeles** <http://www.beneathlosangeles.com/>
- **Hollywood Underground** – the burial sites of Hollywood's most famous stars, moguls and eccentrics. <http://www.hollywood-underground.com/index.htm>
- **Hollywood Underground Yahoo group** <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/hollywoodunderground/>
- **Cemetery Transcription Library** <http://interment.net/Default.htm>
- **Death and Dying in the 18th and 19th Centuries** http://www.memorialhall.mass.edu/classroom/curriculum_8th/les-son1/bkgdessay.html
- **City of the Silent** <http://www.alsirat.com/taphophile/index.html>
- **Tomb With A View's Guide to Dying** <http://members.aol.com/TombView/symbol2.html>
- **The Association for Gravestone Studies** <http://www.gravestonestudies.org/>
- **Find A Death** – death, scandal, intrigue, home of the Death Hags, a bit on the morbid side, but an interesting site with lots of books available <http://findadeath.com/>
- **The Farber Gravestone Collection** from the American Antiquarian Society – thousands of cemetery images <http://www.davidrumsey.com/farber/view.html>
- **Dearly Departed: The Tragical History Tour** – tour Los Angeles most famous death sites <http://www.dearlydepartedtours.com/DDT/index.html>
- **Los Angeles Coroner's shop** – "Skeletons in the Closet, For those of us with dubious distinctive taste." One has to see the stuff for sale! <http://www.lacoroner.com/>
- **Celebrity death certificates** <http://www.celebritydeathcertificates.com/>
- **The Literary Cemetery** <http://www.theliterarycemetery.co.uk/>

Graving: Visitors search out long-lost relatives and the final resting place of the famous

FROM D1

ten, like Buster Keaton, whom I visit a lot," said Wirth. "My friend Shannon Cole and I go to Hollywood Forever to clean the headstones, and Forest Lawn to clean Buster's."

Each graver has their own special graving kit containing what they think they will need for a day of "graving." (see sidebar)

Marlene Soffera, senior pastor at Victor Valley Church of God, visits the cities of the dead for different reasons.

Though she often visits to conduct a funeral, other times she collect epitaphs.

"You can learn a lot about life hanging around dead people," she said. "You can tell so much about people based on what their epitaph says."

"If it is an upbeat person, who had a positive outlook with hope for the future, you can see that in their epitaphs. On the negative side, you can also see sarcasm, cynicism or a 'woe is me' outlook."

Some folks, like Joe Doyle of Victorville, visit graveyards planning for the inevitable while checking out his future neighbors.

"When I first arrived in California, my friends and I visited a slew of cemeteries looking for famous people," said Doyle. "I have a spot picked out and paid for in Westwood Cemetery where Marilyn Monroe, Natalie Wood and Elizabeth Taylor's parents are buried. The plot is all paid for and ready to move into when my time expires."

Doyle's graveyard neighbors are Burt Lancaster and Eve Arden.

"Marilyn's crypt is in sight of my spot where I will have my cremated remains rested," added Doyle.

Visiting cemeteries turned into a busi-

ness for Jim Tipton, who created Find A Grave.com (FAG) in 1995. He started the company after realizing there was no central source for celebrity burial site information on the Web.

The site started out with his meagre 20-30 grave sites, he said.

"People wrote e-mails and told me who I was missing, like Elvis and Jim Morrison, and I would add the names one at a time," said Tipton.

Today FAG boasts more than 300,000 members, and 15,000 names of the deceased are submitted every day. And FAG is no longer just about famous names.

"Our lists are growing faster than the U.S. death rate," he said. "Our goal is to have a list of where everyone who died in the U.S. is buried. We are actually making progress!"

Tipton says his favorite grave is still that of Al Capone "because it was my first long-distance pilgrimage to find a grave."

"I wasn't a big fan of Capone or his life, but I liked Mafia movies and figured he was buried somewhere," said Tipton.

Books led Tipton to where Capone's name is etched in stone. He thought, "Whoa. I am standing where Al Capone ended up."

(Capone was originally buried at Mt. Olivet in Chicago, but the family became tired of all the sightseers and vandalism of the monument and moved Capone's remains to Mt. Carmel. People soon found the simpler memorial and left odd mementos of respect: a cigar, bottles of beer, even a toy gun.)

Making burial information available to

others is important to Tipton, and implementing the photo request process on Find A Grave has been one of his meaningful milestones.

"The photo request system is one of my most-liked features I have added to FAG," he said laughing. "Sometimes, within hours of a request, a person on the other side of the country goes out to find the gravestone, photographs that stone, uploads it and you can see it."

Seeing that gravestone is a tangible link to recent relatives or long-dead ancestors. You may know they are part of your family intellectually, but seeing their actual gravesite makes them more real, he said. The family roots bind more tightly.

Hesperia's Joe Canfield finds visiting some cemeteries humbling.

"I was at Arlington National Cemetery a few years back, and due to the sheer size of it, I just picked a name — Ira Hayes, the Pima Indian who was one of the guys who raised the flag on Iwo Jima, in the famous photo by Joe Rosenthal.

"After about a half-mile walk I found it, and after I spent a few minutes with him, I decided I would have to spend a lot more time at Arlington the next time I went," he said. "I also paid my respects to Audie Murphy, JFK and Tomb of the Unknown."

"Arlington is a very emotional and humbling experience, but made me feel a connection with history. I believe all Americans should spend a day there."

My wife and I walk in cemeteries. The main and odd reason is that we like to read the names. There are many interesting names that were common in the past but seldom used today. It's an interesting study.

One can also place the history of a community within the global timeline of the cemeteries lifetime. Almost invariably, for instance, one sees many stones dated 1918, sometimes whole families, due to the flu epidemic of the time.

Scott and Susan Daniels, Dover, OH

My husband Richard and I visit graveyards whenever we go on vacation to PA and NY. We have walked many cemeteries in both states. We are genealogists and can hardly go by a cemetery without looking over at it. Some of the stones are quite elaborate and some are quite pitiful, but all are interesting. We take pictures of all our ancestors gravestones, and are saving our money to replace a few broken ones.

Jakki Lutz, Victorville

I live in the Sycamore Rock area of Apple Valley just a few blocks away from the Sunset Hills cemetery. My husband and I and our two young children frequently take walks through the Sunset Hills cemetery. Sure we visit the grave sites of friends but we also enjoy seeing the sunsets from "above the valley" ... We have taken visitors from out of town to see the Roy Rogers and Dale Evans grave sites, the elegant ponds, rock sculptures, the rolling hills, and the beautiful views. We have spent many hours wandering and visiting the grave sites of people we never met wondering who they were and remembering our friends.

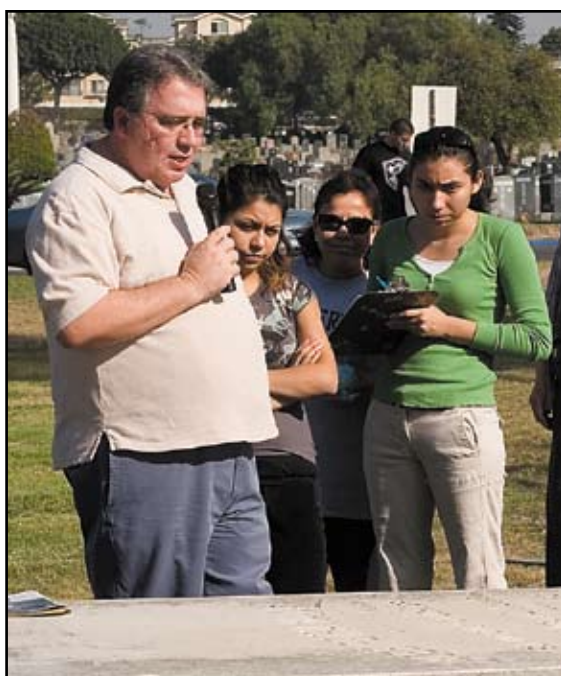
Kim Walker, Apple Valley Resident

My husband and I are avid genealogists. We love visiting all kinds of cemeteries and photographing the gravestones of our ancestors. When we plan vacations, we always plan on visiting cemeteries. It is one highlights of our trip. One of the most interesting cemeteries that we have ever visited is in the backwoods of North Carolina. It is an old and abandoned cemetery which was once located on a plantation.

Craig and Mary Anne Stephens

You never know what you may learn in a cemetery.

Norma (Gossard) Nikkel, Victorville



Resident storyteller for The Studio for Southern California History Joe Walker explains the story behind a young woman's death and her burial at Evergreen Cemetery.

THE WELL-PREPARED GRAVERS' KIT

- flower spade
- wisk broom
- utility knife
- small flags
- items for making rubbings/tin foil
- digital camera with plenty of memory and batteries
- pocket knife.
- small house-plant kit with clippers, tiny rake, shovel.
- clipboards/binders
- pencils & pens
- notepads
- soft brush
- spray bottle
- 1-2 gallons of clean water
- sponge
- pruning shears
- grass clipper
- compass
- DEET
- sunscreen
- straw hat
- binoculars
- FAG interment printout for the cemetery
- cell phone
- a stocked cooler if it's a long visit.

BOOKS ON FAMOUS BURIALS

The Stars of Hollywood Forever – Tony Luke Scott

Celebrities in Los Angeles Cemeteries – Allan R. Ellenberger

The Hollywood Book of Death: The Bizarre, Often Sordid, Passings of More than 125 American Movie and TV Idols – James Robert Parish

Where the Bodies Are: Final Visits to the Rich, Famous, & Interesting – Patricia Brooks

Dishing Hollywood: The Real Scoop on Tinseltown's Most Notorious Scandals – Laurie Jacobson

"Cemetery Research" – covers everything from cemetery and death-related terminology to clues offered by headstone art, and cemeteries' role in our culture and history. – Sharon DeBartolo Carmack

Death in Paradise – An illustrated history of the Los Angeles County Coroner's Office – Offers an inside look at the the most celebrated deaths of the century. In paperback. From the Cutting Edge Office Supplies Collection



ABOVE: Grave hunters take a tour at Evergreen Cemetery in Los Angeles. The walking tour was sponsored by The Studio for Southern California History.

BELOW: Pastor Marlene Soffera copies an epitaph from a tombstone at Sunset Hills Memorial Park in Apple Valley.

