Grave Tending: With Mom at the Cemetery

Carolyn Ellis

Abstract

This autoethnographic story shows the process of tending the graves of family members. In the past, the author reluctantly accompanied her mother on her visits to the family cemetery. Once there, she took on the role of distant observer as her mother took care of the family cemetery plots. When her mother becomes disabled, the author begins to arrange the flowers on the graves. Doing so leads her to examine the meaning of visiting the cemetery, feel and connect with her losses, and consider the customs she wants to be part of her own death. When her mother dies, the next generation of women in the family—the author, her sister, and sister-in-law—take on the role of tending the graves, connected in their love and respect for their mother and their feelings of family and family responsibility. This story examines the meanings of family rituals around death and how they are passed from generation to generation.

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She comes to the Woodlands Cemetery in Philadelphia regularly to tend to the Keens' graves, despite having no connection to them, familial or otherwise. She and her husband were randomly assigned the Keens when they became grave gardeners. Originally a botanist's estate in the 18th century, the Woodlands was converted into a rural cemetery in the 1840s. Last year they also started a workshop at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania so gardeners could find information about the people buried in the graves they were assigned. "It really helps it fit into our interpretation, but it also makes gardeners feel more connected to the site and they end up being really good liaisons for us to the community," Baumert said.

Ariel ensured that all eyes were on her during a casual shopping errand at The Grove in LA. She showcased it all from her enviable pins to her ample decolletage in this flirty, A-line mini dress. Her plunging neckline frock features a cute ribbon bow-tie around her waist and dramatic bell-sleeves for a boho finish. The good news is that this high-hemmed number comes with an affordable price tag of $23.99! Pair it with platforms like Ariel or save it for summer, this sexy little dress will certainly pay itself off in spades. So click right to nab one for yourself at OASAP or shop our favorite a Our Mom pillow arrangements come in several different colors, and are made with silk carnations. Mom is written using white carnations. These pillows are inexpensive and make a great memorial. If you can't tend to the graves on your own because you're physically unable, or you live far away from the cemetery, there are grave tending service providers around the country who you can hire to do it for a small fee. They will even send you a picture of the grave once the work is complete so you can see how nice it looks. If you don't know of a service in your area, consult our Grave Tending Service Provider Directory for options. Before starting any maintenance or decorating, be sure to check with cemetery about their rules.