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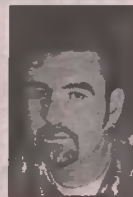
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## OPINION

### Editor's Note

by David Moore

#### Life's journeys and the stories you find



It's funny how twists and turns on your journey can take you to a certain place in life and time. Had you turned left instead of turning right, had you slept a few minutes later or made an alternate decision regarding a particular topic, would the outcome have been different?

Four years ago my partner and I moved back to Charlotte to take care of my terminally ill father. A few months after our re-arrival, he passed away and was buried in Forest Lawn Cemetery West.

Visiting my dad's plot in the subsequent days, I stumbled across a headstone that listed the names of two men — surrounded by a meticulously tended garden.

In this part of town where I had grown up — I still have vivid recollections of homophobia — I was amazed to see the names of two men that were obviously a gay couple.

It was quite by accident that I made the discovery. I just pulled up next to my father's gravesite one day and glanced to my left as I got out of the car. That's when my eyes landed on the monument in question.

Intricately carved designs reflecting the interests of the two men, I assumed, and the words "mates for life" leapt out at me. The stone statue of an eagle atop a podium opposite a reflecting bench — all of these elements combined together — clearly painted a picture of two individuals completely devoted to one another.

In the middle of the headstone was a metal crest that bore the name "Redcliffe." Perhaps that was a school — I thought.

As the years have passed, I have visited Forest Lawn on a number of occasions. I have to admit the serenity of this cemetery has always appealed to me. It's quiet and pretty — and full of endless stories. In addition to my father, there are a few other individuals I knew that are buried there.

When I was five, there was an 86-year-old woman named Sally Kennedy that lived in a small house behind ours. She became good friends with my family and often she'd watch after me if my parents had other obligations.

Despite the vast age difference, we became good friends, too. She would tell me stories about experiences she had growing up in rural North Carolina in the 1900s. She would play old 78 records, like Dinah Shore's "Buttons and Bows," on a hand crank victrola while she danced a little jig around the kitchen floor.

*East is east and west is west*

*And the wrong one I have chose*

*Let's go where I'll keep on wearin'*

*Those frills and flowers and buttons and bows*

*Rings and things and buttons and bows*

Sally is buried there, alongside her husband Gus who had passed away several years earlier. So are Daisy and Violet Hilton, the conjoined twins that were once famous Vaudeville stars (you can see them in the films "Freaks" and "Chained For Life").

The two were dumped in Charlotte by a scheming PR man in the early '60s during a revival tour of Todd Browning's "Freaks." With little more than the clothes on their backs, they took up residence on Charlotte's

west side and went to work in the produce department of a grocery store. I can still recall seeing them on visits to Park 'n Shop with my dad when I was a very little boy.

A few months ago I stopped by my father's plot again — at my mother's request — to see how the surrounding plants were being tended.

It was on this visit I noticed the garden plot that had caught my attention on so many previous occasions was different. There was a freshly dug rectangular hole. I read the names on the tombstone again and realized that the older of the two men had apparently passed away.

After looking up his obituary online, I came to learn more about their story. I didn't know them, but somehow, now it felt as though I did. I could only imagine the grief the surviving partner must have been experiencing after such a loss.

I typed a few words of condolence in the online guestbook, expressing my sorrow for his loss and my appreciation for the artistic tribute they had created as a monument to their relationship.

A few weeks would pass before a man named William sent me a message thanking

***They met in the late '70s, William told me. They had spent 29 years together as a couple. Buddy loved trucks and trains and over the years he had been a rig driver, a CATS driver and even an engineer for the Charlotte Trolley.***

me for the comments I had left in his partner's online guestbook.

We exchanged a few emails and eventually decided to have lunch — that's when I would learn even more about the life the two men had shared together.

They met in the late '70s, William told me. They had spent 29 years together as a couple. Buddy loved trucks and trains and over the years he had been a rig driver, a CATS driver and even an engineer for the Charlotte Trolley.

Redcliffe, as it turns out, was not a school, but the name of the home they owned together. It started out as a small cottage, William explained, but after adding onto it many times over the years, they felt it deserved a name.

He showed me pictures of them in the backyard at Redcliffe with two fat and happy Chesapeake Bay retrievers. At times he would imitate the way his partner spoke when recalling a particularly amusing incident. Through the dramatic change in voice it felt as though I was actually listening to someone else speak.

From our conversations I discovered that William and Buddy had quite a life together. Proof that same-sex relationships work and are just as valid and deserving of recognition as the opposite-sex versions. I'm glad I got to know their story. ▀