

OPINION

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Who knew dead people could lie so well

Andrew Newson

Columnist

Earlier today, I decided to take a stroll around the old Elon Cemetery, across from the new intramural fields.

I was wandering aimlessly, surrounded by tributes to the anonymous dead, when I realized something, a truth so simple and yet so profound that it shook my world: I was going to die. Granted, I wouldn't get a huge gravestone with a Confederate flag stapled to the top, but the fact remained: I would be dead someday. Deader than these folks. No, that doesn't make any sense. But I will be just as dead.

I sat down near a freshly placed tombstone. This person had died only two years before. "Devoted father, loving husband." I couldn't help but think of it as crap. We all know when we go to funerals, perhaps ones for people we weren't really close to, that a lot of the things being said are exaggerated, or at least are put in a more positive light, because the subject of the eulogy is, well, dead. You don't want an angry 83-year-old woman haunting your ass.

I mean, what would it be like to have truly honest eulogies? What if we engraved what people really were like on their gravestones? What would I be reading now? Granted, a lot of these people probably *were* devoted fathers and loving husbands. But others were probably drunken idiots who watched reruns of the roast of Denis Leary over and over again and missed every one of their daughter's soccer games growing up. What would be on these people's graves?

"Here lies Austin Zaytoun. Dead-beat husband, lousy father. Did not return phone calls." Perhaps, underneath all this, there would be a quote from the Bible. Something really nice and cheery, like "And you will know I am the Lord when I lay my vengeance upon you" (Ezekiel 25:17).

I think we don't do this because, besides the fact that our society loves to lie to each other and make each other feel like we're all great, morally upright human beings, we wouldn't want that on *our* graves. We know we do some bad stuff. Even so, we'd want something on there like, "You had the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in

beauty" (Ezekiel 28:12).

Some people, of course, wouldn't go out this way. These truly good people would have something meaningful on there, full of humility, to make the rest of us feel even worse than we already do. Martin Luther King Jr. has engraved on his tombstone a verse from Genesis that reads, "Here comes the dreamer... Come now, let us kill him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams" (Genesis 37: 19-20).

That makes sense for Martin Luther King, but it wouldn't work for me. I rarely ever dream, and when I do I have trouble remembering what they were about.

With all these pointless, rambling thoughts running through my head, I leaned back and rested. I watched a few geese grazing (or whatever geese do) in the distance. I looked down and noticed that I was resting on a tomb.

"Bobby" Salmons, Jr. He died in 1998. "Beloved son and brother," it read. And I believed it. He gave me a few minutes to sit and take in the world around me, and to appreciate the simple fact that whatever I am remembered for, however much of a

prig I am, there is also beauty; there is also goodness; there is also truth; there is always redemption. Realizing this again was, in some small way, like meeting Jesus again for the first time. I guess I owe part of that moment of peace to Bobby.

I know that I'm not the best person to lean on and talk to. I'm a broken, messed up bundle of paradoxes, like every other human on this earth. But maybe one day, many years from now, I'll be stuck in a graveyard somewhere. Perhaps I'll have a gravestone that says something like "Devoted son and loving father". And perhaps another young woman will be wandering through that graveyard and start to think about mortality, human life, and the amazing beauty that is right below the surface of our awareness.

And perhaps, taken aback by the presence of the Spirit of God, she will use my gravestone for a resting place, if only for a few seconds.

I think somewhere, I would smile.

Contact Andrew Newson at
opinions@elon.edu or 278-7247.

With Love, From Chile

A weekly look at another country's culture and customs

Finding Books in Chile

Charlie Remy

Columnist

An important aspect to a culture is its ability to produce good literature. Many well known authors have come from Chile including Pablo Neruda, Gabriela Mistral, Violeta Parra, Roberto Bolaños, and Isabel Allende among others. Globalization is hard to avoid in terms of books and media. Music from the United States is frequently played here and many U.S. bestsellers are hits here as well, such as *The Divinci Code*.

One thing that really disappoints me about Chile is the high prices of books. Most books cost at least \$10-25. At least you are doing really well if you can find

something decent for under \$10. Today I saw a book of scenic photos that cost about \$95, and this is the same type of book that I would expect to see on the bargain rack of Border's or Barnes and Noble. Interestingly, the vast majority of books here are paperback. I've hardly seen any hardcovers. There is a 19 percent tax on all books and this is supposedly why they are so expensive. The booksellers don't seem to be making large profits. They are usually good about giving me a "student discount" of about 10 to 20 percent if I pay in cash.

The problem with the high cost of books here is that it hinders their access to people who are of more modest means. Many people simply cannot afford to read in Chile. Although I have yet to investigate it, it seems as if the public library system here is less developed than the U.S.

Speaking of libraries, the one at my uni-

versity is horrible. Although they have an online card catalog, they still check books out the old-fashioned way - with cards. Therefore, there is no way to verify if the book you want is in the library from the catalog. One thing that is quite different from libraries in the U.S. is that the books simply are not accessible to patrons. One has to do a search in the catalog and then write down their desired book(s) and give the slip to the attendant. This is extremely inefficient, especially when there is a long line of people. I feel bad for the employees who have to work so hard to do something that patrons do themselves in our libraries.

Unlike Belk, there are no comfortable lounge chairs in which to fall asleep. The library closes at 7 p.m. and is closed on the weekends. Students can only check out a maximum of five books at a time. I cannot imagine doing exhaustive research projects

here because the resources and access are not the greatest.

I want to make it clear that my intent here is not to act like an arrogant person from the United States that thinks their system of doing things is better than anyone else in the world. It's just a culture shock for me because I am not used to the Chilean system. We must be very thankful to have the beautiful Belk Library at Elon. The staff at Belk bend over backwards to help and accessibility is their number one priority. Hats off to Kate Hickey and the rest of the library staff that work so hard but are often under appreciated by the Elon community. I hope after reading about the library at my Chilean university you will appreciate Elon's library more and be more.

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opinions@elon.edu or 278-7247.