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I thought I'd change things up a bit this time and talk about headstones. Talk about exciting! Fasten your seatbelts. I follow a lot of cemetery restoration sites on Facebook. Actually, if I click on one, I then get a whole bunch more that want to show me something. I've learned a lot. I tried Googling types of headstones and now I have a bunch of email coming to sell me a headstone. It's very annoying.

The Centerville cemetery has several different types of headstones including wood, marble, limestone, and cement. All of them need different kinds of care and some of them are beyond help, most especially the wooden ones. There are 5 wooden ones and if the sun is just right, I can almost see writing on a few of them. I've taken pictures at different times of the day of the ones I can tell had words and then gone back to my photo editing apps to see if I can bring them to life. So far, no go.

The ones made of a softer material are a lot harder to clean and require multiple tools to get them readable. They are the limestone ones and are generally ones for the children. It's like the stone is slowly melting. The engraving is softer. The edges are not sharp at all. None of the lambs on top of the headstone have heads. Who breaks off the heads of the lambs and takes them? Is there someone out there with a bunch of limestone lamb heads? Why? I have no answers. It ticks me off though.

The cement ones are kind of intriguing. There are the standing stones with a coarse grain that are super hard to read which is why I wrote about the flour trick and George Siggs in a previous article. They don't hold up well in our weather in terms of how they must have looked when originally set. Common throughout the cemetery are the flat stamped headstones. I have a lot of questions about these but have found no answers. Yet. They look like rectangular, smooth blocks with names and dates pressed into the then wet cement and set onto the ground. Over time, many of them are partially covered up. I've been digging around the edges, trying to make them 'pop' so they are more easily seen.

There are many different kinds of marble headstones, parts are polished and engraved. These tend to be more artistic, both in shape and what is written on them. They are really easy to clean. A little Dawn dish soap and water spray, rinsed, and air dried. Done. The real work on these is the bases. They are made of other things that either crumble or attract biological stuff like lichen, mold, and dirt which slowly break down the stone at the joints. Many of the broken headstones out there have made them easy targets for vandals or the with the settling of the ground over time make the bases lean, the epoxy holding it weaken, and they fall off and break. The back side of the Van Voast headstone shows the cement base crumbling where pieces of

cement and rocks erode out. I hope it doesn't tip over while I'm out there. We would need a crane to reset that one after a new base is built. Anyone have ideas on preventing that?

After 3 years out there, I feel like I've barely done a thing but I have learned a lot. About the people, about restoration, about how long it actually takes to do this kind of work. I try to chop out as much cactus every trip as I can carry in a bucket each visit, reset footstones and headstones, clean bird poop and then yell at the birds for making more work, trim shrubs so the headstones can be read, fill gopher holes, and actually clean, to my satisfaction (therein lies the problem), the headstones.

I promise to ask for help one of these days. I want to get a bunch of headstones prepped for reset and new epoxy so we can be efficient. I know I can't do the heavy lifting myself. Wouldn't it be fun to get all the children's stones put back together, standing straight and tall, glued down for another 100 years? Do I need to redefine the word 'fun'?

In the meantime, I really do cherish my time out there by myself and Maizy and Tank, maybe even Benny and Joon, the failure osprey nesting pair. The other day I watched a giant gathering of starlings, thousands of them. They did that thing where they fly in some kind of choreographed synchronized pattern, swirling and turning and then landing on trees and power lines en mass. I've since learned this is called a 'murmation' and it is mesmerizing which is why I got nothing done that visit. And for more drama, there was a bald eagle sitting on one the power poles nearby, just watching. It was like the starlings were daring it to come get them. I love nature. I love my 'job'.