

Whispers Of The Past

I don't know about anyone else, but every time I walk into a cemetery, I notice how my brain switches into math mode. The sad thing is, I'm not getting any faster or better at this kind of math. It is the headstone's birth-and-death math, to get to know how old someone was when they died. It's almost embarrassing. I think I put too much pressure on myself.

The good news is there are quite a few cheater headstones. These have the years, months and days someone lived. Now that is higher math! Sometimes I check just to make sure they are right and so far, so good. Whew. Who would you tell if it was wrong?

I can't tell you how many times I've walked the Centerville Cemetery in the three years I've been working out there, but I can tell you I always look at any headstone and automatically start adding and subtracting. 1872-1931 is, um, um, 28 plus 31, um, 59!! I high-five myself in my head. I can't help it anymore. This is followed by some commentary to no one about how old or young they were and I always wonder how they died.

When I get home, I look up a name and find some interesting and unexpected death fact, like with Charles Sheldon who came from New York to work for the Sullivan Gold Mining Company out of Winston and died after being hit by a train during a blizzard on February 7, 1936. Ouch. Born in 1889, so that's 11 plus 36 equals 47 years old. Too young.

Or Edward Mackin, a sheepherder, who killed himself with a .30 caliber gun at the age of 50. Born in 1861 and died in 1911. That's 39 plus 11, equaling 50. That was easy math, but a sad story.

Clifford Grounds was a blacksmith from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania who somehow found his way west doing different kinds of work, like road grader in Frenchtown and then with the railroad in Helena. Somehow, he ended up as a ranch hand for the Doggetts who found him dead one day, bleeding from the mouth. He was born in 1867 and died in 1937 at 69 years old. The math is 33 plus 37, which is 70, but the birth and death dates make him 69. Can't fool me.

None of these men have headstones. Like dozens of others, they were interred with markers that are unreadable now or have disappeared, so I have no idea where in the cemetery they are. I just know they somehow made it to our area, left their marks in the minds of the people they worked with or lived around who are also long gone. They left families who may or may not know where they ended up and we'll never know their full stories. For whatever reason, I feel good I've found something about them just in case someone comes looking.

I know you all are wondering about my little osprey family, Benny and Joon. They show no signs of having babies again this year. They still chirp at me when I open the gate but their nest still looks pathetic. Maybe they have chosen not to have kids ever. I'm just glad to see them out there.