

Good Grief: Pictorial Gravemarkers

One of my favorite cemeteries in San Antonio is the small Lockhill Cemetery, on the corner of Huebner and Fredericksburg. The cemetery provides a comforting mixture of longevity and modernity. Longevity emanates from the large number of mature Live Oak trees, reminders of the days when the cemetery was owned by Oxford Methodist Church. Modernity flashes from its half dozen pictorial gravemarkers, products of the new owners, Mission Park Funeral Chapels and Cemeteries.

An excellent example of this fairly recent pictorial artistry sits just inside the Huebner Road entrance and immediately to the left. A dark grey rectangular cube, three feet tall and two feet wide on each side, presents an eye-catching monument/sculpture – memorializing Dawn Hamilton. At right angles to the side facing Fredericksburg Road, sits a black bench - with the word HAMILTON engraved on each side.

Beginning in the mid-1970s, various technological advances – using Goodkin Lucigraph sandblasting; computer assisted designing; lasers; and diamond-tipped engraving tools - have allowed monument makers to duplicate photographs and other etchings onto stone. Fortuitously, in the early 1980s the increasing availability and affordability of imported granite – especially black granite - provided a hard surface that accepted this technology better than other types of stone. Monument makers were now capable of offering a product that allowed for a new type of creative art. The HAMILTON monument beautifully displays this range of new technology.

The cube, made of traditional grey granite, has been inscribed using a computer-assisted laser technique. The side of the cube that faces Huebner road reads: “CLASS OF 1981; TOM O. CLARK HIGH SCHOOL.” Beneath, arranged in symmetrical order, are inscribed icons that appear to declare individualized connections to Dawn: a cowboy hat, a truck license plate, a dog, a

possum hanging from a tree branch, a fishing pole, a soccer ball, a tennis racket, a piano, a clarinet, etc.

Opposite the bench, on the side of the cube that faces the gravel road, visitors can see a laser-inscribed, unedited, handwritten poem. Clearly we are hearing the words of Dawn herself:

DEATH: *When Someone Dies then your depressed for they were alive now they're at rest.*

But, when one dies You shouldn't mourn for when God takes another is born.

When the loved one dies, You feel all pain.

The last time is vivid, those times will never be again. **DAWN T. HAMILTON**

On the south side of the cube, at right angles to the poem, are a collection of laser-inscribed icons. At the top is displayed a wide-angle image of a sunrise, with the word DAWN embedded within the outstretching rays. Beneath that sunrise are images that “look like” a modern version of the classical YinYang; the words “friends forever”; and a large drawing of a truck.

These engraved icons overlook a conventional family headstone – black granite – lying flat on the ground. It reads: “Dawn Patrice Hamilton; Oct. 30, 1963; May 16, 1982; Daughter and Love of Pat and Cindy Hamilton.” Between the birth and death dates, a 1920s-style ceramic, color-enhanced, photograph of Dawn has been set into the granite. To the left, however, is an engraved etching of a guitar – most likely hand-engraved with a diamond tool.

This duality of memorialization, the sculpture erected by classmates complemented by the headstone erected by family, tells a remarkable story. Visitors do not know what caused Dawn’s death. We do know, however, that she was loved.

So what makes a cemetery a favorite cemetery? The love of family, of course – love that emanates from majestic live oak trees and from contemporary artistic icons on gravemarkers.

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