

Whitney

and in tone. While Halloween masks, thanks to Hollywood, signify a dark night of terror or mischief, the Day of the Dead celebrates an affirmation of life. Day of the Dead celebrations, originating thousands of years ago with indigenous peoples, celebrate the idea that death is a natural phase of life, that the dead are still a part of the community – kept alive in memory with altars in homes and cemeteries loaded with water, food, family photos, lit candles, and paths of marigold petals said to guide wandering souls back to their place of rest.

We commemorate in different ways. Within its ornate wrought iron gates, the Nashua Cemetery, a beautiful, sequestered old cemetery next to the Unitarian Universalist Church established in 1834, is a Who's Who of Nashua's generous "landed gentry" who left legacies we enjoy today, families with names such as Spalding, Hunt, Stark, and Greely.

Though I can walk by my family gravesite that stands behind a church in Rye, there is no place for me to walk to recall my Whitney family legacy because my in-laws' ashes were scattered ceremoniously out to sea. As more and more families choose cremation, records of families marked by names carved into granite are literally disappearing, in keeping with the fact that the digital age is causing paper trails to disappear.

As a biographer who spent more than a decade following the century-old paper trails left by my subject, I am saddened to see paper trails and archives disappearing into the cloud. In light of this fact, I wonder if graveyards and cemeteries will become conservation land, serving to remind us how to remember – to encourage us to develop new tools for remembrance.

How to honor the war dead? How many of us know why November 11 is Veterans Day? If we had kept the name Armistice Day, we would all remember that on the 11th hour of the 11th day in the 11th month, in 1918, the world witnessed the signing of the armistice that ended

WWI hostilities between the Allied national and Germany.

On Nov. 11, at 10:45 a.m., Cathedral of the Pines, in Rindge, will celebrate its Annual Veterans' Day Service with an artistic twist to celebrate the 100th Anniversary of Armistice Day.

More than 90 years ago, the U.S. government commissioned Leonard Craske, a British sculptor, to create a memorial sculpture to be placed in Arlington National Cemetery to pay tribute to those lost in "The Great War." Craske, best known for his "They That Go Down to the Sea in Ships" Memorial to Gloucester Fishermen, made a model of his proposed sculpture titled "Ecce Homo," meaning "Behold the Man." The five-foot-high crucifixion sculpture features Jesus looking down at an anonymous dying soldier – marked by no rank or insignia – whose wounds resemble those of Christ. Despite plans for his sculpture to be made "full-size and a half," for reasons unknown, Craske subsequently broke his contract and never delivered the statue.

The sculptor spent the rest of his life looking for the proper place to place his model. In 1950, Craske visited the newly-built Cathedral of the Pines and talked at length with co-founders Douglas Sloane III and his wife Sybil who built Cathedral of the Pines to honor their son who died in WWII. Craske was so moved by his visit that he changed his will, leaving the "Ecce Homo" to the Cathedral of the Pines. Craske died three weeks later.

On Nov. 11, during the Veterans Day service, "Ecce Homo" will be placed upon the Chaplains' Altar in Hilltop House at the Cathedral of the Pines. The Chaplains' Altar is dedicated to four Chaplains who lost their lives – giving up their life preservers to young seamen – when the U.S. Dorchester went down after being torpedoed by a German submarine.

What can we learn from remembrance? One lesson I take away from the dead, especially those like the four chaplains who sacrificed their lives for others, is that we cannot fully live unless we face our own fear, and that with

that courage, we grow into something better than we were before.

Novelist Nicole Krauss wrote about fear in response to a letter Vincent Van Gogh penned to his brother Theo. "And yet even if we could scrape away the many forms our fear takes and get to the underlying source – our mortality, our division from the infinite – we would still discover that our fear is not based on actual knowledge unlike the part of us that chooses to be free. Bravery is always more intelligent than fear, since it is built on the foundation of what one knows about oneself: the knowledge of one's strength and capacity, of one's passion."

In an age of diminishing paper trails when so much information is vanishing into the cloud, granite monuments in a cemetery hold some special significance. How do we remember, pay homage to and acknowledge the past when physical representation of the past is fast disappearing? We mark remembrance by the stories we tell, the art we create, the buildings we build, the land we consecrate, the legacies we leave – physically and metaphysically.

In fact, because we are less tied to the physical remnants of culture than our less mobile ancestors, it seems to me that parades such as the colorful Day of the Dead parades, the rituals we create, live performances in music and art – these things that we do in real time celebrate life and remind us how short it is. Facing fear, whatever your fears may be, is, in itself, a small tribute to those now gone whose legacy to us was the courage they showed – exemplary legacies for subsequent generations.

In this vein, it seems to me that the kind of ceremony at the Cathedral of the Pines is this courage personified: the courage to be present to acknowledge the gift of those who will not grow old or weary, but whom we remember in story, in ceremony, in artifact and art.

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