

The Township Cemetery Would Like More Respect.....

The original article by Denise Crosby was posted under “opinion”, my rebuttal will be fact!

While unfortunate, tragedies happen every day. No single person’s tragedy is greater than any other person’s loss. Loss of a loved one impacts us for the rest of our lives. Never forgotten, but each day we move forward and continue on with our routines. So, for a “news reporter” to want to do a story on the opioid epidemic is understandable. However, for a reporter to not obtain the facts, exploit the truth and make a cemetery look bad just to obtain a story is disgusting! The opioid epidemic as well as suicide is unfortunately growing at a rapid pace. I myself, have suffered the loss of family and friends through suicide and substance abuse. Which is the reason this “opinion article” upset me to the point of rebuttal with the truth!

Let’s start at the beginning, not of Rachel Dohogne’s story, but of Our story at Little Rock Township Cemetery. In early April 2018 it was brought to the attention of the Little Rock Township Road District, that the cemetery’s care and punctuality was lack luster. By the beginning of May 2018, the Road District, led by Commissioner Richard Wade, had stepped in at the cemetery. The former “cemetery manager” abruptly quit leaving the cemetery in shambles. At this point, it became a crash course from burials and cremations to mowing and other cemetery protocol. In mid-June the cemetery trustees felt they could hire someone to run the cemetery and the Road District could step away. Two months later, in mid-August, it was apparent that individual was not capable of such a task. At that time the Road District came back to the cemetery, where they remain today by intergovernmental agreement, the care takes of the cemetery.

As I dove into the process of figuring things out, it was evident the cemetery hadn’t been run properly in years. When the Township Clerk handed me a binder from 2003, I knew something wasn’t right. I jumped onto the computer and began to do research. What were the laws regarding cemeteries in Illinois? In the meantime, the Road Commissioner and other Road District employees were busy maintaining the grounds that had become overgrown. Come to find out, that since the deplorable practices at Burr Oak Cemetery in Alsip, the State of Illinois had implemented strict laws and practices effective in 2010 and in full practice by 2012. With that intel I began the process of getting the cemeteries and ourselves licensed with the Illinois Department of Professional Regulation and registered with the Illinois Comptroller. None of which had been done previously, thus the cemeteries being non-compliant. With that goal being achieved and the grounds work under control, now was the task of office work and re-establishing relationships with the local funeral homes and monument companies that had been lost years ago. After a long process and lots of work, we now feel caught up. Although almost everyday there is some sort of surprise, we tackle each event with pride as we see how far the cemetery has come!

Now let's pick up with the Dogohne's. On June 1, 2018 a grief-stricken Charles and Tamara Dogohne along with son and daughter-in-law, entered the cemetery office. All visibly shaken to their core, they finalized Asher's arrangements. At one-point Charles breaking down, crying how when he had been the one to find his son having left this Earth. This was so difficult. It was our first time dealing with a grief-stricken family, from such a sudden tragedy, in the office. As the family left, we took a deep breath and knew everything had to be perfect. Remember, we were still rookies at this point. It was going to be only our second burial; we were still learning. Understandably with the months following Asher's service, family and friends became regular visitors to the cemetery. At one point asking if some pumpkins and other decorations could be placed on the gravesite for his birthday. Reluctantly, Richard said yes to the decoration request. While an inch was given, a mile was taken. Rules at the cemetery were set in place long before the Road District took over. One of those rules being spring and fall cleanup. Each beginning on the 1st of April and November and lasting for one week. At which time all items must be removed or will be disposed.

Sometime in November after the cleanup period, Tamara Dohogne had stopped into the office to inquire about a couple of small items she couldn't locate on the grave. I informed her that the first week in November had been cleanup and any items not removed had since been placed in the dumpster. Which she replied that she had told Asher's ex-wife not to have the children place the items at that time, near cleanup. Not sure if the dumpster had been emptied yet, I said perhaps the items were still in there and could be located. Unfortunately, the dumpster had already been emptied. More time went on with friends visiting Asher and regular visits from his mom and sister, Rachel. Often when Rachel would arrive, the visit was accompanied with loud, thumping music from her vehicle and ended with her speeding away. There is a 5mph speed limit set within the cemetery for the safety of all. Not only is this a cemetery, but it is also a place where people walk, ride bicycles, jog and not only enjoy the overwhelming sense of peace, but beauty and safety. As there are numerous visitors at any one-time, loud music from people or vehicles is prohibited and noted in the rules and regulations. We must think of all while visiting the cemetery, not just one.

After multiple times witnessing not only Rachel speed in and out of the cemetery, but also Tamara, I made the Commissioner aware of the recurring issue. In late March 2019, while on our way to locate a gravesite, Rachel was in such a hurry that she drove through the grass (other burial plots) to get around a departing truck. In which there were multiple witnesses to that event, Richard approached and asked Rachel not to drive through the grass, Rachel was rude, aggressive and belligerent. Months went on without any major incidents from Rachel, until September 4th, 2019. At which time Rachel was once again carelessly speeding through the cemetery. When asked for yet another time to please stop speeding, Rachel went into a screaming tirade. Using vulgarities, being aggressive and illustrating completely disrespectful behavior inside a cemetery, Rachel called her parents and the Kendall County Sherriff's Department. Richard nor I spoke to the parents or a sheriff's deputy. The next day we contacted the sheriff's department and asked if a deputy could come out and take our

statement. Unknowing of Illinois cemetery law and the Cemetery Protection Act, the deputy misinformed Rachel as to the consequences of repeated violations of the cemetery rules and regulations. The deputy also advised Rachel to visit during non-business hours to avoid further conflict. With that incident brought a rash of Facebook postings bashing and threatening the cemetery. The cemetery was peaceful until October 9th, 2019 when once again Rachel came speeding into the cemetery. This time, it was the monthly cleaning lady that noticed Rachel's excessive speed. As I left the shop to go to retrieve the mail, Rachel approached. With initial mumblings not understood, I simply asked "I thought you were coming here during off hours"? In which Rachel replied, "I can come here whenever the f(expletive) I want"! I then said, "I was only asking a question". Rachel's response, "I don't have to answer a f(expletive) thing". She then attempted to ask a question at which time I responded, "I don't have to take this"! Which is true. I don't. We don't. Under the Cemetery Protection Act,

(765 ILCS 835/1) (from ch.21. par. 15) Sec. 1 (d-5)(3): Any person who harasses or threatens any employee of a cemetery on cemetery grounds is guilty of a Class A misdemeanor for the first offence and a Class 4 felony for the second or subsequent offence. (Source: P.A. 95-331, eff. 8-21-07; 96-863, eff. 3-1-10.)

Later that morning, Rachel returned to the cemetery and harassed and tailgated the cleaning lady on her way out. Additionally, The Cemetery Protection Act,

(765 ILCS 835/2) (from ch.21, par 16) Sec. 2 The cemetery authority is hereby authorized to make by-laws or rules and regulations for the government thereof, and to make rules regarding the driving of cars, motorcycles, carriages, processions, teams, and the speed thereof, the use of avenues, lots, walks, ponds, water courses, vaults, buildings, or other places within such cemetery, the operations and good management in such cemetery, the protection of visitors, the protection of employees, and for the maintenance of good order and quiet in such cemetery, all such rules to be subject to the rights of interment, entombment, or inurnment right owners, or others, owning any interest in such cemetery; and all persons found guilty of a violation of such rules shall be guilty of a petty offense and shall be punished by a fine of not less than \$100, nor more than \$500 for each offense. No judge shall be disqualified from hearing any cause that may be brought before him under the provisions of this Act, nor shall any person be disqualified from acting as a juror in such cause, by reason of any interest or ownership they or either of them may have in the interment, entombment, or inurnment rights of such cemetery. (Source: P.A. 94-44, eff. 6-17-05.)

On October 9th, 2019 I filmed a majority of Rachel's unacceptable behavior and brought it to the sheriff's department to file a follow up complaint. The Kendall County Sheriff's Department seems uninterested in following the law. Perhaps it's because they are unaware of cemetery law. They have been of no help in trying to diffuse the hostility with Rachel or in mandating any of the laws regarding cemeteries set forth by the State of Illinois. The response we received

from the deputy from the last complaint we made was to “Call the sheriff’s department the next time she arrives and ask for a deputy to keep the peace”. I think we are past that point.

Are we, the Little Rock Township Road District, going to run a tight ship at the Little Rock Township Cemetery? ABSOLUTELY! This is not Rachel Dohogne’s cemetery. This is the cemetery of the taxpayers of the township. We, as the caretakers, had to take a class and exam and be licensed by the State of Illinois. For Richard, he was born here in Plano and has lived here his entire life. He has a plethora of family and friends buried in this cemetery. He takes great pride in all the work we have accomplished here. The continuous incidents have upset him tremendously. I’ve witnessed it. He takes it very personally, it’s not just a job. As for myself, I’ve lived in Plano for 16 years. As a transplant, I consider Plano my home and no doubt this is where I too shall pass. Having dealt with an abundance of death personally, I feel that it has molded me to be a valuable representative of the cemetery to handle the needs of people in their times of grief. I also take it very personally. I believe in doing what is right, even if there are complaints. Let’s face it, you can’t please everyone.

These are my residents in their gated community. I am their advocate, the person who makes sure they can rest in peace. Just as in life, in death you want to have nice, quiet neighbors whose yards are tidy, and their guests are respectful. These residents deserve the utmost respect, dignity and peace in their final resting place. It’s about them, no one else!

-Shannon McNelis

Little Rock Township Cemetery

Customer Service Employee