



We Built Our Own Cemetery.

You might ask why? Training as a group was difficult this year. Even though our training is done distanced from one another, many of our locations locked down or canceled our permit. We stayed home for the first several months; training did not happen. Slowly, we started training in small groups again, but still had very limited locations. I had the thought that it would be fun to build a cemetery to train on. I told Lynne and Barbara my idea and they wanted to help.

Something I thought important to the plot designs was to have many of the things you would see in a historic cemetery. Why? Well, when a person first sees us working a cemetery, they often ask, "Are the dogs just alerting on headstones?" By creating our own cemetery (complete with common cemetery

symbols) and knowing *exactly* where the sources are buried, we create a unique training opportunity.... We will know which symbols are associated with scent, and which are not.

I had simple guidelines for all of us to set up our cemetery:

- We decided to do three family plots. Each of us would do one and keep what and exactly where we buried things a secret from everyone else on the team, including the other two plot builders.
- Each would place visual cemetery items in their plot.
- Buried sources could be human or negative items (like dead animals.)

We defined the plot boundaries, and got to work! Below, Barbara watches Lynne use the jack hammer. (Not to worry, Barbara also got lots of exercise digging.) End of summer with no rain and the ground is really hard. We used a pickaxe, digging bars, jack hammer, shovels and lots of hard work to dig family "graves." It's a good thing we did not have to dig as deep as a real cemetery. Our scent sources were limited to human bones, cremains and not whole bodies. You can see some of the cemetery symbols (borders, depressions, and markers) taking shape around them.



The Morris Family Plot

My plot ended up a mix of styles - modern Chinese monuments, old style pioneer wooden crosses, and concrete pavers flush with the ground. Lisa contacted Acme Monument Company in Colma asking if they had any broken headstones we could have. I took four beautiful black Chinese headstones that I could *almost* carry and added them to my family plot.



Pence Family plot

Barbara went with a homey rural cemetery movement look where families used cemeteries as a place to visit and enjoy time in a park setting. It uniquely featured seating and flower pots, in addition to various individual plot boundaries and markers.



Engelbert Family plot

Lynne's cemetery is more of a modern family cemetery where families make graves very personal with items that reflect the deceased loved one. Her family plot had a stake and rope boundary. Pinwheels and pom-poms decorated individual plots, in addition to stone monuments and a flat marker.





a funny cemetery story...

I added a Halloween skeleton hand to one of my grave plots. When Lynne went to work the cemetery she asked me why my hand was now in her plot. I called Barbara and asked her where the hand was when she worked it. She said it was out of the cemetery in the orchard. Then I called Peg (who's orchard our cemetery is in) and asked her if she knew anything about the traveling hand. She said she found it in the orchard, but did not know where it belonged so she put it in Lynne's plot. We still don't know how it got from my plot to out in the orchard ... (Too bad we did not do this for the October newsletter.)

How We Would Work It

We also worked out guidelines for our Cemetery work:

- The items will be in place to age for awhile (and hopefully get some rain) before our team works it.
- Teams influence each other as little as possible:
 - Results may not be discussed (with anyone other than the plot builders) until all are done.
 - Teams schedule their own individual training day; at least two days would separate each date.
 - No food rewards were allowed in the cemetery.
- Teams are given information including: a fictional client, CRM, pertinent history, and goal for the "project."
- Teams choose their own strategy, but each works blind - with no knowledge of what is in the plots or where things are. (Lynne, Barbara and I would work the others' plots blind.)
- Each team records their findings on a cemetery map and debriefs / discusses only with the plot builders.

- When all are done, we'll discuss what we learned and how that knowledge informs future training / work.

This is a training and hopefully will give us feedback to how precise the dogs can locate sources... and who knows if there will be negatives buried in the cemetery.

Next month we will report how it is going!

~Adela~

We have listed some of our past ICF newsletters that have articles on Funerary customs. You can still read them by clicking on the dates below:

- [July 2019](#) Embalming
- [August 2019](#) Types of cemeteries Immigrant
- [September 2019](#) Gold Rush Era Chinese burials
- [October 2019](#) Native cremains burials
- [November 2019](#) Decommissioned cemetery and East West orientation
- [February 2020](#) Types of cemeteries
- [March 2020](#) Rural Cemetery Movement
- [April 2020](#) Lawn and Monument Park Cemeteries

To access more of our past issues

[CLICK HERE](#)



Vacaville Cremains Recovery

Why do we work cremated remains recovery? Imagine for a minute that you have lost your home, all of your belongings and your memories (photo albums, keepsakes, heirlooms, etc.) ... absolutely everything! Suddenly, you realize that the cremated remains of your loved one(s) were left behind and are lost in the ashes of your home. Then you learn that the debris will be scraped up and hauled off to a toxic dump. The devastation is unbearable.

Now, imagine that you learn about a group of dog teams and archaeologists who can actually recover your loved one's ashes. When that happens, and you are presented with what you thought was lost forever, the tears begin to flow and you reach out, not in grief, but in gratitude. The photo above captures that magic moment and the hug says it all. (Both participants were appropriately masked though not physically distanced ... how could you be in a moment like

this?)

ICF continues to work with Alta Heritage Foundation in the recovery of human remains left in homes after the fires. These services are provided free of charge to the wildfire victims. For more information, people in need of this service, donations or volunteering, go to [here](#).

Please feel free to pass our newsletter along to anyone who might be interested.



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We are happy to talk with you about your project and how our dogs might help locate human remains or burials.
Call, email, or check out our website.

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