

REFLECTIONS NO. 19 (April 6, 2021)

By Jerry McKelvy

The Circus Comes to Town

I don't remember ever going to a circus. I'm sure I would have remembered it if I had gone. A circus coming to town is always an exciting thing.

In October, 1911, the Sparks circus came to Prescott. The show arrived by train and the animals and equipment were loaded into wagons and taken to the show location. Many people gathered to watch the animals being unloaded from the train cars and the huge tent being erected. The circus began with a parade with three bands and a steam piano. There were clowns galore, including a funny clown band, open dens of animals of all types, a herd of elephants, a troupe of Japanese artists in balancing and acrobatic stunts, a revolving iron jaw act, sensational trapeze artists, exhibits of tumbling and acrobatics by the Petit family, trick horseback riding by the Mayors and Crandalls which included a somersault done while riding horseback.

I was curious about the revolving iron jaw act. According to what I found; the act involved lifting a performer into the air by a cable supported only by a bit held in the teeth. While suspended in the air, the performer does stunts by moving the arms and legs. The act is sometimes called "The Jaws of Life".

The newspaper reported that it was remarkably clean and well-managed show enjoyed by people of all ages and that the show drew one of the largest crowds to Prescott in many years

About three weeks later, the same circus was performing in Utica, Mississippi. A little girl (age not given) worked as an animal trainer. She had appeared at the Prescott show in an act involving lions. While the show was going on in Mississippi, one of the lions attacked the little girl lacerating her throat and severing her windpipe. The girl was transported by a special train to a hospital in Jackson, Mississippi. She died following an operation at that hospital.

After hearing this news, many who saw her at the Prescott show, remarked that such an act should not have been permitted due to the danger involved.

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Comments from readers—

1. The first circus I ever saw before I married was in Texarkana. I sometimes worry about the safety of the stunts on America's Got Talent TV show. -- Linda

REFLECTIONS NO. 20 (April 12, 2021)

By Jerry McKelvy

Tornado Hits Hempstead Co in 1921

This week marks the 100th anniversary of one of the most destructive storms to hit in southwest Arkansas. The tornado (or what many called a cyclone in those days) hit at 5:20 p.m. on April 15, 1921. The storm system had already caused much damage further southwest in Miller County and in east Texas.

The area in Hempstead County hit was southwest of Blevins as the storm moved on a path from the southwest to the northeast. Thirteen people were in the A. J. Brooks residence as the house was completely destroyed. They all huddled together in one room and emerged from the damage uninjured except for one of the children who suffered a slight injury. There were several other cases of people surviving the devastation without injury. It could have been much worse.

The Bells Chapel church was swept from the earth. The Macedonia church was also destroyed. Grave markers in the Macedonia cemetery were moved here and there by the storm. At one home, a concrete block weighing 6,000 pounds was moved, but a bucket left at the nearby well was left untouched.

There were many injuries caused by the storm and eleven deaths in the Blevins area. Many farm animals were either killed or injured. The Thede Shackelford family were all killed—Mr. and Mrs. Shackelford, their daughter, Mildred (age 6) and their six-month old baby. Their home was lifted from its foundation and moved about 100 yards with the family inside. There was nothing left of the home but a pile of rubble as evidenced by a photo published in The Blevins News. A man named Julian Harris who had stopped at their home to take shelter from the storm was also killed.

It took a while for word to reach Prescott of the storm damage since wires were down, but as soon as word reached town, people from Prescott rushed to the scene. Prescott doctors went to treat the injured along with Prescott's two ambulances to bring the injured back to the Park Sanitarium in Prescott for treatment.

Roads were blocked by trees, so men with cross-cut saws and axes began to clear the roads. The Prescott Chamber of Commerce sent a request to the state for 300 cots and 100 tents for the homeless. Men searched the storm damaged area on horseback and on foot looking for injured people. An appeal was made for donations of food, clothing, dishes, pans, skillets, furniture, etc. for the victims of the storm. Feed for livestock was also needed since many of the barns had been destroyed. Co. C. of the Prescott National Guard helped to set up the tents and cots for the homeless. The Prescott and Northwestern Railway helped get supplies in to the storm-damaged area.

A few days later, the funeral for the Shackelford family was held at Midway Cemetery a few miles from Prescott. It was estimated that between 2,500 and 3,000 people attended that funeral. The Shackelford family was well-known and well-liked. They were all buried in the same grave but in two caskets. Mr. Shackelford (age 29) and his daughter, Mildred

(age 6) were in one casket and Mrs. Shackelford (age 30) and the six-month-old baby named Orlis in the other casket.

There were actually four tornadoes produced by this storm system in Texas and Arkansas resulting in 56 deaths (39 in Arkansas). A Red Cross survey conducted later showed 497 families losing homes or personal property in Arkansas and 110 families in Texas.

Those people had no advance warning since they had no weather radar or warnings issued on radio and TV like we have today. About all they could do was watch the skies and seek shelter. There was no mention in the papers about anyone having a storm cellar, so they just huddled together in their homes and prayed.



Grave marker for the Shackelford family at Midway Cemetery

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Comments from readers--

1. My great grandfather Wilson Polk Wallace lived on a farm near Ozan at that time. I wonder if his family was affected. He would have been 75 years old, and my grandmother would have been 15 and still living at home. -- Barbara

2. Those of us who were born in the 1940s and beyond probably take our communications' system for granted. I often wondered how in the world the first settlers managed when a hurricane or tornado suddenly hit...with no real warning. Never thought about the fact that people not that long ago had to deal with the same thing.-- Julie

3. Thank you so much for your wonderful glimpses into the past. So well chosen, written. I first came across Sandyland Chronicle when some research into an old book I have took me to your part of the world. I live in southern England, a retired boarding school teacher. – Tim

REFLECTIONS NO. 21 (April 19, 2021)

By Jerry McKelvy

CEMETERY ETIQUETTE

“A cemetery is a history of people—a perpetual record of yesterday and a sanctuary of peace and quiet today. A cemetery exists because every life is worth loving and remembering—always.”

(Unknown Author)

I was recently looking a web site which listed general rules for visiting cemeteries. Here are some of those rules or suggestions and some of my comments in italics:

- 1. Touching a grave marker is extremely disrespectful.** *I see no problem with touching a marker as long as the marker is not damaged. Probably best not to touch the very old fragile markers.*
- 2. Be respectful of other mourners.** *We should not invade the privacy of others who might be visiting a grave.*
- 3. Drive carefully on cemetery roads or trails.** *We need to watch for grave markers and not accidentally hit one with our vehicle. They are expensive.*
- 4. Don't walk on top of graves.** *This is something our parents taught us. If possible, avoid walking on top of graves. It's mainly showing respect for the deceased. Of course, those who maintain the cemetery must walk on graves while weed-eating and they ride their mowers over the graves.*
- 5. Don't sit or lean on headstones, grave markers, or other memorials.** *Some think it is disrespectful. It's best not to lean on the old markers. Some are easily broken.*
- 6. Don't leave glass, ceramic, or other breakable items on the graves.** *The main reason for this is they can cause extra work for those who maintain the cemetery. I have seen some graves with so many items left on the graves that it looks unsightly.*
- 7. Don't put up solar lights and those little plastic fences.** *This causes extra work for those who maintain the cemetery.*

8. Don't leave food or drinks on headstones and then complain about ants. *We shouldn't leave any such items in the cemetery. Most cemeteries have trash receptacles. If not, carry your trash with you when you leave.*

9. Keep pets on a leash. *Some cemeteries may not allow pets in cemeteries.*

10. Don't take flowers or keepsakes left by others. *This is a problem in some cemeteries. People often complain about missing flowers they had placed on a grave. The wind often blows the flowers off the graves and nobody knows which grave they came from. It is best to attach the name of the grave on the flowers. I know of one case where a woman took flowers from graves and kept them at her home. A person can really get upset to spend a lot of money for flowers, place them on a grave, and then find them missing.*

11. Don't get too close to a funeral in progress. *This is just showing good common sense and respect.*

12. Keep a close eye on young children and keep them from running, shouting, and playing on graves or monuments. *I have a lot to say about this. Read on.*

I was recently reading comments on this topic and noticed that people have different opinions on this. Some think that a cemetery is a good safe place for children to play hide and seek and see no problem with this. Others think it is highly disrespectful and even dangerous.

Some don't realize that many of the very old monuments in old cemeteries can easily topple over. Many of them are very tall. If a child were to pull or push on one of these old markers, it could fall on them. There have been several cases of children being crushed to death by a grave marker falling on them.

Another thing that might happen is a child might pull up one of the metal funeral home markers while playing. If not put back in the exact spot, the grave location could be lost. Some graves are never marked with a headstone and these metal markers are the only thing marking a grave.

Many of the older graves are marked with only a native rock or a piece of petrified wood. A lady told me one time that some of the old folks moved the rocks out of a cemetery because they were in the way of the mowers. A grave marker should not be disturbed no matter how simple it might be. I have come across graves marked with pieces of small diameter well tile, pieces of metal, and even one marked with a white metal chamber pot half buried in the ground...

Some commented that they thought it was good to bring children to visit the cemeteries so they could learn about their family history. I have no problem with that as long as parents keep a close eye on the children and what they are doing. One person made the

comment that she loved the sound of children playing and hoped children played on her grave when she was gone.

There was a time about a hundred years ago or more when families often had picnics in cemeteries. They would bring the whole family, spread a blanket over their loved ones' graves, and enjoy a meal. It was a way of feeling closer to deceased family members. One of the reasons for this practice was that in those days there were few city parks, so the cemeteries were seen as being a safe clean place to bring the family. This practice gradually faded away about 1920. They also had a problem with some people leaving trash in the cemetery from their picnic.

I would like to stress again the danger of allowing children to play around the headstones. They can fall and some weigh hundreds of pounds. These pictures show what can happen.



This is a Woodmen of the World marker in an old cemetery in Nevada County. Many of these markers are made to resemble tree trunks. This one is six feet tall and probably weighs close to 1000 pounds. As you can see, it doesn't have much support. If the cement securing it to the base becomes loose, it could easily fall. Imagine a young child playing around this, pulling on it, or trying to climb it.



This is another Woodmen of the World marker in the same cemetery. They do sometimes fall.

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Comments from readers—

1. Thanks again for an informative newsletter...

This topic and its lessons are important. I totally agree with you regarding anyone, especially children, getting too close to large tombstones. I've seen numerous adults leaning on and/or sitting on old tombstones. They are often more fragile than they appear and extremely difficult to repair, not to mention costly, so they often remain broken considering family may never know of the damage. Super great idea about writing names on flower arrangements in the cemetery. I've seen some expensive arrangements blown all over Memorial Park here in Camden after storms or high winds. Writing the surname of the headstone and purchasers name on the backside of an arrangement is a great idea and could be done at the flower shop with a Sharpie. I once asked my great aunt why so many of her photos were made at cemeteries. She looked a little puzzled at my question, it wasn't strange to her. In rural Arkansas in the early 1900s it was commonplace for the reasons you mentioned. My final thought on this article, I feel sorry for the cemetery caretakers trying to mow around all the obstacles people bring to the cemetery, better to bring your memories with you to visit your ancestors resting place, and perhaps take photos, or limit the items to those that easily rest on the tombstone base such as a coin, toy etc. – Teresa

2. Thanks for this important post. Cemetery etiquette is a topic without much coverage. The upkeep of stones is an ongoing task. I have many family members in the DeAnn Cemetery in Prescott. A trust is in place to contribute to the cost of maintaining the cemetery. Contributions to cemeteries in Blevins are also welcomed. – Irma

REFLECTIONS NO. 22 (April 26, 2021)

By Jerry McKelvy

Confession Time

I hope the statute of limitations has run out for something I did about 63 years ago when I was in high school. In biology class, one of our projects was collecting insects. Insects are classified into something called “orders”. They have names like Lepidoptera which includes butterflies and moths and Coleopteran which are beetles and weevils. There are thousands of species of insects which are classified into 24 orders.

Collecting insects was easy at first. I soon had collected several butterflies, beetles, grasshoppers, and other common insects. Best I remember, we had to display them on a poster board or something similar. We got points for each insect we collected and also got points for each order of insects represented. We had to have a certain number of orders in our collection (six, I think).

As the time approached for the project to end, I noticed that I was lacking one order to have the required number of orders in my collection. Fleas are in the order Siphonaptera, so I thought it would be easy to find a flea for my collection.

I checked our dogs for fleas and could not find any. Then I came up with what I thought was a brilliant idea. We had some large ants on our farm. I caught one and cut off the

ant's stinger which was about the same color and size as a flea, put it on my poster board with a piece of Scotch tape over it, and called it a flea. I was hoping that the Scotch tape would help disguise my "flea" and that my teacher, Mrs. Purtle, wouldn't check it too closely.

My plan worked. Mrs. Purtle had so many insect collections she didn't notice that my flea was really not a flea at all. She accepted my insect collection with my fake flea on it and gave me the points for collecting a representative from that order of insects. I knew it was wrong to do that, but in a weak moment, I succumbed to the temptation to take the easy way out instead of working harder to find an insect that would meet the requirements.

I didn't tell anyone about what I had done. If Mrs. Purtle had discovered what I had done, I'm sure she would have given me a bad grade on my insect collection along with a stern lecture. I know she would have been disappointed in me. If my deception had been discovered, I would not only have been in trouble with Mrs. Purtle. I would have also been in trouble with my parents if they had found out about it.

This incident with the fake flea bothered me for a long time. I think that was my conscience reminding me that I had done something wrong. I regret that I didn't tell Mrs. Purtle about it. I think I would have felt better and would have accepted whatever punishment she thought was appropriate. Every time I see a flea on a dog or cat, I am reminded of this incident. I guess that is part of my punishment.