

# Cleaning the Sons of Jacob Cemetery markers

June/July 2016, by Joan Youngerman



WELCOME TO MY WORLD! and to my workplace. I am Joan Youngerman and I clean tombstones. Cemeteries are the greatest place to work. And Sons of Jacob cemetery is one of these places.

It was a lovely evening, the 1st time I came to work. The Western Kingbirds were there to greet me, flying around the site and returning to sit on the fence wires in the southeast corner. They, the three of them, were excited to have company. Walking toward the east side, another 'greeter' was there but the gopher was too busy gathering grass to pay much attention to me.

Sons of Jacob is a small cemetery, maybe 16 stones. Some old hand chiseled ones, some modern ones, some quite large local field stones, several smaller old marble ones, several newer granite plus two metal markers. On the far west, a large local fieldstone donated by a local farmer is newly engraved to honor unknown graves. A flagpole stands near.

I have come to clean the lichen off the grave markers. Lichen's purpose on the earth is to reduce stone to dust. It is good to remove it from the grave markers to preserve the lettering that had been hand chiseled in the large field rocks so long ago. Think about this. Some one with a heavy heart of losing a loved one finds a suitable field rock and hammers away, chipping off the stone to carve works to last forever. No power tools, no electric help. I work the same today. No power tools or electric help. Everything is done by hand.

Row by row, stone by stone, I spray the tombstone cleaner on each stone; I will be back tomorrow to do the scrubbing and washing. Lichen will be easier to remove tomorrow. The tombstone cleaner needs time to work, at least 10 minutes, but over night or several days to work is what is needed. Lichen growth has been on the stones for years and has 'roots' down into the stone and this product goes to the 'roots' and kills it off. It needs time to work, to do it's job.

Next day. Early morning. We get there to work. George, my husband, has come along to help. It begins to rain. Only thing to do is leave; go to Devils Lake and come back after the rain has moved on. And it did.

We came back. Now everything is fresh and clean. Bird droppings have been washed off. Kingbirds greet us but then leave to do whatever Kingbirds do.

After a few hours we realize there is more work and time needed. There are different kinds of lichen, different colors, the 'black' is the easiest to clean off. Green isn't too bad but the darn orange is harder and the cream colored is the hardest. There is some of each color.

We need to be done for this day and return to finish another day. Pretty wild flowers, yellow and purple, line the prairie trail.

Another day. Now it is July. Western kingbirds greet us, excited we are back. My friend, Dianna, has come to help. Dianna has Jewish relatives, has read and studied Jewish history, including the local Jewish history. Plus she has studied rocks. I learn a lot from her knowledge.

Seeing thru Dianna's eyes and background makes this site even more interesting. First, how hard it is to find, unless you know where to look --the distance off the gravel road, the few visual stones on the hilltop. Maybe it

is the flagpole that catches your eye or the new NDSU weather station stand with its instruments. Standing in the middle of the cemetery, on the top of this small hill, one can see as far as you can see, south, west, north; east has trees off in the distance. WHAT A LOCATION!!!

It's another beautiful day...sun.. a good breeze, no bugs. We work hard. Native stones, those big stones, don't have polished, easy to clean surfaces. We don't quite finish even though we have worked hard, scrubbing those native stones. This is the first time I have had this type tombstone to clean. It has been a learning experience for me. Dianna told me that these large stones are a limestone. The fieldstones, gathered in the center of this gravesite, will be left to nature. Lichen will show their colors. Another bit of nature to see and appreciate. When you look at these uncleaned stones, you will 'see' what we had to clean off the tombstones. Again, we didn't finish; we will be back tomorrow.

Tomorrow is today. Dianna and I are back. Our bird greeters are there to greet us! And as birds do, they have 'sat' on each clean stone...birds always seem to be drawn to the clean stones!!! You know how we know they 'sat' on every stone!! Now to finish the last few stubborn corners on the big rocks take one more 'finish' look at each stone. Work is done.

Off to the southwest we can see the big rainstorms

forecasted in the weather warnings. The storm is here. The storm clouds are circling around us. Weather warnings are on the radio. We leave. The prairie roses, North Dakota's official flower, a beautiful pink color, are blooming along the prairie trail. We go back home. Another workday done, another adventure and learning experience. I have the best work place.



Joan Youngerman