Roadside Memorials in Five South Central Kentucky Counties

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ROADSIDE MEMORIALS IN FIVE SOUTH CENTRAL KENTUCKY COUNTIES

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of Modern Languages
and Intercultural Studies
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
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Roadside memorials in Allen, Barren, Butler, Edmonson, and Warren Counties in south central Kentucky mark the sites of automobile fatalities. These informal memorials are constructed by family or friends of the deceased. Thirty-one memorials are found throughout these five counties.

The majority of these memorials take on one of three forms: crosses, crosses with flowers, and standing styrofoam-based flower arrangements. Crosses, particularly white wooden crosses, are the most common element in these memorials.

Unlike most death-related material culture studies, this research is built heavily upon interviews and conversations with those who construct and maintain the memorials. Much of the analysis of this thesis consists of in-depth explorations of particular roadside memorials and the meanings they have to those who constructed and maintain them. The memorials are explored within the larger context of regional death memorials in general. This larger context
includes personal memorials, cemetery decoration, public memorials, and newspaper memorials.
CHAPTER 1
AUTOMOBILE DEATH IN STATE, LOCAL, AND NATIONAL CONTEXT

Then a few days later the boys from the Highway Department will mark the spot with a little metal square on a metal rod stuck in the black dirt off the shoulder, the metal square painted white and on it in black a skull and crossbones. Later on a love vine will climb up it, out of the weeds.

Robert Penn Warren, All The King's Men

Within a week after automobile deaths in south central Kentucky, flowers or wooden crosses are often placed at the site of the accident by family members or friends. Many of these memorials are not renewed and are either removed or weather away. Others are renewed annually, on holidays, or on the anniversary of the death.

The study area for this thesis is Allen, Barren, Butler, Edmonson, and Warren counties in south central Kentucky (Figure 1).¹ In these five counties, there are currently at least thirty-one memorials, representing the deaths of forty-three people. Nearly all of these memorials are located on U.S. highways or state roads. There are no

¹Approximate county populations are: Allen 14,500; Barren 34,000; Butler 11,250; Edmonson 10,400; Warren 70,000. County seats are: Scottsville (4,250) in Allen; Glasgow (12,350) in Barren; Morgantown (2,300) in Butler; Brownsville (897) in Edmonson; and Bowling Green (40,500) in Warren.
Figure 1. Map showing the counties of Kentucky. Shaded areas are Allen, Barren, Butler, Edmonson, and Warren, numbered one through five, respectively.
memorials on the interstate (I-65); one memorial is located on one of the two parkways.

A roadside memorial is not erected for all automobile deaths in the area. This thesis writer documents those memorials that are currently in existence, maintained, and renewed.

Automobile Death in State and National Context

Throughout the United States, automobile accidents are the leading cause of death for persons between the ages of one and thirty-four (Baker 1992:211). During the 1980s, between forty-four thousand (44,000) and fifty-two thousand (52,000) people in the United States died each year in automobile accidents (1992:212). The death rates vary substantially by race, age, ethnicity, and gender. Native Americans have the highest combined annual death rates—forty-two per 100,000, compared with twenty for whites, seventeen for blacks, and eleven for Asians (1992:220).

Since the mid-1980s, the number of deaths in relation to miles travelled has steadily and slowly declined. While Kentucky's overall automobile-related death rate has declined along with the U.S. rate, Kentucky has had a higher rate than the U.S. rate every year since 1985 (Figure 2).² In Kentucky during 1993, one person out of every 4,228 was

²All Kentucky statistics are taken from the annual editions of the Kentucky Traffic Accident Facts from 1986-1993.
Figure 2. Number of deaths per 100 million miles travelled, Kentucky vs. United States

Figure 3. Kentucky death rates for 1993 by age and sex
killed in a traffic accident; one person in every 2,853 was involved in a traffic fatality; and one person in every sixty-seven was injured in a traffic accident. The number of persons killed in Kentucky by automobile accidents between 1984 and 1994 ranges between 715 and 940 each year.

Perhaps the most significant Kentucky statistic arranges fatalities by age and gender. During 1993, the average year that the memorials in this study were first constructed, every age range except for 0-14 shows a substantially higher rate of death for men than women (Figure 3).

In the five-county study area of this thesis, the number of automobile fatalities was thirty-eight for 1991, thirty-nine for 1992, thirty-seven for 1993, and forty-eight for 1994. None of these five counties the last ten years has had a stable or predictable death rate (Figure 4). Allen County, for example, experienced three deaths each year between 1991 and 1993, but eleven during 1994. According to reports by the Kentucky State Police, no single statistical condition explains this rise.

On the cultural level, the impact of automobile death is significant. In American popular culture, it is nearly impossible to see a television commercial for a new car that does not stress safety features. Those variables in causality that are understood to be most controllable (i.e., alcohol use and lack of seat belt use) are the focus of
national public service advertisements. On a more limited cultural level, local and state campaigns stressing responsible driving are common in this area of Kentucky, as well as other areas throughout the United States. On the community and regional level, particular auto-related deaths or substantial increases in the number of deaths in a county over a period are always important, often front-page, news.

The Presence of Automobile Death in South Central Kentucky

Roadside memorials are not the only reminders to the people of south central Kentucky of highway dangers. Throughout the 1980s, Bowling Green's newspaper, The Park City Daily News, kept a daily count of the number of traffic deaths in the area (Figure 5). This chart was usually placed on the front page, beneath the state-wide news
summary. This chart reflected the statistics of the Kentucky State Police for Allen, Barren, Butler, Edmonson, Hart, Logan, Simpson, and Warren counties. It included the total number of people killed and the number of those persons wearing and not wearing seat belts, as well as number of motorcyclists, bicyclists, and pedestrians killed.

Since 1990, the daily chart has been replaced by a monthly article that compares the past month with previous months and the year-to-date statistics with statistics for the previous year. In addition to the monthly article, an extended article appears during the second week of January listing the total number of fatalities in the area for the previous year, the number in each county, and the number not wearing seat belts. It also compares the statistics of the previous two years.
Newspaper articles about particular traffic accidents and deaths do not have a fixed priority in the Bowling Green newspaper. Some are found on the front page, others consist of a few lines above the obituary section. Often, a minor traffic accident accompanied by a spectacular photograph will appear on the front page, while a fatal accident may only receive a brief mention on the fourth page. When a fatal accident is reported in the Park City Daily News, the following information is almost always given: the county of the accident, the name of the driver, the names of all passengers, the name of the deceased, the place and time of the accident, whether or not seat belts were used, and the medical condition and the hospital of the survivors. If the deceased was pronounced dead at the scene, the attending county coroner's name is also given. Many of these articles also include a final statement listing the number of fatalities for the year in comparison with the same time the previous year.

In smaller communities, such as Scottsville, Brownsville, and Morgantown, articles about traffic deaths are almost always found on the front page of the weekly newspapers. These articles generally include all of the information that the Bowling Green paper includes, but they add the address, occupation, and vehicle-type of the deceased. They also list the various police and ambulance crews that responded. Additional details, such as the
clinical cause of death and the number of feet the vehicle traveled before coming to a complete stop, are also common. Many include either a photograph of the person killed or a photograph of the wrecked automobile.

As in most areas, newspaper obituaries in south central Kentucky are extremely formalized. This information may include the name, place of death, time of death, place of residence, extended listing of close family members, and funeral and burial arrangements. With the exception of those who die in automobile accidents, it is difficult or impossible to tell from the obituary alone how an individual died. Regardless of the south central Kentucky newspaper, the fact that the deceased died in an automobile accident is always given in the obituary. A typical obituary for an automobile death reads:

Kevin J. Simpson, 24, of 1300 Barren River Road died Oct. 24, 1992, of injuries suffered in an automobile accident at Hobson Lane and Barren River Road. / The Bakersfield, Calif., native was an employee of Kelly-Whitmore Construction in Bowling Green. He was a son of Freddie Simpson of Smiths Grove and Nancy Simpson of Anoka, Minn., who survive. / Funeral will be at 10:30 a.m. at Hardy and Son Funeral Home, Smiths Grove chapel, with burial at Hays Cemetery. Visitation begins at 2 p.m. Tuesday at the funeral home. / Other survivors include a step-mother, Shelby Simpson of Smiths Grove; a sister, Kim Hough of Tulsa, Okla; three stepsisters, Jackie Bessett of Smiths Grove, Nancy Brooks of Bowling Green and Sandra Thomas of Hendersonville, Tenn.; paternal grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. W.K. Simpson of Osakis, Minn.; a maternal grandmother, Virginia Creger of Portland, Ore.; and a maternal step-grand-father, Grider Kemble of Smiths Grove. (Daily News Oct. 26, 1992)
Paid obituaries and printed memorials are also common in the weekly newspapers in Allen, Butler, and Edmonson counties. They occasionally appear in the classified section of the Bowling Green and Glasgow papers. Some of these are poems about the dead or to the dead, some are letters written to the dead, others are narratives that describe the impact of the death on the family. While a large portion of newspaper memorials are for people who die in automobile accidents, most do not mention the kind of death. However, the towns and cities in which this practice is most common are small and the cause of death is already known by many of the people in the community. The relationship between printed memorials, roadside memorials, and other forms of memorialization is explored in chapter five.

In addition to printed statements about highway deaths, numerous local, state, and national public service campaigns advertise against drunk driving or speeding via local television. A reporter from WBKO television in Bowling Green recently interviewed a mother whose son was killed by a drunk driver. Carefully selected portions of this very emotionally moving interview were shown during a feature about repeat D.U.I. offenders. Also, a national television advertisement on NBC shows a group of teenagers placing flowers on a tree as a "memorial" for one who drank and drove.
Formal Memorials

While this is focused on informal memorials, it is likely that some institutionalized site-marking practices may have served as models for more informal memorialization practices. As a part of safety programs, highway departments in various states since the 1930s have marked sites of traffic fatalities. According to casual conversations with people from various parts of the country, these formal memorials have included signs, black skulls and bones painted on the shoulder of the highway, and white wooden crosses with inscriptions such as "2 KILLED."

One of the most well known of these formal memorials currently in existence is in north Kentucky on Interstate 71 between Louisville and Cincinnati. Large green signs mark the site of the Carrollton bus crash in which twenty-seven people, mostly children, were killed returning from an amusement park in May of 1988. The trial of the drunk driver who caused this wreck received national attention, as did questions about the safety of school busses and the location of their gas tanks. In the days and months following this accident, a long portion of the fence along the highway was decorated with flowers and wreaths. In order to discourage family members and tourists from stopping on the side of the interstate, the informal memorials were removed and large green signs were posted on
both sides of the interstate. The signs read "SITE OF FATAL BUS CRASH, MAY 14, 1988."

Public and Private Narratives

Images and narratives related to traffic safety are very common. Formal institutions such as the Kentucky State Police account for traffic accidents and deaths statistically. According to the literature by these institutions, nearly all traffic accidents and deaths are the result of "contributing factors." These factors include everything from excessive speed to failure to yield. According to the assumptions of these institutions, the roads and highways are constructed so that accidents will not normally happen if certain rules are followed. When an accident does happen, it is defined and categorized by the appropriate rule or law that was broken. According to these assumptions, nearly all automobile accidents and deaths are preventable. The annual report, titled Traffic Accident Facts, by the Kentucky State Police the last ten years has been dedicated to the people who died as a result of "senseless tragedies on our streets and highways."

"Senseless" in this context means that the accident could have been prevented had a driver followed all the rules established and recommended by the highway-governing institutions.

According to conversations with families and friends of those who died in automobile accidents, they also understand
the accidents as "senseless." What they mean by the use of this word is very different than what the Kentucky State Police mean. For families and friends, a senseless death is one that happens suddenly, unexpectedly, and without an opportunity for closure. It is a senseless death because it violates many of the conditions associated with a "good" death.

While academic approaches to the study of automobile death are few, anthropologists and folklorists have long been interested in the study of social and cultural reactions to death. In most cases, these studies do not struggle with specific instances of death. For the most part, these studies document or explain general reactions to death in a community or culture. Chapter two is a review of relevant death-related literature.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF RELEVANT DEATH-RELATED LITERATURE

Useful scholarship in the study of roadside memorials falls into the following categories: scholarship about roadside memorials; functional approaches to the study of death; cemetery studies; social-critical approaches to the study of death; the death awareness movement; studies of death in contemporary context; and studies of socially complicated forms of death.

Scholarship About Informal Death-Site Memorials

The body of scholarship about roadside memorial practices in various communities throughout North America is slowly growing. Studies have documented this practice in Native American, Mexican-American, Mexican, and Anglo-American communities. A review of this scholarship is useful because it illuminates some of the cross-cultural consistencies and variables in these practices.

One of the more exhaustive studies of this practice focuses on the Tohono O'odham's (Papago) roadside shrines on the Sells Reservation in south central Arizona. This research by David Kozak documents 130 death memorials on a single reservation (an average of one every 2.6 miles).
This practice combines traditional O'odham and Catholic beliefs about death and the supernatural. The O'odham construct two different kinds of roadside shrines. A "grotto" is a structure that marks the site of an automobile fatality. A "chapel" is a roadside structure that is erected to help prevent (symbolically and spiritually) a future death along a certain stretch of road. The distinguishing characteristic of a grotto, or death memorial, is the white cross. Votive candles, flowers, fences, santos, and U.S. flags are common components of these memorials. The practice of erecting death memorials for automobile deaths on the reservation began in 1958 when seven white crosses were placed at the site of an accident that killed seven young community members.

According to Kozak, automobile deaths are considered "bad" deaths by the O'odham. Such deaths create an unnatural spiritual imbalance. The major motivation for constructing the memorial is so that the soul of the deceased may return to the death place instead of the home of the deceased. These memorials serve as a "lure" to prevent the soul from returning to locations where it could "do harm" to the living (Kozak 1991:214).

Ten shrine-chapels are erected along particularly dangerous sections of road. These chapels are dedicated to particular Catholic saints that are understood to have the power to ensure safe travel. These chapels are
ideologically related to the grottos but are clearly not memorials for the dead.

Hugo Nutini's book, *Todos Santos in Rural Tlaxcala*, addresses memorial practices of Tlaxcalans. When someone dies in an automobile accident, members of the deceased's family choose ritual sponsors, *compadres*, to erect a metal or wooden cross at the site of the accident on the October 28th following the accident. Theoretically, these sponsors are obligated to travel to the site regardless of distance. Practically, sponsors do not generally travel more than two hundred miles. On the fourth October 28th following the death, the sponsors return to the scene and remove the cross and bury it at the foot of the grave of the deceased. Mexico's Department of Transportation and Public Works disapproves of the erection of these crosses but has been unable to stop the practice. "The rites of remembrance for people who die on the highway are more elaborate than those for people who die in any other way" (Nutini 1988:124-7).

Estevan Arrellano (1986) has documented the practice of erecting *descansos*, generally consisting of crosses, at the site of an unexpected death in some of the Hispanic communities in New Mexico. Arrellano explains that this practice is old, dating back at least two hundred years. Currently, these memorials are very common on rural roads in New Mexico, but they are also found along interstates and on
some street corners in Santa Fe. Arrellano explains the artistic dimension of these memorials:

Descansos are not only reminders of a journey never completed, they are a work of art and perhaps one of the few authentic noncommercial folk arts of New Mexico's Hispanics. They are created out of love in a time of pain and wonderment. These descansos are sculptures, in a sense of earthworks, for they occupy a unique relation to the land and the environment. Though most are carved, some are assembled out of parts from the wrecked automobile, built out of rocks or poured cement, and others incorporate photographs. (Arrellano 1986:42)

A chapter in James Griffith's book Beliefs and Holy Places discusses the deathways of various communities in Arizona. For Catholic Hispanics in Arizona, roadside memorials serve as a visual reminder to pray for those who died there without the benefit of the last rites, according to Griffith. Most of the memorials found in Hispanic areas of Arizona generally consist of a white wooden cross decorated with artificial flowers. Griffith explains that the erection of death-site memorials in Arizona dates back at least to the 1780s.

Virginia Jenkins delivered a paper at the 1995 meeting of the Cemeteries and Gravemarkers section of the American Culture Association focusing on roadside memorials in Shadyside, Maryland (Jenkins 1995). Jenkins documents a memorial tradition that was started by a single person, Mrs. Bass, whose seventeen-year-old daughter was killed by a drunk driver who was drag racing. Mrs. Bass placed a cross at the site of her daughter's death and began placing
crosses at the sites of following fatal accidents. Of the seventeen memorials in Jenkins's study area, Mrs. Bass is responsible for thirteen of them. All thirteen of Mrs. Bass's crosses are identical and are made of 4" X 4" lumber donated by a lumber company and constructed by a local contractor. Reflectors are nailed to the bases and arms of the crosses. Mrs. Bass requests that family members of the deceased not paint the crosses, although they are free to decorate them with flowers. One of the major functions of these memorials is to serve as a warning against unsafe driving. She reportedly has an "understanding" with the highway department that ensures that highway crews will not remove or disturb the memorials (Jenkins 1995).

These six studies are of communities whose assumptions about life, death, and memorialization are quite different. While memorials on the Sells Reservation may look similar to those found in Hispanic Arizona, their meanings are derived from different cultural and social contexts. Memorials for the O'odham exist partly to help prevent the souls of the deceased from causing injury to the living. In Hispanic-Catholic Arizona, memorials encourage interaction in the form of prayers. Memorials in Maryland documented by Virginia Jenkins function primarily as a warning to the living to drive safely. These memorial traditions involve informal, noncommercial, practices by family, friends, or community members.
The functional school of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century anthropology has produced some of the most influential models in the study of death-related behavior. The focus of this approach is generally on rituals: marked, formal, and structured moments in the death and burial of a society's member. According to functionalism, death disrupts the social unity of a group. Rituals function to "mend the rift" in social structure caused by the member's death. Emile Durkheim argues that individuals are obligated to participate and display appropriate signs of emotion. Durkheim argues that mourning in the context of a funeral ritual is social, not individual:

Mourning is not a natural movement of private feelings wounded by a cruel loss; it is a duty imposed by the group. One weeps, not simply because he is sad, but because he is forced to weep. It is a ritual attitude which he is forced to adopt out of respect for custom, but which is, in large measure, independent of his affective state. (Durkheim 1965:443)

Bronislaw Malinowski, following Durkheim, argues that the death of an individual in a primitive society "breaks the normal course of life and shakes the moral foundations of society" (Malinowski 1954:52). While the function of ritual is to mend an upset social structure, individual emotions play a role in Malinowski's view of death rituals. These rituals resolve the organizing tension between the desire to preserve the body and the desire to remove it completely. Without religion and its accompanying rituals, individuals
would have no means to resolve such chaotic and contradictory impulses.

Perhaps the best summary of the assumptions of the functional school can be found in A. R. Radcliffe-Brown's *The Andaman Islanders* (1964). Radcliffe-Brown writes:

A person occupies a definite position in society, has a certain share in social life, is one of the supports of the network of social relations. His death constitutes a partial destruction of the social cohesion, the normal social life is disorganized, the social equilibrium is disturbed. (Radcliffe-Brown 1964:285)

It is the burial customs of the Andaman Islanders that mend wounded "social sentiments." Radcliffe-Brown, like Malinowski, argues that to neglect to "give relief to wounded social feelings" in the form of rituals is to cause these social sentiments to lose their strength and the society its cohesion.

The impact of these social anthropologists can be seen in Robert Blauner's often cited article "Death and Social Structure" (1976 [1966]). According to Blauner, deaths that occur in smaller social structures are more likely to produce a more concrete social vacuum. Rituals function to minimize the distraction created by this vacuum. The impact of the disruption caused by the death depends upon the relative social and symbolic importance of the person who died. According to Blauner's model, elaborate funerals are modernity's response to the damage in the social network. Other than social and symbolic rank, the two organizing concepts that determine the level of loss felt by the
community are age and a sense of lost potential in the society.

A functional approach to roadside memorials is useful. According to some informants, the memorial process helps to relieve anxiety in the weeks, months, and years following a tragic death. However, the essential problem with most functionally-oriented research is that it tends to focus entirely on ritual at the expense of the much longer grieving and memorial processes. The "imbalance in the social structure" caused by an automobile death is not likely to be rectified because of the rituals that occur in the three days between the death and the burial. Social rituals, such as funerals and burials, are certainly important and functional components of a community's response to the death of a member, but these are not the only components.

**Cemetery Studies**

The great majority of death-related material culture studies focus on cemeteries and tombstones. With few exceptions, these studies by anthropologists and folklorists consider as their study objects cemeteries and markers from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. The first extensive work on American gravestones and gravestone art appeared in 1927 when Harriette Merrifield Forbes published *Gravestones of Early New England and the Men Who Made Them, 1653-1800*. Consisting of nearly two hundred photographs,
this study established a model that is followed by nearly all scholarship on cemeteries and gravemarkers. Forbes accounts for the textual and symbolic elements of the markers by placing them in their historic cultural context. She writes:

The gravestones of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries carried a message to the passer-by both by the epitaphs and even more by designs. We of the twentieth century can understand this message if we close our eyes to the present and see them with the eyes of the past. (Forbes 1927:113)

Her book directly addresses the use of symbols and what these symbols meant in their respective eras. Forbes's focus on both the objects and their creators provides an early model that was greatly expanded in the 1970s and 1980s.


In 1967, James Deetz and Edwin S. Dethlefsen published an article titled "Death's Head, Cherub, Urn and Willow" in the journal American Antiquity. This essay correlates the changes of symbols on the tombstones with larger social changes. In his subsequent book, In Small Things Forgotten
(1977), Deetz explains that New England stone carvers employed three different designs between 1680 and 1820. Deetz, borrowing the concept of seriation from archeologist James Ford, argues that each carving style gained in popularity until the emergence of another style, with each style having a single peak of popularity. Further, each of these three styles corresponds directly to social transitions related to the movement from orthodox Puritanism through the Great Awakening.

The model, correlating textual and symbolic elements with social-historical movements, is still the organizing model for most contemporary cemetery studies. In one of the few essays on contemporary tombstones, "Motorcycles, Guitars, and Bucking Broncs: Twentieth-Century Gravestones in Southeastern Idaho," Carol Edison says:

Certainly gravestones, through their multiple role of marking the burial site, symbolizing life's final rite of passage, and memorializing an individual's life in a manner that is both acceptable and understandable by the community as a whole, should provide a history of community values and attitudes that is both rich and accurate. By charting the evolution of southeastern Idaho gravestones and their symbols, much can be learned about the cultures of the region, contributing to a more complete definition of Idaho's folklife. (Edison 1990:1984)

While her focus is on contemporary gravestones instead of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ones, Edison's primary assumption is that a shift in gravestone symbolism reflects a shift in cultural values.
The very title of Richard Meyer's edited book *Cemeteries and Gravemarkers: Voices of American Culture* (1989) indicates that cemeteries reflect culture and cultural change. Throughout cemetery studies, tombstones are understood to be coded using language and symbols. It is the goal of the student of material culture to "unlock" this code and read the information the object has to offer about the past. In his introduction, Meyer says:

> It is, then, the voices of culture we are hearing when we pause to consider the objects produced by members of that culture. Whether whispering or shouting, plain-dealing or knotted in intentional ambiguity, they are there to be heard and read in material things... To heed them, to grapple with their messages, and, ultimately, to unlock their meanings is at once the goal of material culture studies. (Meyer 1989:1)

In a more recent work, *Ethnicity and the American Cemetery* (1993), Richard Meyer again explains the coded nature of cemeteries: "they are, in effect, open cultural texts, there to be read and appreciated by anyone who takes the time to learn a bit of their special language" (Meyer 1993:3).

What is most useful in gravestone research is its symbolic orientation. Many cemetery studies argue that particular symbols appropriately represent a culture's understanding of what it means to die in a given cultural context. Likewise, roadside memorials are symbolically charged objects. They represent not only the fact of a death but also the location of one. Roadside memorials are ambiguous only to those who are unfamiliar with the symbolic conventions of a region or community.
While cemetery and gravestone studies provide some useful models to the study of roadside memorials, three fundamental differences exist between tombstones and roadside memorials. First, burial markers are generally understood to be permanent, whereas roadside memorials are not. According to studies of memorials from Mexico to Maryland, roadside memorials have a short life span and require regular maintenance and renewal. It is practically impossible to reduce Deetz's understanding of design change for gravestones to the short life span of roadside memorials. Cemetery studies are grounded in the static and situated artifact.

Second, memorials are decidedly public. They mark a public death, not a private one. They mark the site of an accident that created a substantial "ripple" in social life: including stopped cars, emergency vehicles, and many onlookers. They are placed in public view, so that each memorial is a part of the daily roadside landscape of hundreds of people. These markers demand some level of interaction and negotiation, if only on the most passive level. Most cemeteries are intentionally sectioned off from daily life. For the most part, cemeteries are places that the living go to and interact with intentionally.

Finally, the function of roadside memorials is to mark the site of an accident. In many cases these sites are understood to be the sacred places where the soul of the
individual left the body. Cemeteries, although sacred places, are generally ambiguous about the kind of death of any particular individual. Cemeteries receive their sacred status from their physical and symbolic associations with the body of the deceased. Roadside memorials are sacred because of their physical and symbolic associations with the place of death.

The largest problem with cemetery and gravestone studies, including those that focus on contemporary gravestones, is that they fail to account for the fact that cemeteries are often a social and interactive context for the living with the dead. As Linda Dégh writes:

No study deals with life after death, the remembering of the dead within a solid bond that keeps cemeteries alive and their inhabitants alive as long as family members who knew them survive. (Dégh 1994:155)

While there are excellent studies that focus on twentieth-century cemetery decoration (Gundaker 1994; Gosnell and Gott 1992; Montell 1989; West 1985), these studies primarily document the practices of a region or area instead of account for them. The purpose of these studies is not, in any concrete sense, to document what cemetery decoration means to those who participate in it.

Social-Critical Approaches to the Study of Death

Social-critical approaches to death, built partly on functional grounds, argue that modernity has affected the deathways of Westerners in negative ways. It receives its
strength from the insistence that contemporary rituals and practices are not functional and deviate from the more healthy traditional ones. Jessica Mitford's 1963 book *The American Way of Death* came at the beginning of the "death awareness movement" and focuses on funeral-providing companies and their rituals. She argues that these companies have created their market by exploiting vulnerable clients. Receiving as much popular attention as academic on publication, this book is an all-out attack of the American funeral industry. The source of Mitford's anger toward funeral homes and the funeral industry is their masquerade of death: "Nature-Glow--the ultimate in cosmetic embalming" or a casket of "18 gauge lead coated steel, seamless top, lap-jointed welded body construction" (Mitford 1963:16).

While Mitford does not call for the complete return of eighteenth- or nineteenth-century burial practices, she certainly calls for the popular reconsideration of what it means to die and who should be responsible for death-related rituals.

Geoffrey Gorer's article "The Pornography of Death" (1965) provides a set of useful metaphors for social-critical approaches to death. According to Gorer, death has replaced sex as the major social taboo in American culture. Death has become more and more socially "unmentionable." "Traditionally," argues Gorer, "children were encouraged to think about death, their own deaths and the edifying or
cautionary deathbeds of others" (Gorer 1984:28). Gorer's larger argument is found in his conclusion:

Nevertheless, people have to come to terms with the basic facts of birth, copulation, and death, and somehow accept their implications; if social prudery prevents this being done in an open and dignified fashion, then it will be done surreptitiously. If we dislike the modern pornography of death, then we must give back to death--natural death--its parade and publicity, readmit grief and mourning. (1984:30)

Perhaps the most forceful and controversial voice questioning the value and function of the contemporary Western view of death is that of Philippe Ariès. In his extensive studies of death and its images the last thousand years (1981; 1985), his purpose has been to explain the objects or rituals in historical and cultural context.

According to Ariès, a dramatic revolution in attitudes toward death occurred in America in the 1920s and 1930s. This change of attitude quickly spread from America to England and industrialized Europe, "leaving oil smudges wherever the wave passes" (Ariès 1974:86). At the core of this change is that "death, so omnipresent in the past that it was familiar, would be effaced, would disappear. It would become shameful and forbidden" (1974:85).

The first of the signs that a change had taken place is the desire to spare the sick person the news of his or her impending death. Until this point, the experience of death that comes partly from the full knowledge of its imminent arrival was valued by the dying person. According to Ariès, for the sick person to publicly accept, to admit, the
knowledge of his or her impending death would mean that he or she would be treated as a dying person and be obliged to behave like one (Ariès 1975:562).

Another change, occurring rapidly between the 1930s and 1950s, is the displacement of the site of death from the home to the hospital. This change transformed the hospital from "shelters for the poor" to places where people go to die. It has become, argues Ariès, inconvenient to die at home.

In his discussions about changes in funeral rites, Ariès cites the shift in responsibility from the family and the church to the funeral industry. Instead of indicting the funeral industry as Mitford does, Ariès accounts for it. He argues that the contemporary funeral industry offers a means to both dispose and preserve the dead body. Additionally, funeral industries offer ritual and solemnity that might not be available otherwise.

Perhaps Ariès's most consistent criticism is that modernity does not allow appropriate outlets for mourning. Citing the extravagant grave-side "swoons" and chest-beatings in the literature of the Middle Ages, he argues that funeral rituals are no longer appropriate places for the emotional releases associated with grief. All of these changes, argues Ariès, have contributed to the emergence of death as a taboo. Echoing Gorer's argument of the pornography of death, "it is no longer the children who are
born among cabbages, but the dead who disappear among the flowers" (Ariès 1975:151).

Social-critical approaches are particularly useful. On the most fundamental level, the fieldwork and interviews that constitute much of this thesis are a regional test of the assumptions of social criticism. Is death, particular death from a particular cause, really a conversational taboo in south central Kentucky?

The Death-Awareness Movement

Bibliographies of death and death-related issues (Fulton 1976; Corr 1982; Simpson 1987; Southard 1991) reveal an exponential growth in studies beginning in the mid-1960s. Much of this growth can be attributed to works by psychologists or counsellors. Many of those who argue against Ariès's claim that death has become culturally unmentionable cite this extraordinary growth in academic and popular literature.

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's classic work, On Death and Dying (1969), proposes five emotional and cognitive stages in the process of dying from terminal illness. Denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance are the chronological stages that Kübler-Ross identifies between the time of diagnosis and death. A similar model (Parkes 1972) identifies numbness, pining, depression, and recovery as relevant stages in bereavement.
More recently, some studies argue that the stages developed by Kübler-Ross do not reflect universal processes. Dying is, after all, a social as well as a biological process. Kathy Charmaz (1980) argues that the patterns observed by Kübler-Ross are more likely part of the process of adaptation to the social context of hospital death. Death in a different context, such as the home, might produce an entirely different set of stages.

**Studies in Contemporary Context**

As Ariès and other social critics have pointed out, the family death bed is no longer the context of death. For many, death now occurs in hospitals. Some scholars have documented what it means to die in a hospital context. In these studies, the hospital is understood to be a social context. Perhaps the most influential work in this area is David Sudnow's *Passing On* (1967). He studies the organization of death in two hospitals. Social attitudes fostered in the hospital shape the kind of treatment a patient is likely to receive. Focusing on the different treatment given to different kinds of dying people, Sudnow argues that social values of the hospital context play an extremely important role in life and death decisions made by the staff. These same social values also determine, on every level, what it means to be dead or alive.

Particularly interesting is Sudnow's treatment of DOA (dead on arrival) cases:
Two persons in "similar" physical condition may be differentially designated as dead or not. For example, a young child was brought to the ER with no registering heartbeat, respirations or pulse and was, through a rather dramatic stimulation procedure involving the coordinated work of a large team of doctors and nurses, revived for a period of eleven hours. On the same evening, shortly after the child’s arrival, an elderly person who presented the same physical signs... "arrived" in the ER and was almost immediately pronounced dead, with no attempts at stimulation. (Sudnow 1967:97)

Sudnow’s discussion is useful because it reveals the variable nature of what it means to be dead in a given social context.

Similarly, Awareness of Dying (1965), by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, focuses on negotiations made between staff, patients, and family in the context of the hospital. The staff often view death as an inconvenience, something that is likely to cause disruptive emotions from family members. When someone dies suddenly, the staff often tells the family that the patient has "taken a turn for the worse" well before revealing the fact of death. This practice is done to pace the family’s emotions and not create an emotionally charged scene in the hospital.

The fundamental concepts of these two studies, particularly Sudnow’s, are that primary and organizing categories, such as "alive" and "dead," receive their meanings socially and contextually.
Death in Public Space

Some studies take as their initial assumption that certain kinds of death are more socially complicated than others. Perhaps no other cause of death in America today reveals the public implications of dying as does AIDS. Illnesses that are automatically associated with death in the popular mind are particularly complicated on the social level (see Sontag 1977). Unfortunately, AIDS currently exists in a popular context that sees AIDS-related deaths as morally and symbolically different from others, inferior or deserved. Very important to this discussion is that certain kinds of AIDS-related deaths are understood in the popular imagination as more socially redeemable than other AIDS-related deaths. There is a growing body of scholarship about the social implications of this kind of death (Sontag 1988; Small 1993; and Fulton and Owen 1994). Fewer studies document practices or rituals in response to socially complicated deaths (see Brady 1987).

Studies and models that focus on publicly charged forms of death are useful to the study of roadside memorials. While most automobile deaths in the region are understood to be "bad" kinds of deaths, some are much worse than others. There are severe formal and informal biases against certain kinds of automobile deaths. Automobile deaths that are brought about by contributing factors such as alcohol, excessive speed, or unusually irresponsible driving shape
the kind of social death experienced, as well as the range and texture of memorial possibilities. For example, none of the thirty-one memorials in the study area is for a driver who was known to have been intoxicated.

Balancing the Particular and the General

The various "schools" discussed above share many fundamental assumptions and characteristics. Those studies that understand death as a social event focus almost exclusively on social rituals associated with death and burial. Renato Rosaldo provides a useful critique of this orientation:

Most analysts who equate death with funerary ritual assume that rituals store encapsulated wisdom as if it were a microcosm of its encompassing cultural macrocosm. (Rosaldo 1989:15)

Likewise, Rosaldo argues the fact that particular deaths in most cultures are reacted to emotionally. Anthropological studies, however, "stand at a peculiar distance from the obviously intense emotions expressed, and they turn what for the bereaved are unique and devastating losses into routine happenings" (1989:57).

The central challenge, as indicated by Rosaldo, is balancing what is true of death-related practices generally with what is true in particular cases. While funeral rituals may indeed help restore the overall structure of a community, this function is generally not understood or articulated by the participants of specific rituals. Given
the range of practices in the region, what is true of these memorials generally is not necessarily true for any one of them particularly. In chapter three the focus is on memorials in general throughout the study area. Chapter four represents an exploration of five particular memorials in the region. In chapter five this researcher places three specific memorials into the more general context of regional memorialization.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND PHYSICAL DOCUMENTATION

When I heard the crash on the highway
I knew what it was from the start
I went to the scene of the destruction
A picture was stamped in my heart

Dorsey Dixon, "Wreck on the Highway"

The fieldwork for this thesis began in the first week
of January 1995 and ended in the middle of June 1995. The
first two and a half months were devoted almost exclusively
to finding roadside memorials and reviewing appropriate
literature. The stages of the fieldwork were as follows:

1. Find the memorials and document them physically
2. Find a date for the memorial
3. Find related newspaper articles and obituary
4. Contact family and find out who made the memorial
5. Contact person who made memorial
6. Interview person who made memorial
7. Document changes in memorial over time

Unfortunately, only a few of the memorials were processed
through all seven steps. On the whole, the memorials were
easy to find. In addition to driving all of the major
roads, I stopped at the Sheriffs' offices in all five
counties, at a number of city police stations, at rural
stores, and contacted a few coroners. The stops at the
Sheriffs' offices were the most helpful in finding new
memorials. Also, they were able to supply dates for a few of them.

By far the most time-consuming part was moving from stage one to stage two. Since only one of the memorials has the date of death on it, there are many memorials that took months to date. The record-keeping body for traffic-related accidents and fatalities in Kentucky is the Kentucky State Police. However, restrictions in their software combined with the fact that their computerized records go back only a few years prevented this resource from being of any significant use.

Of the dozens of people I talked to who live near these memorials, no one could date them for me with any useful degree of accuracy. In fact, most were unsure of the year. Some of the most exact answers I got were that the accident happened "during the winter, because I was wearing a suit" or "it happened during hunting season because I remember being in the deer stand hearing the sirens go by." On the other hand, some memorials are at places where more than one fatal accident happened. Those who live near the memorials were useful in confirming that a certain memorial relates to a certain accident.

Most of the memorials were dated by reviewing the Bowling Green daily newspaper on microfilm for the last
several years. In addition, reviewing the weekly newspapers for Allen, Butler, and Edmonson counties proved useful.

Physical Documentation

Roadside memorials mark a single space on the roadside landscape that is very special, almost sacred, to the family and friends of the deceased. Most of the memorials consist of a single object placed at the site. Other memorials include flowers and crosses spread over a large area, enclosing an entire portion of the roadside landscape.

There are currently twelve memorials in Warren County, six in Allen County, five in Butler County, four in Edmonson County, and four in Barren County (see appendix 1 for a map of their general distribution).

According to the existing literature on roadside memorials, the most common cross-cultural feature is the cross. The great majority (twenty-seven, or 87%) of the thirty-one memorials in the study area include at least one cross. About half (sixteen, or 52%) contain at least one white wooden cross. Three unpainted wooden, two white metal, two styrofoam, one blue wooden, one black wooden, and

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3Bowling Green's paper is on microfilm in the university libraries at Western Kentucky University. Weekly newspapers for Allen, Butler, and Edmonson Counties are at the respective public libraries. The Barren County Library does not have newspapers.
one twig cross also exist. Of the twenty-three wooden crosses, eleven include flowers.'

Most of the memorials are made by the immediate family members of the deceased, while others are made by friends. Several of the memorials in the study area were made by florists and put at the death-site by family members.

The majority of the memorials were first constructed within a week of the accident. Some were erected within a few hours of the accident. Extremely often, a standing styrofoam-based flower arrangement will be placed at the site of a recent accident, only to be replaced a few weeks or months later by a cross. Approximately half of the thirty-one memorials were renewed during the six-month study period, with more recent memorials being renewed more often than older ones. The two oldest memorials, according to those who live near them, have not been renewed since they were first put up in the mid-1980s.

The majority of the memorials are placed as near as possible to the "exact" place of death. In many cases, it is the location of the deceased when the car came to a complete stop. When a fatal accident involves a collision with a single stationary object, such as a tree or electric pole, the memorial is almost always attached to this object. Memorials for deaths that involve the collision of two

"Flowers" means artificial flowers, except where indicated.
vehicles in the middle of a roadway are generally placed parallel to the accident site on the right side of road according to the direction the deceased was travelling.

I have been told of several instances in which the roadside landscape at or near a memorial has changed drastically due to road-widening or other road construction. These memorials are not renewed. In one instance, the tree to which a memorial was attached was cut down by the highway department. Since the tree was understood to be a key factor in the wreck and death of the individual, the memorial was not renewed. In general, substantial modifications of the roadside landscape cause a quick end to roadside memorial practices.

The majority of the thirty-one memorials fall into three basic categories: crosses with no artificial flowers (Figures 6 and 7), crosses with flowers attached (Figures 8 and 9), and standing styrofoam crosses or flower arrangements (Figures 10 and 11). The number of memorials in each category are fifteen (48%), nine (29%), and five (16%), respectively. Two memorials consist of ribbons only.

According to persons who live near the memorials, those crosses without flowers never did have attached flowers. For those that do have flowers, the flowers are always replaced when the memorial is renewed. It is very common, however, for a standing styrofoam arrangement to be replaced by a wooden cross several weeks or months after the
Figure 6. Unpainted cross with no flowers, Warren County (M30)

Figure 7. White cross with no flowers, Warren County (M18)
Figure 8. Cross with flowers and balloon, Barren County (M26)

Figure 9. White cross decorated with many flowers, Barren County (M6)
Figure 10. Standing styrofoam cross arrangement, Butler County (M15)

Figure 11. Standing styrofoam cross with fresh roses, Warren County (M20)
accident.

All three kinds of roadside memorials are also found as a common part of cemetery decoration in the region. On Memorial Day, 1995, I was in Crescent Hill Cemetery in Scottsville and watched a man pound no fewer than ten wooden crosses into the ground at the base of various tombstones. These crosses very closely resemble some of the crosses that are found as part of a roadside memorial. White wooden crosses with flowers are also common in some cemeteries (see Figure 12). Likewise, standing styrofoam arrangements are a standard part of a the regional "spray" found at graves during and immediately after the funeral. In contacting eight Bowling Green florists, I found that all eight regularly make styrofoam flower cross arrangements. None, however, has on hand the materials to make a wooden cross. Most of them referred me to the Old America Store to get the necessary supplies, if I wanted to make one.5

Accident Characteristics

Of the forty-three deaths that have a related roadside memorial, I have incomplete information on ten of them. For the remaining thirty-three, twenty-five (76%) were pronounced dead at the scene by the respective county coroner or deputy coroner. The remaining eight (24%) either

5The Old America Store is a national chain of arts and craft stores. The store in Bowling Green has an exceptional collection of artificial flowers.
Figure 12. Cemetery crosses in a cemetery near Plano, in Warren County
died in route to the hospital, during surgery, or while in critical condition at the hospital. The memorials for people who were not pronounced dead at the scene follow the same physical and symbolic conventions as memorials for people who were pronounced dead at the scene.

The great majority of the memorials are for men. Eight of the thirty-one memorials are for women. Nine women and thirty-four men died in accidents that have an associated roadside memorial in the study area. Although men have a substantially higher regional death rate than women for automobile deaths, the number of fatalities for men is unproportionately higher than for women.

The age range of fatalities is very broad. The youngest fatality was a seven-year-old boy. The oldest fatality was a seventy-eight-year-old woman. The great majority of the memorials are for young people. The average age is just under twenty-eight years.

For the thirty-one accidents, the Kentucky State Police list alcohol as a contributing factor in at least two of them. In both cases, the passenger of an intoxicated driver was killed. Excessive speed was a factor in at least four of the accidents. A driver falling asleep was a factor in three of the accidents. Failure to yield at an intersection

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6 The small number of memorials in the study area may account for this difference. A single accident, such as the one in Brownsville that killed five men and one woman, is statistically significant in such a small sample.
was the cause of three of the accidents. One of the drivers claimed that sunlight caused him not to see an oncoming car; another driver died when he lost control of his car after it hit a large dog.

Nine of the accidents involved multiple vehicles. The remaining twenty-two of the accidents involved the collision of a single vehicle with a stationary object on the roadside landscape such as a tree, telephone pole, or ditch.

While the great majority of those killed were not wearing seat belts, at least four of the forty-three people who died in these accidents were. Family members and friends of people who died while wearing a seat belt are especially critical about the public narratives promoting seat belt use. "Seat belts don't save lives" one informant told me.

Conclusion

While the above sections address the memorials in general, an exploration of particular memorials is useful. Many memorials look very similar, but each memorial marks a unique death and is created out of the unique feelings of family and friends. Most of the people that I talked to readily acknowledge that the memorials they built draw from other memorials that they have seen. Everyone I have talked to, however, explains that the meanings of the memorial are very specific to their particular loss. While it is possible that many people in south central Kentucky who feel
the need to construct a roadside memorial do so out of regionally-shaped attitudes toward life and death, this understanding is not articulated by the informants. They see their loss as unique and their forms of memorialization as unlike any other. The following chapters explore particular roadside memorials and the meanings they have to those who construct and maintain them.
CHAPTER 4
FIVE ROADSIDE MEMORIALS

This chapter is focused on five particular memorials located throughout the study area. These five memorials are remarkably similar and different. In many ways, they span much of the spectrum of roadside memorial practices in the region. From single white crosses with flowers to an entire "memorial area" decorated with crosses and flowers, these memorials are visually and symbolically distinct.

The treatments of the five memorials below share a common structure. From interviews, I attempted to answer the following questions for each memorial:

1. When was the memorial first constructed?
2. Who constructed it?
3. How was it made?
4. How often is it renewed?
5. How is it renewed?
6. How is the memorial and site understood by its maker(s)?

While more questions were asked, depending upon the interview context, the six above questions represent my minimal set of data requirements for each of these interviews.


A memorial area approximately ten feet long is located near the Roundhill community on Ky. 185 in Barren County
directly north of Bowling Green. The memorial is for Willie Rigdon, 53, who was involved in a single vehicle accident there on April 13, 1991. He and his nephew were returning to Roundhill from Bowling Green at the time of the accident. Willie was transported by ambulance to a Bowling Green hospital where he died several hours later. The formal cause of the accident is unknown, but his family speculates that he must have fallen asleep behind the wheel.

Much of his immediate family moved from northern Edmonson County to the Roundhill community about thirty years ago. Roundhill is a very small community. Impressions from conversations with community members and his family indicate that he was very well-known throughout the community.

The memorial currently consists primarily of two flower-covered cross arrangements on two separate trees (Figure 13). The crosses are not painted. The memorial was constructed by Rigdon's sister, June Durbin, and June's daughter, Laura Johnson. The memorial is substantially renewed several times a year: on June's birthday (April 13, also the day of the accident), Willie's birthday (May 31), Easter, Halloween, and Christmas. The first substantial memorial was put up on Willie's birthday about a month and a

7The use of first names is intentionally maintained throughout the case studies for several reasons. Many of the interviews are with family members who have the same last name. The personal nature of much of the data makes the formal use of last names awkward.
Figure 13. Roadside memorial for Willie Rigdon, early April 1995

Figure 14. Roadside memorial for Willie Rigdon, late April 1995
half after his death.

Although Willie formally died over three hours after the accident, June believes that her brother "was dead" before they put him in the ambulance. He died medically early in the morning of June 14, 1993, but the family considers June 13 the day of his death. Although the death was obviously unexpected, June explains that she experienced a certain sense of closure. He called her on the telephone just a few hours before the accident to wish her a happy birthday and to tell her that he loved her. That was the last conversation they had.

The car travelled a considerable distance through the woods before finally coming to a stop. June and Laura explain that the memorial does not mark the exact spot where he died. They describe the memorial as a "decoration of the woods" in which he died. In the four years since Willie's death, this decoration has included many components. In addition to flowers, crosses, and pumpkins, June tells me that they placed battery-powered Christmas lights on the trees on the first Christmas Eve following the accident. When I talked to the family on the fourth anniversary of the accident, they spoke about placing a large pink bunny at the site for Easter. Instead, they hung a dozen colored plastic Easter eggs from the trees with fishing line and added a

"Again, what it means to be dead is always a social construct and depends upon the assumptions and goals of the particular interpretive communities."
yellow flower arrangement (Figure 14). They explain that Willie really loved Easter, and they decorate more on those holidays that he liked the most.

June says, "You feel like you're doing something for him, I guess." June and Laura disagree about whether or not Willie can see and appreciate the memorial. June thinks Willie cannot see the site decoration, while Laura thinks he can.

Most of the supplies for the current memorial were purchased from florists and retail stores in Brownsville and other neighboring towns. Laura is usually responsible for acquiring materials. Both June and Laura have noticed that someone else places flowers and additional objects at the site. They suspect Laura's brother, James Durbin, who was a passenger in Willie's car at the time of the accident, is responsible.

In addition to renewing the roadside memorial, the family renews the decorations at Willie's grave. He is buried a substantial distance away at Union Light Missionary Baptist Church in northern Edmonson County. They are not able to visit it as often as the roadside memorial. June and Laura explain that they compensate for the lack of grave decoration by doing extra roadside decoration. The site of the accident is about three miles from where June and Laura live.
Teresa Gale Bryant (1963-1989)

The roadside memorial for Teresa Bryant, 26, is located on U.S. 231 five miles northeast of Scottsville (Figures 15 and 16). This section of U.S. 231 is a narrow, heavily traveled road between Bowling Green and Scottsville. Teresa moved from Fountain Run in Monroe County (east border of Allen County) to Bowling Green just weeks before the accident. At 7:30 a.m. on December 1, 1989, while traveling from Fountain Run to Bowling Green, a dump truck turned in front of her car. The driver of the dump truck was temporary blinded by the sun and did not see Teresa's oncoming car. She died at the scene. The memorial was placed there by her brother, Terry Bryant. Terry explains that he put the first memorial there about one week after the accident. The memorial has been completely replaced several times. All of these memorials (crosses and flowers) were made by a florist in Monroe County and placed at the exact site of her death by Terry. The memorial is replaced about once a year, or as it needs renewal.

Daniel Johnson (1931-1991)

Daniel "Billy" Johnson, 60, died on U.S. 231 between Bowling Green and Scottsville at 7:30 a.m. on January 24, 1991. His pickup was hit head-on by the car of a local twenty-year-old man who fell asleep at the wheel. He died at the scene. Hours after the accident, his brother put a small white wooden cross and flowers where Daniel's truck
Figure 15. Roadside memorial for Teresa Bryant as might be observed from a passing automobile, Allen County (MI)

Figure 16. Closer view of memorial for Teresa Bryant
came to a stop. Following this first memorial act, Daniel's wife and daughter, Wilma Johnson and Vicki Fleming, have been responsible for renewing the memorial. The first cross was "too small," so they had a larger one made by a friend of the family. This friend is not a carpenter, but is a senior citizen who is "good with tools."

Wilma and Vicki get the flowers from an assortment of places including WalMart, florists, and grocery stores. The memorial is not renewed on holidays, nor is it renewed on the anniversary of the accident. It is renewed approximately six times a year as the family notices that it needs it (Figures 17 and 18).

The area around the memorial is frequently cared for by people other than family members. The family that lives nearest to the memorial was among the first at the scene the morning of the accident. This family occasionally mows around the memorial to prevent highway crews from accidentally mowing it down. They also recently mulched the area just around the cross to keep the grass away from it.


Scott Moore, 24, was traveling north on U.S. 231 in Butler County five miles south of Morgantown when his vehicle crossed the left lane and struck a tree. The accident occurred at 3:30 a.m. on January 21, 1995. He was pronounced dead at the scene at 5:00 a.m. A passenger in his truck was seriously injured.
Figure 17. Roadside memorial for Daniel Johnson, January 1995, Warren County (M3)

Figure 18. Roadside memorial for Daniel Johnson, April 1995
Figure 19. Roadside memorial for Scott Moore, left view

Figure 20. Roadside memorial for Scott Moore, right view
Two days after the accident, Scott's good friend, Lance Chapman, built a wooden cross and placed it on the tree (Figures 19 and 20). This cross is painted light blue. The cross reads "BEST ALL-AROUND FRIEND, L.C." Lance works for a contractor and was building a house in Bowling Green at the time the accident occurred. He explains that he used some spare supplies from his job to construct and paint the cross. Lance also placed a blue and white styrofoam cross and a white bow at the site.

The memorial has not been renewed since the accident. Lance explains, however, that he has travelled by the site several times in order to make sure that the memorial is still there.

This memorial is the only one in the study area that includes the name or initials of the maker. This personal inscription is done so that the Moore family will know that Lance is responsible for the memorial.

**Bradley Thomas Shaw (1973-1992)**

Bradley Shaw, 18, was in critical condition at The Medical Center in Bowling Green for seven days following his single vehicle, single occupant, accident on June 12, 1992. The memorial is located on a tree in the inside of a curve on Ky. 1320 (Girkin-Boiling Springs Rd). Bradley's injuries were from his automobile's collision with the tree. His family--consisting of his mother, father, and sister--lives on the same road about one mile north of the accident site.
Figure 21. Roadside memorial for Bradley Shaw, freshly renewed, Warren County (M25)

Figure 22. Detail of larger cross in roadside memorial before the memorial was renewed. Name and birth date were not restored
According to Carol Shaw, his mother, a beautiful flower arrangement was put up immediately after his funeral by his high school friends. Within days, however, the arrangement was stolen. In reaction to this, his family (including his mother, father, and sister) nailed two crosses to opposite sides of the tree and decorated these crosses with flowers. Carol tells me that these crosses were made partly from materials in the garage and partly from purchased lumber.

The memorial is renewed at least once a year, usually on Memorial Day. Renewal consists of repainting the crosses, removing old artificial flowers, and placing new flowers on the crosses (Figures 21 and 22). The crosses are not removed from the tree during repainting. Carol is primarily responsible for acquiring renewal materials. Some supplies are purchased from Houchens (a regional grocery store chain), Dude's Market (a fruit and garden store), and WalMart.

Although Bradley did not die at the site, Carol referred to the memorial site several times as the place where he died. In addition to the roadside memorial, Carol explains that each Easter she plants a lily on his grave. Likewise, a flower garden off their driveway was planted in memory of Bradley. At the center of the garden is the temporary grave marker initially placed at the grave site by the funeral company.
Conclusion

All five of these cases are significantly different. Some families and friends renew the memorials as they weather, others have fixed days on the calendar for visiting and renovating the memorials. The memorial for Willie Rigdon is primarily calendrical and many of the components, including the Christmas tree and Easter eggs, involve some level of play. In his family, Willie and the memorials for him are talked about often. This is not the case for Teresa Bryant's family. Teresa's brother, Terry, commissioned a florist to make the memorial and he placed it at the accident site. Neither Terry's father, mother, nor any of their other children knew that he was the one who put it there. Although all of his family knew that the memorial was there and that it was put there by one of the close family members, they had not discussed the memorial at all prior to my contacting them.

In some cases, such as for Willie Rigdon and Bradley Shaw, the entire process of constructing, traveling to the site, and renewing the memorial is a group practice. Bradley's entire immediate family was present when the memorial was first put up and is present when it is renewed.

Despite all of the differences between the memorials, they share certain fundamental characteristics. All of the memorials involve someone, a family member or friend, intentionally acquiring or constructing a memorial,
travelling to the site of a fatality, and placing the memorial at an "appropriate" spot. All of the markers are clearly and immediately recognized by family members and friends, as well as local community members, as a memorial—something that is done in memory of a person who has died. For the most part, the memorials are not understood by their makers as cautions to the living to drive safely. Nearly all of the memorials take on one of three physical forms that are characteristic of roadside memorials in the region.
CHAPTER 5

THE FORMS OF MEMORIALS

It's been a long time since I've written a letter at Christmastime, the last one I wrote was to Santa Claus as a child. It's time for another Christmas letter--this time for someone that I should have written to a long time ago. I know it's a little late--well, a lot late--but, here it is, just the same. Merry Christmas, Momma.

Newspaper Memorial

On November 3, 1993, our father, brother, and pawpaw were killed without any warning and for no reason. When that happened to them we felt like our world had ended. It happened so fast that we could not be there to help them or to even say our last good-byes or to tell them how much we loved them both. They meant the world to us all. Both of them were so special to us that we still can't let them go. They are always on our minds. We love and miss them so much. The tragic way they were taken from us makes it so hard for us to give them up to God.

Newspaper Memorial

After several conversations and interviews, I realized that the people for whom the roadside memorials have personal meaning do not see them as clearly separable from the other forms of memorialization. Roadside memorials are just one form within a much larger memorial context in the region. I sensed that some interviewees could not understand why I wanted to talk about the roadside memorial
and not talk about the person who died there. Others found it difficult to understand why I would want to know what the memorial means without asking about the funeral, the community's response to the death, and what the death meant on the personal level. The answers to many of my questions about the roadside memorials included references to other forms of memorialization.

Some of the families and friends were able to narrate more extensively about their relationship with a memorial than others. The extent to which people feel free to talk about personal loss and physical expressions of it varies dramatically by family and individual. Also, "what the memorial means" is not static. In fact, memorials do not mean anything in themselves. They are always connected and explained by use of other forms of memorialization, memories of the deceased, the rituals associated with the burial and remembrance, and other past situation-specific contexts. When people for whom a memorial has personal meaning look at a memorial, they do not see what "outsiders" see. Roadside memorials emotionally and cognitively represent much more than an artistic display that marks the site of an automobile death. The following chapters explore the meanings particular memorials have to those who construct and maintain them.

One danger of focusing in depth on particular memorial practices is that larger regional and cultural contributions
are often downplayed. In order to prevent this problem, each memorial discussed below is placed within the regional memorial context of the study area (Figure 23). Fieldwork about common regional memorial practices for people who die in automobile accidents reveals five distinct kinds of memorials. Roadside memorials, newspaper memorials, community memorials, personal shrines, and cemetery decoration are all part of the memorial profile of the study area. The only type of memorial that is done exclusively for automobile deaths is roadside memorials. While the other practices are particularly elaborate for automobile deaths, they are done for other kinds of death as well. As the following section will show, specific memorial forms interrelate such that they help explain and account for each other. In short, to understand what a roadside memorial means, it is important to look at the other forms of memorialization as well.

By isolating these five kinds of regional memorial forms, I do not mean to imply that these forms are distinct to south central Kentucky. In fact, roadside memorials, newspaper memorials, cemetery decoration, and other forms of memorials are very common in other parts of the country and world. Rather, what makes these memorials different from memorials found in anywhere else is that their meanings on any particular level are derived out of a social and cultural context that is specific to the region. The
Figure 23. Chart showing the relation of common regional memorial forms for those who die in automobile accidents in the region.
following sections will explore different memorial practices developed in response to three unrelated automobile accidents. The first case focuses on an accident in Brownsville. The memorials that emerged in response to this accident are especially elaborate and provide explicit examples of many of the common regional memorial forms. The second two case studies are in-depth explorations of the interrelationships of the memorial forms. These three cases are not chosen because they are "typical." They are chosen because they employ many of the common regional memorial forms.

The Brownsville Accident

No other accident in the study area is as clearly and permanently imprinted on the consciousness of the people of south central Kentucky as the August 15, 1993, accident that resulted in the death of six young people near Brownsville in Edmonson County. In discussions about memorials with people from the region, it is the most referred to, the most narrated about, and understood as the most tragic automobile accident in the history of the region.9

The best context for this particular accident is found in the article announcing the deaths in the local weekly

9The information in this section is based on newspaper articles, textual components of the memorials, and informal conversations with people in Brownsville. Unlike the following two case studies, it is not grounded in interviews with any of the makers of the memorials.
newspaper for Edmonson County. While it is a very long article, titled "Six Young People Die When Truck Overturns Here," it is an extremely moving narrative:

Day by day, families of six who died in Saturday's accident and the people of Edmonson are trying to come to terms with what was described as "the worst accident in the county." Placid summer days were punctuated by funeral corteges as the six, struck down in an abrupt stop, were taken to their last, resting places.

Saturday night had started out as any ordinary summer evening at the Brownsville Minit Mart parking area. Like moths to a flame, young people had gathered, as usual, to hang out with their friends.

Christie Lindsey Lucas, 19, finished her day's work at Minit Mart at 11:10 p.m. Her husband, Grover Winford Lucas III, 20, had come to pick her up. Bradley Brooks, 23, and his girl friend, LuWanda Willis, 19, went to services at the Bee Spring Missionary Church earlier in the evening and then drove to the Minit Mart to see what was going on. Tommy Miller, 30, had attended a family gathering at the Huff home of his parents, Rev. Roy and Clara Miller. About 9 p.m., after everyone had gone, he took his children, Alecia, 8, and Alan, 6, bathed them and put them to bed and read them a story before going off in his pick-up truck. He, too, headed for the Minit Mart and his destiny.

Bruce Logsdon was winding up his 24 birthday with his friends. He would never see another.

Kelly Fields had worked as a bus boy at Seven Springs Restaurant at Chalybeate. After he got off work, he went to the Minit Mart.

At 11:52 p.m., a call came to the dispatcher about a fire on the Salem Church Road. Someone at the Minit Mart had a beeper and the word spread fast. Tommy's brother, Lonnie Miller, lives on Salem Church Road. Could his home be on fire? Tommy revved up his pick-up truck, LuWanda wearing her church-going dress, climbed in front and Dumsey (Buddy) Woodwock, 17, jumped into the front too. Into the truck bed went seven others, off to see the fire. Those in back huddled against the wind, for the night had turned cool. Over the Green River bridge on Highway 259, past the Riverhill Shopping Center, the new quarters of the Ambulance Service and the state highway garage they sped.

A curve loomed up and Tommy fighting to control the truck hit a ditch. They crossed the road and a tire blew out. The truck was estimated to have traveled about 450 feet before it flipped over, down an
embankment in a brushy area, according to State Police. 

Joey Montgomery, 19, arriving home minutes later, noticed his mailbox had been knocked down. Seeing marks on the black top, he and his friend took a flashlight and found the truck, upside down, just off the road. He stayed and tried to comfort Bradley Brooks, while his friend went for help. At 12:11 a.m. a call went out for an ambulance.

Sheriff Eddie Railey was just getting ready to leave his office, having patrolled the lake that evening. At 12:13 a.m. he heard the call for the Jaws of Life and knew something bad had happened. By the time Railey and Deputy Don Starnes arrived, Bradley Brooks and Ricky Willis, 21, LuWanda's brother, had been removed from the smashed truck. There were eight others trapped underneath and in the cab. The sheriff was visibly moved and concerned that some were trapped alive and they wouldn't be able to get them out.

There was no sign of alcohol being involved, he said later, adding he knew all the young people and he "never had any problems with any of them."

Edmonson County had its three ambulances there and Spirit I, Bowling Green's state of the art ambulance, came. The Edmonson County Rescue Squad and members of the Cave City Rescue Squad rushed to the scene, along with state police and fire fighters from Kyrock, Park City, Brownsville, Rocky Hill and Bear Creek. Nevertheless, it took more than three hours to get the last victim out.

Ricky Willis and Bradley Brooks were transported to the Medical Center, Bowling Green, with a broken leg each. Ricky also was kept in the ICU unit until Monday, when he was moved to a room. LuWanda, riding in the cab, was cut and bruised. She said Tuesday that the worst of her injuries seemed to be a cut on her face that required 200 stitches. She added that a plastic surgeon worked on her and she is convinced there will be no scars.

She thinks they were traveling "a little fast" and remembers Tommy trying to miss "a little white mailbox". When she came to, Tommy was at her side, gasping for breath. "He died in my arms," she said.

Apparently in good spirits, she said she hoped to be able to leave the hospital Tuesday. She would like to visit the funeral home, but wasn't sure she was up to it. She said she had been working with the Summer Youth Program here and this would have been her last week. Buddy Woodcock, seated on the other side of her in the cab, was trapped for close to four hours. He was treated and released from the Medical Center with pulled tendons in his left shoulder which will keep him off work at the Fruit of the Loom for a while. He is
recuperating at the home of his parents Rumsey, Sr. and Peggy Woodcock on the Mt. Zion Road. He said Monday that after the truck came back on the road he thought they would be all right. His shoulder was pinned somehow with the back of the seat. LuWanda was hysterical, he said, and he tried to talk her through the trauma and calm her down.

It hurt LuWanda when they tried to move him out and he asked them to get her out first. He did not know until later that his cousin, David Johnson, 23, was killed in the crash.

Bradley Brooks remembers hearing someone said they were going to hit a ditch. The next thing he knew, he woke up under the truck. "I thought it was a bad dream and I wanted to wake up," he said. Christie and Grover Lucas didn't make it. They were to have celebrated their first wedding anniversary at the end of the month. Also dead were Kelly Fields, who would have started his senior year at Edmonson County High School this week and Bruce Logsdon. Students at Edmonson County High School, classmates of Fields mourned his passing. At the first day of school assembly Tuesday, Principal David Stice, told them that any who wished may attend his funeral. Each, however, he said, must have a note from the funeral director.

Stice reminded the seniors, particularly, that any time any one needed a shoulder to cry on, he will always be available. Sheriff Riley cautions young people of the county not to be "fire or ambulance chasers". He urged them to drive carefully. He said the report of a fire had been a false alarm.

Some of the dead's friends from the Minit Mart gathering wanted to do something, didn't know what. They finally made a large sign in memory of their departed buddies and placed it outside the Mart.

Inside, Denise Vincent, store manager set up a container for contributions to the families of the dead. She said any proceeds would be distributed equally among all.

All day Sunday and into Monday, traffic slowed as it passed the site of the accident, where a large wreath had been placed.

It seems as if everyone in the county was affected in some way by the deaths. Lines at the Patton Funeral Home, where four of the dead lay, stretched on and on as young and old wept for lives ended too soon. (Edmonson News, August 19, 1993)

The photographs that accompany this article include a family member of one of the survivors of the accident inspecting
the accident site. Another photograph shows a memorial wreath placed at the site. This standing wreath, made by a local florist, consisted of red carnations, each carnation entwined with six small white flowers—one for each victim. Another photograph shows a group of people inspecting the vehicle after it was moved to a storage lot.

The Roadside Memorial

The roadside memorials for this site have always consisted primarily of standing styrofoam flower arrangements (Figures 24 and 25). No solid wooden crosses have ever been placed at the scene. There are currently four standing flower arrangements and one cross made from twigs (presumably with twigs found at the site). According to some informal accounts, each of these wreaths represents a single person and is placed at the death place of that person. The twig cross is attached to a tree and has a ribbon that reads "Grover" (Figure 26). In December, a Christmas wreath replaced another wreath (Figure 27). The Christmas wreath had ribbons that read "In Memory of Kelly." The Christmas wreath was replaced in late February with a black and white styrofoam heart arrangement.

The accident site is located near the inside corner of a sharp curve. Traffic at that section of the road is dense and moves very fast. There is no place near the site to safely park and walking across the road to the site is dangerous. These environmental factors may help explain why
Figure 24. The accident site in mid-January, 1995

Figure 25. The accident site in late March, 1995
Figure 26. Detail of twig cross

Figure 27. Christmas wreath
the memorial is not updated more often than it is. The only significant change that occurred between January 1995 and June 1995 is that one of the wreaths was replaced and the site was cleaned of debris.

Community Memorials

Community memorials are forms of memorials that publicly announce the fact of a death using the symbolic conventions established by the community for that particular death. Community memorials may include public plantings of trees, public memorial plaques or signs, or other forms that publicly and non-ambiguously remind community members of a particular loss.

Within a few days of the accident, a four foot square piece of plywood was purchased by employees at Minit Mart. This plywood was painted white and mounted on iron posts behind Minit Mart in Brownsville. The sign reads "IN MEMORY OF Davey, Bruce, Kelly, Tommy, Grover, Christy, We Miss You." Initially, the sign consisted of this message only. Before long, family and friends gathered at the sign and began to write messages on it. Hundreds of messages and names were written with permanent markers on the sign in the days and weeks following the accident (Figure 28). Currently, many of the messages are beginning to fade because of weather and sunlight. Occasionally a family member or friend will write a new message on top of the
faded ones. A recent message reads "Kelly, we miss you! And we will always, Love You! Mom, Joey and family."

Minit Mart was a regular "hang-out" for the six people who died in the accident. One of those, Christy, was an employee there. In fact, the accident happened immediately after they left the store. One of the workers at Minit Mart recently explained that the large sign was put up as a form of "therapy" for the staff at the store.

Thirteen months after the accident, a bronze plaque was put next to the informal memorial (Figure 29). This plaque was made by Keith Monument Company in Bowling Green. It reads:

In loving memory of our families and friends who died in the early morning hours of August 15, 1993. They left but did not return.
Steven Kelly Fields
Davey Johnson
Bruce Wayne Logsdon
Christy Lindsey Lucas
Grover Winford Lucas III
Tommy Miller
We would like to say thank you to everyone who gave to this fund. A special thanks to Minit Mart Corp. for all their help in establishing this memorial.

This memorial was purchased after three separate funds established by the store and community were consolidated.

The two memorials are decorated with standing styrofoam wreaths similar to those found at the accident site. These wreaths are put there by family members. It is likely that both of these public memorials would have been placed at the site of the accident, had the accident occurred at a more accessible place. While traveling past the accident site in
IN LOVING MEMORY OF OUR FAMILIES AND FRIENDS WHO DIED IN THE EARLY MORNING HOURS OF AUGUST 15, 1993. THEY LEFT BUT DID NOT RETURN.

STEVEN KELLY FIELDS
DAVEY JOHNSON
BRUCE WAYNE LOGSDON
CHRISTY LINDSEY LUCAS
GROVER WINFORD LUCAS III
TOMMY MILLER

WE WOULD LIKE TO SAY THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO GAVE TO THIS FUND: A SPECIAL THANKS TO MINIT MART CORP. FOR ALL THEIR HELP IN ESTABLISHING THIS MEMORIAL.

Figure 28. Photograph of signature memorial behind Minit Mart

Figure 29. The bronze memorial behind Minit Mart
an automobile, the roadside memorial is visible for only a matter of seconds.

Newspaper Memorials

Newspaper memorials consist of poems about the dead, poems to the dead, letters to the dead, letters to the community about the death, or letters to the community in thanksgiving of their emotional support. Newspaper memorials are found throughout the United States and in many parts of Europe (see Dégh 1994). Often they are done on the birthday, marriage anniversary, or anniversary of the death of the deceased. They are very formulaic, although they allow a wide range of personal expression. In the smaller newspapers in the study area they appear near the obituaries. In the larger newspapers, they appear in the classified section. They are, for the most part, relatively affordable--a substantial textual memorial may cost as little as ten dollars in the smaller papers. Often, the textual elements are accompanied by a photograph of the deceased.

Published newspaper items about the Brownsville accident flourished in the weeks and months following the accident. None, however, appeared in the weekly paper that immediately followed the accident. The Edmonson News published cards of thanks by family members to the members of the community, as well as cards of thanks by two of the four survivors of the accident. Poems, narratives, and
photographs in memory of those who died in the accident were also published.

Within a month of the Brownsville accident, the families of four of the six who died had cards of thanks published in the newspaper. Cards of thanks are very common throughout the area. They are, in fact, more common than newspaper memorials. For most, a card of thanks is a one-time opportunity to thank all of those in the community who helped in the preparation and enactment of the funeral, burial, and other services. Most of the cards of thanks follow a similar structure. The one below for Bruce Wayne Logsdon appeared in the third weekly paper following the accident:

CARD OF THANKS
We would like to take this time to express our thanks to everyone for all of the kindness and support you showed us during this heartbreaking time.

Bruce Wayne was always a kind, goodhearted and sweet young man. We are proud to call him son and the father of our beloved J.B. You never saw Bruce Wayne without a smile on his face. We will miss him forever.

We would like to thank everyone for the beautiful flowers, for the food, the cards, phone calls and money. And most of all, your prayers.

To Jerry and Allison Patton, for the kindness they showed us. God Bless you.

To the Union Light Singers for the beautiful songs; to Georgie Childress for his reading of the obituary; to Bro. James Jesse for the message that touched so many hearts.

And, a special thanks to Charles, Scott, Oren Michael, Cling, Jimmy, Randy and Mike, who so bravely carried him to his final resting place.

We love you all.

--J.B., Bruce and Cathy Logsdon and Sheila and Michael Shane Skaggs. (Edmonson News, September 2, 1993)
In addition to cards of thanks by family members of the deceased, two of the four survivors of the accident had cards of thanks published. LuWanda Willis has had several cards published. One of the first published items about the wreck in the second paper following the accident is a card of thanks by LuWanda. It reads:

Dear Friends, Family and Loved Ones:

There are just a few words I would like to say. First of all, I would like to thank each and every one of you all for your support and love through this tragedy. Please take my advice: Serve God and keep him close with you and in your heart because I know beyond the shadow of a doubt that God is the one who brought me out of that truck. Those who were called home are in a much better place because they don't have anything to worry about and they don't need our sympathy but I still love all of them dearly and will never be ashamed for them or what they stood for. Please BE CAREFUL, WEAR YOUR SEATBELT, AND DRIVE SLOWLY, because everyone holds a very special place in my heart. Once again, thanks for being there and being such friends. I LOVE YOU ALL DEARLY! -LuWanda (Edmonson News, August 26, 1993)

Another survivor, Bradley Brooks, had the following card of thanks put in the local paper:

CARD OF THANKS

I would like to thank all the people who helped get us out of the truck, those that took us to the hospital and those who kept us company while we were down there. I am grateful to the people who brought us flowers, food and donated money. I want to thank JoJo and Mark for coming and finding us. I don't know how long we might have been there if they hadn't found us. My sympathy goes out to all the families who lost their kids. If there is anything I could do to help, please let me know. I would like to commend the ambulance service, the rescue squad and those that used the Jaws of Life for the good work they did in getting us out. I want to thank everybody for all their prayers but most I want to thank God for saving my life.

--Brad Brooks (Edmonson News, September 2, 1993)
Most of the items published in the paper relating to the accident fall clearly into the category of a newspaper memorial. Dozens of poems, most of them organized around the themes of flowers or gardens, have been published since the accident. Many of these newspaper memorials include formal and informal photographs. In one, a photograph of Bruce Wayne Logsdon and David Johnson sitting on a living room couch appears above a poem written in memory of them. Another newspaper memorial poem, in memory of Christy Lindsey Lucas and Grover Winford Lucas III, is placed beneath their wedding picture. One of these poems, in memory of Bruce Wayne Logsdon, reads:

\begin{verbatim}
It's hard to lose the ones we love,
    To see them pass away,
The sweetest and the kindest gone,
    While others are left to stay.

But if we had a garden,
    With roses fair and bright,
We'd often pick the loveliest
    And think it to be right.

And so it is with Jesus,
    In His Heavenly garden here,
He often picks the fairest flower,
    The ones we love so dear.

The flowers that are picked by him,
    Will never fade away,
We know they'll live forever
    And we'll see them some sweet day.
\end{verbatim}

--Love Mom and Dad (Edmonson News, September 16, 1993)

Depending upon the family, many of the cards of thanks and memorials list the names of the entire immediate family. Often a poem will be found or written by a single person in
the family, but the entire family is given credit for it. In cases of divorce or memorials done by both sets of grandparents, it is not uncommon to see multiple cards of thanks or memorials.

Cemetery Decoration

Cemetery decoration, sometimes done by both family and friends, involves the placement of objects (in this study, burial markers are included) near the burial site of the deceased. The temporary objects include fresh or artificial flowers, wooden crosses, small personal items belonging to the deceased, objects associated with holidays, or other appropriate objects (see Gundaker 1994; Gosnell and Gott 1992; Montell 1989; West 1985).

Cemetery decorations for most of the six who died in the accident in Brownsville are very elaborate. One of those who died in the accident, Bruce Wayne Logsdon, had sixteen standing styrofoam flower arrangements outlining the full length of his grave on Memorial Day, 1995 (Figure 30). Inside these standing arrangements, dozens upon dozens of flower arrangements are placed. As is typical of many forms of memorialization, the biological relationships of the deceased to the living appear textually on the memorials. For Bruce Wayne, his grave is surrounded by arrangements that read "My Daddy," "Grandson," "Nephew," "Son," "Brother," so as to surround the grave textually and symbolically with the entire family (Figure 31). This
Figure 30. Cemetery decoration for Bruce Wayne Logsdon, Memorial Day, 1995

Figure 31. Close-up of standing arrangements showing familial relationships
memorial practice is very common in the region. Many of the newspaper memorials also use this elaboration of familial relationships. A newspaper memorial might read, "On that tragic day, we lost a son, a grandson, an uncle, and a cousin" all referring to the death of a single individual.

In addition to standing wreaths and flowers, the use of ceramic objects is very common in the area. Very often, these ceramic pieces are in the form of a child-like angel and are generally placed at the base of the marker.

Generally, cemetery decoration varies substantially from cemetery to cemetery. In Union Light Missionary Baptist Church Cemetery, the cemetery that Bruce Wayne Logsdon is buried in, it is conventional to have a sufficient number of flowers to outline the entire grave. Often, these flowers may consist of a single line of flowers a substantial distance apart, but they do span the full length of the grave.

Personal Shrines

Personal shrines are those memorials that are decidedly private. Public access to them is extremely limited. Memory books, assemblages of items and photographs, special gardens, or other forms of related memorialization that serve as personal reminders or symbolic representations of the deceased are common.

While I did not interview family members for this type of memorial for this accident, it is very likely that
collections of photographs or some other private "sectioned off" areas exist for many of those who died.

Generalizations about the Memorial Forms

While the five forms of memorials discussed above are common in the region, very few automobile deaths are memorialized by all five forms. Cemetery decoration and personal shrines are possibly the most common form throughout the region for all causes of death. Depending upon the specific part of the study area, cards of thanks and memorials may be the second most common. For those who die in automobile accidents in the region, twenty-percent or less have a roadside memorial that lasts any significant amount of time. Public memorials exist in a wide range of forms. However, it is likely that they are the least common form of memorialization for death from all causes in the region.¹⁰

The next two sections of this chapter are an in-depth explorations of the memorial forms for two young people from Allen County who died in separate automobile accidents during October of 1994. Generally speaking, they were members of the same community: they were friends, they went to school together, and they are buried in the same cemetery

¹⁰Exceptions to this generalization might be memorial contributions made by family and friends to charities or other agencies following a death, public memorial services, or formal memorials established in memory of a government official or other well-known personality.
less than thirty feet from each other. However, they died very different social deaths. This difference is reflected in the range and texture of the forms of memorials.

Penny Annette Patterson (1977-1994)

Penny Patterson, 17, was a well-known, talkative, and energetic Junior at Allen County-Scottsville High School. She was an employee at Sonic (a drive-in fast-food restaurant) in Scottsville. On Sunday, October 30, 1994, in early celebration of Halloween she went to a haunted house in Nashville with some of her friends. At about 2:15 a.m. on Monday morning, after returning from Nashville and leaving the house of a friend, she fell asleep at the wheel of her car. Her vehicle travelled along a fence row, went down a small hill, and rolled over into a telephone pole. The attending coroner said that she died instantly from massive head and back injuries. She had not been drinking and she was wearing her seat belt.11

According to her mother, Robbie Stinson, the community response to this reaction was enormous. Those classmates who did not already know about her death found out about it at school. According to several different accounts, the scene was something that school faculty did not have the resources to handle. Those students who were particularly

11The fact that Penny was wearing her seat belt is significant. "Don't let no one tell you seat belts save lives, they don't" is a common statement made by family and friends about Penny's accident.
upset were separated and pastors from local congregations were called in to help with counselling. By mid-morning, the school released everyone who wanted to leave.

Large numbers of students congregated in three different areas: the site of the accident, the storage lot where the car was moved, and Robbie's house. Beginning at daylight on Monday, as many as one hundred people, mostly students, went to the site of the accident. Because of the severity of the accident, the contents of the car were scattered over the entire area of the wreck. Dozens of people combed the ground looking for Penny's belongings. These objects were all collected in one place and given to Robbie.

Many of Penny's friends went to the lot where her wrecked car was hauled. By Monday evening, every smooth place on the body of the car had "We Love You Penny" or "We Miss You Penny" or other short phrases etched into it with keys and similar objects. Later, Penny's family felt that they should go and inspect the car. By the time Robbie got there, one of Penny's friends had taped a sign onto the dashboard that read: "We love and miss you Penny."

Penny's father and step-mother were living in Tennessee at the time of the accident. By the time they arrived in Scottsville, around mid-morning on Monday, there were so many people en route to Robbie's house that it took them nearly an hour to travel the three blocks from Main Street
to the house. At the house, family members and Penny's friends "shared tears."

Informal estimates of the number of people at her funeral on Wednesday, at 2:30 p.m., are as high as one thousand. When I contacted the funeral home in Scottsville, they conservatively estimated that the number was well over five hundred. The entire population of Scottsville is just over four thousand.

The Roadside Memorial

For the first week, the only memorial that was put at the site of the accident was a small, one square inch, purple ribbon. This ribbon was nailed to the electric pole by one of Penny's friends. Purple is the organizing color in all of the memorials for her--it was her favorite color. This ribbon is still attached to the pole and has perhaps become the most meaningful part of the memorial to the family. According to Robbie, the reason a cross was not put up sooner is because one of Penny's friends asked permission to hire a carpenter to make a nice one. After a week passed without a memorial being there, Robbie's ex-son-in-law made a white wooden cross and placed it near the fence (Figure 32). Since then, Robbie has been responsible for decorating and renewing the cross. Around the middle of May, 1995, Robbie noticed that the cross needed repainting. She removed the cross and all of the flowers. The flowers were discarded and the cross was painted black. About one week
later, she put the cross and new flowers at the site (Figure 33).

Community Memorials

Many of the public community memorials are the products of Penny's co-workers at Sonic. Immediately following the news of her death, Sonic attached large purple bows to all of the poles (approximately forty) around the restaurant (Figure 34). In addition to this, the lighted sign in front of the restaurant that usually advertises specials read "WE LOVE YOU PENNY." On Wednesday, the day of the funeral, the sign was changed to read "WE MISS YOU PENNY, CLOSED 1:30-5 FOR FUNERAL." In front of the store near the sign a large standing purple wreath, decorated with over a dozen white fresh carnations, was placed. On the restaurant itself, beneath the neon sign that reads "Burgers," a smaller purple wreath with carnations was hung from the window. On the Saturday following Penny's death, Sonic donated twenty-five percent of its profits to Goad Funeral Home to help defray funeral expenses. In addition, all of the workers donated their tips for the day. On November 8, Sonic presented a check to Robbie and Goad Funeral Home for $3,470. This amount combined with money raised by Penny's classmates during a roadblock covered all of the family's funeral
Figure 32. Penny Patterson's roadside memorial prior to its renewal, Allen County (M21)

Figure 33. The roadside memorial for Penny Patterson after its renewal
TO HONOR HER MEMORY—Following the death of co-worker 17-year-old Penny Patterson, the management and staff of the Scottsville Sonic paid their respects to her memory by hanging these beautiful purple bows on poles all around the restaurant. To help the family with funeral expenses, classmates held a roadblock on the square, the car-hops donated all of Saturday's tips and the Sonic itself donated 25 percent of Saturday's sales.

(Photo by Pitchford)

Figure 34. Photograph of a purple bows at Sonic from weekly newspaper, used with permission of The Courrier-Journal
expenses. At Christmas, a purple bow several feet wide was placed at the top of Sonic's outdoor Christmas tree.

In addition to the memorials at Sonic, many of her classmates attached purple bows to the front of their cars. Presently, eight months after the accident, most of the bows have been removed. Robbie told me:

Some of the kids in this town still have their purple bows on the front of their cars, one lady just went out there and made her son take it off, in fact, she caught him gone and she took it off. There was just no sense in keeping it on. (Stinson, June 3, 1995)

Newspaper Memorials

There have been two newspaper memorials purchased by Penny's family. Both of these appear in the March 2, 1995, edition of The Citizen Times newspaper (Figure 35). Both pieces are done by Robbie's sister-in-law and her daughter. A related form of memorialization that could be categorized as either public or private depending upon its context of use is a memorial page. The mother of one of Penny's friends had hundreds of copies of the words of a contemporary Christian song, "Friends are Friends Forever," along with Penny's picture made. It was distributed to family and friends. The border is purple, with two purple bows in the top left and bottom right corners.

Roadblocks, consisting of people standing with buckets for donations at the four-way stop in downtown Scottsville, are very common. Often they are done to help defray medical expenses or to purchase new emergency equipment for the county.
In Loving Memory of Penny Patterson on Her 18th Birthday

Dear Penny:

On March 2, 1995 you would have turned 18. Everybody knew how excited you were about your 18th birthday. We also know how hard it was to give you up at such a young age. But we wanted to write this to tell you that we love and miss you with all our hearts, and to tell you Happy 18th Birthday!

The Family of Penny Patterson

In Memory

Remembering you
The nights are long.
The days are short.
It seems like the only thing we do is cry.
It takes a while to realize it's time to say good-bye, but still we think of you, and now it's so hard to even think the day through without thinking of you.
Happy Birthday, Penny!

—Written by Keri Mesker

Figure 35. Newspaper memorials for Penny Patterson
Cemetery Decoration

Penny's grave is visited very often. I have been there four times and each time someone was there when I arrived. Robbie says that she visits several times a week. While the family contributes most of the decorations to the grave, they have noticed that many objects appear for a while and are then removed by people other than family. According to Robbie, many of Penny's friends place hard peppermint candy at the site. Peppermint candy is a symbolic convention recognized by family and friends as a symbol of Sonic. When the family sees the candy, they immediately know that one of Penny's friends at Sonic has visited. At the bottom left of the tombstone base, one of her friends recently placed a Sonic key chain. Most of the flowers are purple, and a large purple bow is attached to a plant holder (Figures 36 and 37).

During the Christmas season following her death, one of Penny's cousins placed a battery-powered Christmas tree at the grave. This same cousin also placed a small stuffed Santa Claus on the base of the tombstone.

Personal Memorials

There is no way to account for the full range of private memorial practices for Penny. It is likely that many of the printed items were received by Penny's friends and saved. It is also likely that public memorials, such as the purple bows attached to cars, have been saved and assume
Figure 36. Penny Patterson's grave in mid-April 1995

Figure 37. Penny Patterson's grave on Memorial Day, 1995
a primarily private memorial role. According to Robbie, by the end of the funeral service, Penny's casket was filled with items, personal letters, and other symbolic objects.

Robbie's personal memorial for Penny is her memory book. This book, a three-ring binder covered with a white and purple cloth, was made and given to her by a family member (Figure 38). The contents of the book include the following:

1. Photographs of Penny and her cousins as children
2. Copies of the newspaper article announcing her death
3. Some of the items that were in the car at the time of the accident, collected by her friends, and returned to Robbie
   a. Social Security card
   b. Personal letters
   c. Score card for a miniature golf game
   d. Her ATM (bank machine) card
   e. A torn ticket stub for the movie "The Lion King"
   f. Her drivers license
   g. Two one dollar bills and seven pennies
4. Photographs of the site of the accident (Robbie took photos)
   a. Photographs of the tiny purple ribbon on the electric pole
   b. Photographs of the family (mostly cousins) inspecting the site
5. Photographs of the smashed car, including a personal sign attached above the steering wheel (Robbie took photos)
6. Photograph of Penny at work at Sonic
7. Photographs of the signs, flowers, and Christmas tree at Sonic (Robbie took photos)
8. A piece of the purple wreath from Sonic that reads "Penny"
9. Photographs of the flowers at the funeral home
10. A photocopy of Sonic's $3,470 check made out to "Robbie Stinson and Goad Funeral Home"
11. Letters written to Robbie by Penny's friends in condolence
12. Photograph of a school bus with a ribbon attached to it
Figure 38. Robbie Stinson's memory book

Figure 39. Two pages of memory book showing photographs of school bus with ribbon attached to front, fence at accident site, purple ribbons at Sonic, and electric pole at accident site
In many ways, this memory book is a microcosm of the entire memorial process (Figure 39). Likewise, Robbie has pictures that document the evolution of cemetery decoration. On the living room wall in Robbie's house is the framed printed memorial made by the mother of one of Penny's friends.

The Presence of Automobile-Death

In case of Penny's death, death-by-automobile is particularly charged. Allen County had an especially bad year for automobile deaths during 1994--often called the worst in recent memory. Eleven people in Allen County died during 1994 in car wrecks. Shaun Steenbergen, a twenty-year-old Western Kentucky University student, died less than two weeks before Penny in an auto accident. Shaun was a good friend of Penny's. Immediately following his death, she wrote a poem in memory of him. Ironically, this poem was published in the 1995 high school year book in memory of her.

Penny's family explains that they have known many people who died in automobile accidents. Less than two weeks following Penny's death, her boyfriend's stepmother was killed in a single-vehicle accident. In mid-January 1995, a family friend was killed in an automobile accident. Another friend of Penny's was killed during the last week of May 1995 in Barren County in a single-vehicle accident.
Robbie showed me a hand-written poem written by Penny. Robbie understands this note as a prophesy by Penny of her own death. The poem reads:

DEAR LORD

Dear Lord, why can't I walk?
Dear Lord, why can't I talk?
Dear Lord, why does Mommie cry?
Dear Lord, am I going to die?
Dear Lord, why is the car smashed?
Dear Lord, why didn't someone think fast?
Dear Lord, am I going to die?
Dear Lord, what is wrong w/my back?
Dear Lord, why is everything starting to go black
Dear Lord, am I gonna Die

Penny Pat.

Robbie sees this poem as an accurate description of what physically happened to Penny as a result of the accident. This poem certainly testifies to the socially and personally charged nature of automobile death in Penny Patterson's world.

The Relation of Memorial Forms

The above elaboration of memorial forms for Penny Patterson reveals several common elements: the use of the color purple, purple ribbons or bows, and symbols associated with Sonic. Those who are not familiar with the other
memorial forms might not see any significance in the tiny purple ribbon attached the electric pole—chances are they would not even see it. Also, significance of the color purple, so central to all of the forms of memorialization, might not be noticed or have any particular meaning by looking at the roadside memorial alone.

All of the memorials for Penny are related—they help explain each other. Friends, family, and community members have been, since the news of her death, actively involved in a social construction of meaningful memorials. Although the organizing categories (roadside memorials, cemetery decoration, etc.) are common forms in the region, memorials for particular individuals utilize these forms in unique and meaningful ways. For those who are part of the memorial process, Penny's roadside memorial is more than a marker of where she died.

Shaun Steenbergen (1976-1994)

Shaun Steenbergen was a freshman at Western Kentucky University at the time of his October 19, 1994, accident. He was travelling toward Scottsville on Ky. 252 in Allen County about five miles south of his home. Several hundred yards before the intersection of Ky. 252 and U.S. 31E, Shaun's car hit a large dog. He lost control of the car and it struck a raised driveway in a ditch on the right side of the road. He was pronounced dead at the scene by the Allen County coroner.
The Roadside Memorial

Shaun's roadside memorial is a carefully constructed white wooden cross. The cross is twelve inches tall, eight inches wide. It is the most symmetrical memorial in the study area. The horizontal piece of the cross is held to the vertical piece with four equally spaced screws. The horizontal piece of the cross insets into the vertical piece (Figures 40 and 41).

The current memorial is the second white cross constructed by Shaun's father, Jimmie Steenbergen. This current cross marks the site of the accident, not the site of Shaun's death. The impact of the accident caused him to be ejected one hundred feet from the car. Two days after the accident, Shaun's father, mother, and sister placed a white cross where Shaun's body came to a rest. That same day, the cross was destroyed by the owner of the land where Shaun died. The owner apparently did not feel that it was appropriate to have a death memorial in his front yard. When the Steenbergen family went back to the site, they were ordered off the premises. The current memorial was placed on the property owned by a nearby country store. The cross is approximately ten feet in front of the accident site and approximately one hundred and ten feet from where Shaun

\[13\]

I have heard this story from an assortment of sources, including store workers, police and Sheriffs' officers, Penny Patterson's family, and the Steenbergen's. Each time, the story is told in extreme criticism of the property owner.
Figure 40. Roadside memorial for Shaun Steenbergen, Allen County (M12)

Figure 41. Top view of memorial for Shaun Steenbergen
died. The Steenbergens tell me that the store owner has agreed to cut the grass around the memorial and "keep an eye on it."

The current memorial is constructed of the same lumber that was used to build the family's house. Shaun's parents, Faye and Jimmie Steenbergen, live in a beautiful two-and-a-half-year-old log house near the Barren River dam. Both of Shaun's parents have been in the area their entire lives. The house is built on a small portion of land that has been in the family for generations. The current cross is made from the wood that was used to make the moldings around the door frames. This wood was used because of its connection to the house. As of mid-June, 1995, the memorial has not been changed since it was put up several days after the accident.

Public Memorials

In trying to find the most appropriate ways to memorialize their son, the Steenbergen's initially established a one thousand dollar cash scholarship at Allen County-Scottsville High School for a student who plans to attend Western Kentucky University in drama, journalism, or music. Faye and Jimmie wanted to have their scholarship mentioned at graduation along with the other awards because

The reason we wanted to have it mentioned at graduation night was to keep that memory alive, because he [Shaun] went through that line last year and received his high school diploma. (Steenbergen, June 12, 1995)
The administration at Allen County-Scottsville High School refused to allow the mention of this scholarship at graduation. Because of that decision, the Steenbergen's have withdrawn the scholarship from the high school in order to have Western Kentucky University administer it. Faye and Jimmie feel confident that Western Kentucky University has the resources to administer the scholarship appropriately.

Shaun was a Boy Scout and an Eagle Scout. His local Boy Scout Troop planted a pine tree near his cemetery plot five or six weeks after his death. This memorial falls into the category of a public memorial as well as a form of cemetery decoration. The Boy Scouts initially wanted to plant the tree on the Steenbergen's property near their new house. When the Steenbergen's said that they may move sometime in the distant future, the Troop decided to plant the tree in a context where its meaning would always be preserved.

Cemetery Decoration

Shaun's grave is located less than thirty feet away from Penny Patterson's in Crescent Hill Cemetery in Scottsville (Figure 42). Shaun died on October 19, 1994, and Penny died on October 31. His gravestone is made of black marble. The emblems of the Boy Scouts and the Eagle Scouts are etched into the front of the gravestone (Figure 43). He was awarded his Eagle Scout three days before his
death. The award ceremony for Shaun and two other scouts from his troop was in July 1995.

On the back of the monument, an etched picture of Shaun playing his Yamaha drum set was done by an artist in Georgia. Faye and Jimmie did not have a good picture of Shaun playing his drums, so they sent a good picture of the drum set and a good picture of Shaun to the artist. She made a composite.

Faye and Jimmie plan to have Shaun's picture attached to the gravestone using an epoxy compound. The picture they will use is the one that is hanging in the family's living room. This picture is also the one used by the local paper in the article announcing his death.

Shaun's parents have been trying, even before the funeral, to have an "eternal flame" placed at the grave site.¹⁴ The city recently refused permission for the family to have a gas-fueled flame in the cemetery, citing that no other cemeteries in south central Kentucky have such forms of cemetery decoration. Despite this rejection, they are looking into forms of "eternal flames" other than gas-fueled.

Personal Memorial

The Steenbergen's explain that they have not done anything with any of Shaun's belongings. This is clearly

¹⁴When I asked what an "eternal flame" is, Faye explained "like for John Kennedy."
Figure 42. Shaun's grave on Memorial Day, 1995

Figure 43. Etchings of the Boy Scouts and Eagle Scouts on front of the gravestone
Figure 44. Photograph of Shaun's drums in upstairs bedroom

Figure 45. Etching on the back of Shaun's gravestone
understood by Faye as a memorial. The three upstairs rooms (two bedrooms and a bathroom) were Shaun's. In showing me Shaun's room, she explained that nothing has been touched or moved since he died. In the bathroom, she explained that the toothpaste, shaving cream, razor, everything is exactly where Shaun left it eight months ago. In a corner of the other bedroom sits Shaun's thirteen-piece Yamaha drum set, the likeness of which is etched into the back of his tombstone (Figures 44 and 45). All of his clothes are still in the closets. Posters still lay on his bed, as he was rearranging them before he left the house. Everything on the second floor of the house, down to the smallest detail, is exactly as Shaun left it.

The only item that has been added to any of the three rooms is a small Christmas tree. Shaun's sister placed a tiny Christmas tree in his bedroom on the Christmas following his death. When Shaun's sister recently asked Faye if she had removed the tree, Faye told her that since she put it up there, she would have to remove it.

The Presence of Automobile Accidents

Shaun was involved in an accident on August 7, 1994. The car was completely totaled, although Shaun was unharmed. Faye explains that she thinks it is very "ironic" that he lived through such a severe wreck, only to die in another one two and a half months later. While Faye and Jimmie did not want to go and inspect the car, Shaun's sister did. She
reported to them that the car itself was only slightly damaged in the fatal wreck.

The Negotiations of Memorial Forms

It is significant that the roadside memorial is made from parts of lumber that were used to build the family's house. The memorial is made of the same lumber that frames the doors in the house, including the three doors of Shaun's upstairs rooms. Additionally, the drums that are preserved in the second upstairs bedroom also appear on the tombstone. Like the memorials for Penny, the memorials for Shaun certainly help explain each other.

What is most interesting about memorials for Shaun Steenbergen is that many of them had to be negotiated. The first roadside memorial existed in a non-negotiable space. The current roadside memorial is located in a negotiable space—a space that does not have the same meaning as the place of his death. The college scholarship, that the Steenbergen's thought could be appropriately administered through the high school, was relocated because of a breakdown in communication between the Steenbergen family and the school staff. The best location for the Boy Scouts to plant the tree was not determined until substantial discussion had taken place. Shaun does not currently have an "eternal flame" at his grave because city officials have decided against it. His mother is currently negotiating with these
officials for permission to erect a form of this memorial that they will agree to.

Faye's insistence to keep her upstairs just as Shaun left it is an extremely important part of the ongoing memorial process. It is, in fact, the only part of the memorial process that the Steenbergen family has complete control over.

What seems at first to be "the most fitting memorial" often cannot be carried out as initially planned. As the memorial objects are moved from one context to another, their meanings change. This case study shows that memorials, whether roadside or cemetery decoration, are not "automatic" reactions by family members and friends. The memorials and what they mean are the products of an ongoing interpretation and reinterpretation of what a death means and how it should be memorialized.

Memorial Profiles and Memorial Longevity

There is a wide range of memorial possibilities for people who die in south central Kentucky. These fall into the categories of private memorials, community memorials, newspaper memorials, and cemetery decoration. For those who die in automobile accidents, roadside memorials are also common. These memorial forms are often practiced concurrently and are done to help "keep the memory of the dead alive."
While the regional memorial profile for automobile deaths includes all five forms of memorials, in very few particular instances are all five practiced. Penny Patterson's death is memorialized by all five forms. Shaun Steenbergen's death is memorialized by four of the five forms--his parents intend to have his picture and a poem put in the paper on the one-year anniversary of his death. Each of the six people who died in the Brownsville accident has a different overall memorial profile, depending upon the extent and texture of the personal memorials, cemetery decoration, and newspaper memorials done for each one.

Judging from the current state of the practice of these forms, roadside memorials are among the first of the forms to be discontinued. I spoke with dozens of people who told me where a memorial "use to be." In general, most roadside memorials do not last through the first year. Those memorials that are renewed for an extended period of time are often not renewed after three or four years.

All of the forms of memorialization are generally practiced less as the time from the death increases. Cemetery decoration becomes less elaborate, newspaper memorials are published on fewer anniversaries, public memorials lose their appropriateness, and private memorials may be moved from the living room table to the spare bedroom. Roadside memorials are either renewed regularly, or the practice is discontinued entirely.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: MEMORIALS IN REGIONAL CONTEXT

Someone I loved a lot died in September of '80 in an accident. She was funny and sweet and oh so pretty. She was 26 years old and one week from having a baby. I was 26 also... The thing about automobile accidents is that one is not prepared (the survivors). It's hard. It's tragic. It's a totally senseless type of death. And so many people are impacted by it and forever changed by it. I can see why people memorialize it. There isn't a time that I ever drove past that curve... when I didn't think of her and ache for her.

Part of a Personal Letter from a Friend

Perhaps the most emergent regional characteristics of the memorials relate to their physical structure. The great majority of them fall into three distinct styles: crosses, crosses with flowers, and styrofoam-based flower arrangements. When a memorial appears on the roadside landscape taking the form of one of these three styles, it is immediately understood by those in the region as a roadside memorial. When roadside memorials assume more ambiguous forms, such as a ribbons or bows, they are generally recognized only by those who are familiar with the details of the accident. For example, one of the memorials in the study area consists of a red ribbon attached to a tree. The tree is located less than ten feet from a house and at least fifty feet from the road. Because of its form.
and context, this memorial is ambiguous to everyone except those who already know that a fatal accident happened there.

**Narratives and Narrative-Making**

A major concern from the beginning of the project was my fear that the people would not want to talk to me about such personal and painful experiences. I found that they were very willing to talk to me once I explained the nature of the project. The only person who declined an interview was a supervisor at the highway department when I was asking about procedures for dealing with roadside memorials when mowing or doing road work.\(^\text{15}\)

In-depth interviews with those who construct and maintain the memorials were done for only a portion of the memorials in the region. Thus, the following generalizations come from a very restricted body of data.

One article by Christopher Crocker, "The Southern Way of Death," (1971) provides a good point of comparison between generalizations about southern deathways and the particular deathways in this study. According to Crocker,

> In the South the horror of dying alone is matched only by that of being buried alone or in an unmarked grave. The former attitude appears based on the assumption that the dying man can be reassured by the presence of his "loved ones." (Crocker 1971:117)

\(^\text{15}\)During this conversation, he admitted that he has seen highway crews accidentally mow down a memorial, only to see it reappear a few weeks later.
Generally, those that I talked to stressed the difficulty in adjusting to such sudden and unexpected deaths. According to responses, automobile deaths are understood to be "bad" deaths for the living—they happen too suddenly and do not give adequate time for closure.

Judging from comments made during interviews and conversations, family and friends are extremely familiar with the formal details of the accident. Most know such information as the official time of the accident and death pronouncement, the number of feet the vehicle travelled after it left the road, the formal contributing factors to the accident, and the details relating to the impact of the accident on the body of the deceased. The formal details and causes of the accident that were told in the interview setting were very structured, precise, and rehearsed.

Crocker writes in his study: "while the sufficient cause of death is admitted to be an auto accident or cancer or cessation of heart beat, the necessary cause is always divine will" (Crocker 1971:116). The theme of "God's will" is a recurrent theme in many of the conversations, interviews, newspaper memorials, and public memorials. However, this is not understood or articulated as a primary "cause" of the accident. While the formal cause is very familiar, the central problem that I sense throughout the interviews is that the accidents and deaths seem to elude an acceptable cause—"God's will included." Metaphorical
explanations that attempt to reduce the meanings of deaths to concrete language or analogy are very difficult to shape and maintain. When a newspaper memorial or poem reads "I'll never understand why it had to be you" or "we do not understand and cannot get into our minds, / Why you were taken so young and in the prime of time," family members are expressing the sentiment that this kind of death is very difficult to understand. For the most part, deaths from automobile accidents simply do not make sense—they are senseless. Roadside memorials, as understood by those that I talked to, are not physical testaments of God having worked His will. They are physical testaments of a very hard-to-accept and understand death. In the case of Penny Patterson's death, the only comfort the family takes in the fact of her death is that the community readily and explicitly acknowledged its "senselessness."

Public and Private Dimensions of Memorials

In one sense, roadside memorials are among the most public forms of memorials in the region. They are a part of the roadside landscape for hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of people a day. They publically mark the site of a death. In another sense, they are among the private forms of memorials. For those who passively come into contact with a memorial, access to its particular meanings is extremely limited. For the most part, the memorials do not reveal particulars relating to the accident or the individual who
died there. The only memorial that currently has a full name on it is also the only one with a complete date of the accident. However, this memorial is attached to a tree a substantial distance from the road. I was able to find it only because newspaper accounts provided a precise description of the accident site. It is an unpainted cross attached to a tree, such that the color of the cross "blends in" with the color of the trunk of the tree (see Figure 6). It is curious that the memorial containing more textual information than any other in the study area is also the one most hidden from public view.

Other memorials are coded using nicknames or other language that has meaning only to those who can translate it into a meaningful form. One of the memorials, placed on a fence post near the road, reads "In Memory." The horizontal piece reads "RFFR 'BUG' BFFB." (Figure 46). Another memorial includes the letters "BTL" painted on a nearby fence post (Figure 47). While such coded language is not necessarily common in the area, the one common element is that the memorials themselves contain very little accessible information for outsiders.

Many public memorials, unlike roadside memorials, receive their strength from the fact that they are explicit about who the memorial is for and how the community should feel about it. The two public memorials behind Minit Mart in Brownsville contain a large amount of information about
Figure 46. White cross in Warren County (M28)

Figure 47. Iron cross in Warren County (M17)
the accident and those who died in it. Many of the public memorials for Penny Patterson are also explicit, such as "We Miss You Penny, Closed Today 1:30-5 For Funeral" on the Sonic sign. The primary reason the tree for Shaun Steenbergen was planted near his grave was so that its meaning would be easily accessible to anyone who looked at it.

Cemetery decoration, while it is understood by those who practice it as a private statement, also contains both public and private dimensions. While cemeteries are not generally considered public places, they are not entirely private places either. In south central Kentucky, the decoration at many of the graves includes textual items in addition to the grave marker. Standing flower arrangements often include ribbons that indicate family relationships.

While they are very structured and formulaic, newspaper memorials contain many public and private elements. Obviously, newspaper memorials are public. While they often consist of poems or letters written to the deceased, they are read by hundreds or thousands of people. The range of information given in these memorials varies significantly from family to family. One such newspaper memorial is for an Allen County woman who died in 1990 in an automobile accident on U.S. 231 in Alvaton. This memorial is just one in a series done by her friends. At the time this memorial
was published, she also had a roadside memorial at the site of the accident. The opening of the memorial reads:

On March 8, 1990 tragedy struck the hearts of all those who knew and loved Tammy Lynn Smith. While on her way home from Bowling Green the cruel hands of fate snatched this bright, energetic child from this life. For her loving parents, devoted brother, and mourning family members left behind, there are no words of comfort to fill such a massive loss. For the many friends that Tammy had so easily made in her short life, there is a void that even time cannot erase. / For the acquaintances who might have known this kind and compassionate human being, there is a loss that only those who loved her can truly understand. (Allen County News, March 22, 1990)

The opening line of this memorial reveals far more information about the details of the accident than any roadside memorial contains.

Finally, the different forms of memorials contain different amounts of information for "outsiders" because each form has a different function. Public memorials exist to draw specific attention to the fact of a particular death. Many newspaper memorials are written by the family to the community, so as to help shape the community's attitudes and feeling about a particular death. Other newspaper memorials are letters or poems that are written to the deceased. These arrive at the deceased symbolically as they are read by the members of the community. Cemetery decoration, like personal memorials, is mostly a private form of communication between the living and the dead.

Roadside memorials in the study area are primarily personal memorials. While these memorials are certainly
shaped by community aesthetics and traditions, they are done for personal, not communal, reasons. For a family for whom a certain site has personal meaning, the application of a name or date to the memorial is unnecessary--they know who died there. The fact that the memorials are located in public space has everything to do with the fact that the accident occurred in public space.

A large number of those that I talked to mentioned that previous roadside memorials were destroyed or damaged. All of those that I talked to about Shaun Steenbergen's memorial were very critical about the owner who destroyed the first memorial and forbid the family from putting another memorial in front of his property. Public space becomes private space at the site of fatalities in the region. The memorials mark this transformation of space. The tiny purple ribbon put on the telephone pole by Penny Patterson's friends the day of the accident is very important to her family; they understand this ribbon as saying "This place has meaning to us too." Lance Chapman decided to put his initials on the memorial for his friend, Scott Moore, because he wanted to let the Moore family know that it was he--a good friend--who put the memorial at the site. Roadside memorials mark a symbolic shift in ownership for a piece of the roadside landscape from public property to private property.
Some of the sites are focal points for the community of bereaved. In the case of Penny Patterson's death and the accident near Brownsville, the sites were heavily visited by friends and family in the hours and days following the accident. For days following the Brownsville accident, those for whom the accident had some level of personal meaning slowed down as they drove past the accident site. In one case of a fatality near Morgantown, a memorial service was held at the site of a fatal accident. This service was on the day before the funeral. Following this memorial service, flowers were placed at the scene.

In Allen, Barren, Butler, Edmonson, and Warren counties, roadside memorials are part of a memorial complex. All of the memorials may fall into regionally-shaped forms, but their particular meanings are personal.
APPENDIX 1: MAP OF STUDY AREA WITH MEMORIALS
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SITE #</th>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>COUNTY</th>
<th>ROAD</th>
<th>TYPE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Teresa G. Bryant</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>12/1/89</td>
<td>Allen</td>
<td>US 231</td>
<td>White cross with flowers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Shane Harrison</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2/26/90</td>
<td>Warren</td>
<td>US 231</td>
<td>White cross attached to telephone pole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Daniel Johnson</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>1/24/91</td>
<td>Warren</td>
<td>US 231</td>
<td>White cross with flowers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Kevin Simpson</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10/25/92</td>
<td>Warren</td>
<td>880 &amp; Barren River Road</td>
<td>White cross, outlined with photoreflective tape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Linda Cline</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Thomas Miller</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8/15/93</td>
<td>Edmonson</td>
<td>KY 259</td>
<td>Multiple standing flower arrangements, cross made with twigs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Steven Fields</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bruce W. Logsdon</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christy Lucas</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Grover Lucas</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>David Johnson</td>
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<td>Barren</td>
<td>US 31W</td>
<td>White cross with many flowers attached</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Brian Fleming</td>
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<td>8/29/94</td>
<td>Warren</td>
<td>KY 234</td>
<td>Red ribbon</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Michael Wade</td>
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<td>Warren</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Timothy Wade</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Willie Rigdon</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>4/14/91</td>
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<td>Crosses with flowers</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Mary Cowles</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Shaun Steenbergen</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Scott Moore</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1/21/95</td>
<td>Butler</td>
<td>US 231 Light blue wooden cross, styrofoam cross, attached to tree</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Noel Sherl Winford Adams</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Ronnie Ball Richard Swift</td>
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<td>4/6/91</td>
<td>Butler</td>
<td>KY 79 White wooden cross attached to tree</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>unknown</td>
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<td>KY 234 Iron welded cross near a fence post</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Andy Williams</td>
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<td>7/13/89</td>
<td>Barren</td>
<td>Old Glasgow-Munfordville Road Wooden cross</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Arthur Kunkel IV</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2/26/95</td>
<td>Warren</td>
<td>KY 2629, (Old Scottsville Road) White metal cross near tree</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Penny Patterson</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10/31/95</td>
<td>Allen</td>
<td>KY 1332 Black wooden cross and flowers</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>Ollie M. Moore Eva Lee Moore</td>
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<td>Butler</td>
<td>William H. Natcher Parkway Red and pink ribbons</td>
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<td>Christopher L. Scott</td>
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<td>3/11/95</td>
<td>Warren</td>
<td>US 880 (Hobson Lane) Standing styrofoam heart</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Edmonson</td>
<td>KY 259 White wooden cross and flowers</td>
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<td>Bradley Shaw</td>
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<td>6/12/92</td>
<td>Warren</td>
<td>KY 1320, Girkin-Boiling Springs Road Two white crosses with flowers attached to opposite sides of tree</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>Jeff Gordon</td>
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<td>Barren</td>
<td>KY 249 Varnished wooden cross with flowers</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Robert Bradley</td>
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<td>KY 249 White cross with flowers</td>
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<td>KY 1435 (Barren River Road) White cross attached to a fence post</td>
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<td>Laura Ann Smith</td>
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<td>KY 99 Standing styrofoam cross arrangement</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>John Greenwell</td>
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<td>Beech Bend Road Unpainted cross attached to a tree</td>
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<td>Edmonson</td>
<td>KY 187 and KY 238 White wooden cross mounted on metal highway post</td>
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<td>unknown (male)</td>
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WORKS CITED


