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My Grandfather Is Buried There

I finally visit the Los Angeles National Cemetery to meditate on my most personal and permanent connection to Westwood.

By [Anne Louise Bannon](#) | [Email the author](#) | May 27, 2011 [Print](#)

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It happens every time I drive past the Los Angeles National Cemetery in Westwood, as I have done hundreds of times before. One simple thought whispers through my brain, quietly shoving aside the emails I need to send, the phone calls I need to make, the contact lenses and the library hold I must pick up.

"My grandfather is buried there."

The thought arrests me as I'm trying to figure out which questions I need to ask at this next news conference, the conversation I'm engaged in with whomever I happen to be with, whatever bit of relational angst I'm trying to unravel.

"My grandfather is buried there. And I have never seen his grave. I should check it out."

So today is the day. We're on the cusp of the Memorial Day Weekend and while Grandpa Bannon did not die during his service in World War I, or I would not be here, it still seems a good time to finally find his grave site.

I don't know why I've avoided doing this. Maybe it's because of all the emails, phone calls, errands, conversations that, like everyone else, fill my life. But mostly I suspect that it has more to do with the fact that I never knew Grandpa.

I was a young kid when he died and all I really have is this shadowy memory of him driving me to visit him and Grandma at their apartment in Los Angeles. Grandma and I went on to have lunch at one of the Wilshire Boulevard department stores—a very elegant thing to back in the day. Grandpa probably drove because Grandma didn't drive. I keep thinking I must have been around 4 during that visit. But that doesn't seem right, either, because I'm pretty sure I was 4 when he died.

The only image I really know is of a gaunt old man not quite smiling in one of my parents' wedding photos.

My dad has never really talked about his father and I don't know if it's just because I haven't asked right or if there was some other reason for the distance. It could have been the era Dad grew up in: He was born during the Great Depression, the third child of four. Grandpa supported the family (as far as I know) as a salesman and was often gone.

But it's Memorial Day, and while Grandpa survived his service, it's time to find his grave and see what there is to see, and maybe find a deeper connection to the man who, though I didn't know him, is still part of me.

It's a perfect day for it. The sky is crystal blue as only our LA skies can get when the breeze is coming in off the ocean. That same breeze is softly blowing across the green lawn, taking the edge off the sun's heat while leaving the brightness intact.

I check in at the administration building. There's a small kiosk just outside the office door with a computer screen and a small sign inviting me to find a grave, with a

note not to push the screen too hard. I type in my last name —Grandpa's last name—and sure enough there are six Bannons that pop up. One of them is John Henry Bannon. My grandfather, interred in November 1964, which startles me.

If he died in 1964, then I was 6 when he died and that visit with him and Grandma must have happened when I was 5 or so. Now I know that about him.

I decide to walk to the grave site listed instead of driving. It's in the section near the corner of Wilshire Boulevard and Veteran Avenue, over by the Memorial, and as I walk along, I look at several of the grave plaques along the cemetery road. I'm struck by how many women there are. There aren't that many, but still a lot more than I expected. Many of them served in World War II.

Also interesting is that each plaque is engraved with the name, the birth state (or place), the rank of the decedent and what war he or she served in and the dates he or she lived. Not one of the plaques that I see shows someone born in California, and since most of the people buried in this section were World War II vets with a smattering of World War I vets, that says a lot about our city.

It's all plaques on this side of the cemetery. The headstones are on the other side. I debate calling the cemetery director to ask why.

I feel my insides starting to go a little queer as I approach the section where my grandfather is buried. I'm still not sure how I'm going to react when I see his grave plaque. But then there it is. Born in 1892, he was 72 when he died. I hadn't thought he was that old. And he was a corporal in World War I, which is a little bit more than I know about him now.

But my feelings are not cooperating. I feel blank and that makes me feel a little sad. Then I think about when my daughter was around 6 or 7, she suddenly went into a spate of crying for her Great-Grandpa Bannon and her Great-Grandpa Martin (both dead long before she was born) because she would never know them. And that's the loss I feel.

I don't know if John Henry Bannon served with distinction or even where he served during his time with the U.S. Army. I don't know how he met Ellen Sweet, the woman who became my grandmother. I don't know how he felt about his days on the road, struggling to sell enough to cover his salary and bring home money for his family. I don't even know what he sold.

But he produced my dad, who has blessed me with a love of learning and curiosity, a gift for telling stories and a passion for living. Dad got all that from somewhere, and it wasn't all his mom. And maybe that's enough for now.

I'll probably do some records searches. Bug my dad again. See what more there is to learn about John Henry Bannon. But for now, it's time to get back in the car and start thinking about emails to send and phone calls to make. I gotta pick up my contacts and, drat, I forgot to pick up my book on hold at the library.

And yet, as I look back at the white memorial statue on Wilshire Boulevard, I think once again, "My grandfather—my history—is buried there."

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