

by Bill Ellis

On Saturday, August 7, 2004, I made an unplanned trip to an old cemetery located at the head of Cabin Creek, Kanawha County, West Virginia. The last time I was there was the day my grandmother Ellis was buried more than 50 years ago on the hill above the little coal mining community of Republic. The cemetery remains as the final silent reminder that living people once inhabited the surrounding territory.

Bob Lawrence, a friend of many years, took Kitty and me, my cousin Ann and her husband, Mack Day, on the trip which had its moments of uncertainty. Leaving the smooth asphalt road, we traveled on gravel and finally mud, ruts and weeds. At least three times we were not sure we would reach our destination.

At the cemetery Ann and I felt the tug of sorrow and heartache. Her dad—my Uncle Buck and my dad's only brother—is buried there. Only his grave has a permanent stone, one made by his sons-in-law whom he never knew and lettered in the wet concrete by his daughters Louise and Ann. My grandmother, Octavia Hodge Ellis, was buried next to him.

Next to her is my grandfather, William Hamilton Ellis, who died when my dad was nine years old. On the end is the grave of Aunt Clara. A stone, just an ordinary rock, had CEC on it, which we could barely detect. She died at the birth of my cousin, George Carr. She was married to Monroe Carr, hence the initials CEC.

A strange feeling came over me, tears came to my eyes as I realized that parts of my heritage and life were buried in unmarked graves. Owen D. Young, an American lawyer of the last century, gave us these words about the grave: "An angel's arm can't snatch me from the grave; legions of angels can't confine me there." I recalled the day when I stood there with Clarence Ellis, my dad and Grandma's son, a strong and noble man of Christian character. We shed our

Is Dying the End of Living?

How do we
deal with
death when it
comes with
such finality?

tears together as they dropped to the soil of a freshly dug grave.

My friends, Wayne and Doris Neary Maddox, lost 13 close family members through death in less than two years. Included were three brothers and two sisters plus four uncles, two aunts, a cousin and a nephew. Four were victims of cancer.

How do we deal with death when it comes with such finality? Where do we find comfort and peace? Naturally, we turn to other family members, friends and neighbors. Words from the Bible offer comfort to those who are believers in its ancient message. Passages like the following offered encouragement and strength to Christians like Wayne and Doris.

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints (Psalm 116:15, NKJV).

John, the beloved disciple, gives us these words of Jesus: "He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live" (John 11:25, NKJV).

St. Paul exclaims: "How we thank God, who gives us victory over sin and death through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (1 Corinthians 15:57 NLT).

Dying is not the end of life for those who believe in Jesus Christ. It is only the beginning of forever. □

© ASSIST News Service

Bill Ellis is a syndicated columnist and convention and conference speaker on every continent. He and his wife, Kitty, live in West Virginia.