

# Tender signs of love displayed years after loved ones die

Coins still rest on Conner Greig's grave stone engraved with a baby angel at St. Ignatius, Hickory. Toddler Blaine, age 3 at the time of his brother's death, placed the money there a dozen years ago so Conner would be able to call home.

Now age 15, The John Carroll School, Bel Air, 10th-grader continues to visit his sibling's grave with parents Susan Larney Greig and Blaine Greig, and 18-year-old-sister Allie. Conner now would have been 13; he died in 1995 at age 2 with a brain tumor.

With gravesite visits, photos around the house and the family "using" Conner as their "messenger angel," Mrs. Greig keeps their brother's memory alive for Blaine and Allie who were too young to remember him.

"I knew that would happen," said Mrs. Greig, alumni relations coordinator at John Carroll. "I purposefully keep the pictures around, not so much for me but for them." The Greigs honor the baby's anniversary of death and July birthday, leaving balloons by the grave and a small cake topped with candles. Stuffed animals and Happy Meals have been left as well.

"He'll always be a baby to me," said Mrs. Greig whose father, Bill Larney, a parishioner of St. Francis de Sales in Abingdon, keeps the grave well supplied with flowers. Mrs. Greig's mother, Joan, "uses Conner more than anybody," said Mrs. Greig. "Driving late at night, she'll say, 'OK, Conner, get me home.'"

Although she parks her car next to the grave marker weekly while attending Mass, the 47-year-old mom doesn't feel as if she is still mourning. "That lasted for the first 2-3 years," she said. "It was really hard. It took me a while to like God again. I was angry, but not anymore."

Although occasional tears may erupt while dusting his picture during a Saturday morning cleaning spree, Mrs. Greig rebounds quickly. She kisses his face, sets the photo back in place and says to herself, 'OK, I'm done with that.'

From where she sits at the New Cathedral Cemetery on Old Frederick Road, Baltimore, office manager Anne Lucido has been looking out the window toward the graveyard for about 36 years. "There's one woman who comes every single day - the little lady in the green car."

Her observations of typical graveyard behavior is that people come back shortly after a burial - a week later, or some for the entire month. "Everyone does it differently," said the 78-year-old.

Birthdays and anniversaries of death prompt graveyard visits as well as aging. "They get to an age when they want to come back to visit those they loved, those who raised them." Some people come back years later who haven't visited their mother's grave in 10 years. What Mrs. Lucido also sees is people visiting the cemetery to tackle a genealogy project. "That's the happy part of it," she said.

It's common to see flowers on graves in the circa 1871 cemetery, said the parishioner of St. Agnes, Catonsville; balloons are the rarest. Holidays bring pumpkins at Halloween and Christmas trees near Dec. 25. Some people place notes on the ground.

"We try to help them out. We are very good at that here," said Mrs. Lucido as she spoke about talking to people in their grief. "That's why I'm here. I love people."