

PACIFIC SOUTHWEST DISTRICT

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Roses in Remembrance

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED what happens to all the beautiful roses after the show is over? After the sale to the public concludes, what happens to the rest of them? They used to be donated to hospitals and nursing homes. Due to unknown chemicals or pests that may be on the flowers and allergies, most facilities won't accept them as donations anymore. Since 2018, they have been used to decorate the graves of our beloved veterans at the nearest National Cemetery. We call this "Roses in Remembrance".

How did this all come about? During the breakdown after the San Diego Rose Society's (SDRS) Annual Rose Show in April 2018, as a rose grower myself, I watched beautiful roses being tossed into waste baskets. Those I had purchased were going to decorate my Dad's grave and many other sites of fallen military friends and family interred at Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery. I asked if I could take some that were being thrown away. Of course, they said yes, and I filled up my car and was on my way. After spending time, cutting and arranging flowers for several family members' graves, a novel idea bloomed. Collecting the flowers was easy, but who could I ask to help? Of course, I know, my best friend and another San Diego Rose Society member, Christine Epstein. We have given more than 70

years of service to our country, she as an FBI Special Agent and myself as a NCIS Special Agent. We come from military families and have traveled the globe in service to our country, and now in our retirements, besides roses, honoring and helping veterans, charities for law enforcement and animals are our volunteer causes. She, like me, is always up for something new and different. I asked Christine, she was in.

During a committee meeting prior to the 2018 American Rose Society National Convention, I asked if it would be possible for the two of us to collect the roses instead of discarding them. "OF COURSE, that would be fantastic" was the response. Since we had volunteered for tear down, the logistics were easy. I told them about our idea of taking them to a National Cemetery and decorating graves. If you attended, you know how many roses there were in the show room. So many absolutely gorgeous roses, and luckily, most of them ended up in the bed of my truck. On an absolutely classic sunny late October day, Christine and I decorated more than 150 graves at Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery with about 400 beautiful homegrown roses. Only a few of the fragile single petal roses did not survive the journey from the convention center to the vases at the cemetery. We also gave trimmed roses

BELOW: Roses in Remembrance at Miramar National Cemetery, photo Mary M. Shanley





TOP: Roses in Remembrance at Rosecrans National Cemetery; ABOVE: Roses being sent to Miramar, and LEFT: Roses being sent to Rosecrans; all photos Mary M. Shanley.

to folks who were there that day burying their loved ones. From start to finish (cutting, placing vases, watering, cleaning up), we could enjoy our efforts in three hours. Even the bees found us! It made an absolutely stunning memorial decoration. Many people and most of the staff at the cemetery stopped to thank us for our efforts.

Because all flowers are picked up on Fridays, they would not be there for the 2018 Veterans' Day or Marine Corps Birthday. As a side note, the film crew for the TOP GUN 2 movie with Tom Cruise was setting up positions for filming scenes nearby the floral display. Hopefully, we will see this floral memorial in the movie (*at no cost to the movie producers*).



“In honor of those who gave the ultimate sacrifice in service to the United States of America and families they left behind. Their sacrifice will not be forgotten.”

Nashville National Cemetery

Before leaving, I photographed what we did and shared it with the SDRS via email so they knew what happened to their beautiful roses. Numerous members were moved because like myself, they also had their loved ones buried at Fort Rosecrans. At another SDRS chapter meeting, Linda Clark, SDRS and ARS PSWD Director, asked if we would fly to Nashville, Tennessee for the 2019 ARS National Show. Christine and I made our tentative plans right away.

In April 2019, we used the roses from the SDRS district show to decorate the newer Miramar National Cemetery in San Diego, California. It is a new national

cemetery located on the Western side of the Marine Corps Air Station Miramar. It was opened because the Fort Rosecrans National is full. We decorated more than 100 gravesites, including Christine's loved one from a recent passing. We had many family members stop by to ask about the flowers already decorating their loved one's gravesite, and they were so appreciative. One lady, visiting her husband's grave, was so visibly moved by what we were doing that she helped find additional vases and put flowers on many gravesites.

In October 2019, Christine and I flew to Nashville for the last day of the show. At the conclusion of the

public sale Linda Clark, Christine and I started gathering all the viable roses to take to the Nashville National Cemetery. We filled every available empty box to the absolute brim with roses. With little room to drive the car, Christine and I were off the Nashville National Cemetery, a historic cemetery constituted after the Civil War. It contains thousands of graves for unknown soldiers and three (3) Medal of Honor recipients. On that cold rainy Saturday evening, Christine and I began our task finding the right area to decorate. After driving the entire cemetery, we selected a round plateau of graves on a hill. Then we collected the plastic cemetery vases, cut the roses, and placed them on each gravesite. It was obvious this old historic cemetery was not visited often as very few graves were decorated. We used the few viable plastic vases, and then found the water was completely shut off. We stayed in the cemetery until past sundown. Using the headlights from the car, we decorated until the gates were shutting, and the caretaker asked us to leave. We took the remaining roses back to the hotel. We cut them down and used the sink, wastebaskets and bathtub to keep them fresh. On Sunday, we brought 20 gallons of water to finish the task. We ended up decorating more than 100 veterans' gravesites and monuments, including SSgt. Barry Sadler, U.S. Army veteran who wrote the song, "The Ballad of the Green Beret" and three (3) Medal of Honor recipients and many, many unknown soldiers from the Civil War.

At the request of Linda Clark, we still plan to be at the ARS rose show in Colorado Springs, Colorado in late August 2020. Christine and I will pick up the roses and this time deliver them to the new National Cemetery in Colorado Springs. We welcome anyone who would like to join us. We totally understand many who are showing or working the rose shows are too tired and probably too tired of roses to want to do this afterwards. We try to find veterans from each war and also any Medal of Honor recipients.

So, why do we do this? Christine and I do this voluntarily; we use our own money for the travel and the expenses we incur and we never ask for recompense. Having served our country ourselves, this is another way to honor all those veterans who served and their spouses who are laid to rest with their veteran. It is such a shame to waste all these beautiful roses that were tended to so lovingly by all of you. Instead of tossing them away, we take our time to place them on graves, and remember the people,

their service and some who most likely haven't ever had a visitor. In our small and quiet way, we thank them for their service to our country and our freedoms.

The rose is America's Floral Emblem as designated by President Ronald Reagan in 1986. There is no more perfect flower to decorate the graves of America's veterans. Christine and I are honored and humbled by doing this. We are so very thankful to the American Rose Society and local chapters for allowing us access to these amazing roses. We would love to continue this project and welcome anyone who would like to help. We encourage each chapter to do so after their local shows. It could be used as a community project by local students. I am always available for questions via email at mmshanley85@gmail.com if we can help in any way.

LEFT: Headstone at Nashville National Cemetery; BELOW: Roses taken to Nashville National Cemetery; photos Mary Shanley.

