

Book Excerpt for
Sid Shroyer
Author of *When Once Destroyed*

From chapter 43, "Witness"

(Among seven thousand graves moved, officially in a "dignified manner," to make way for the Upper Wabash Valley Flood Control Project was that of my grandmother, as witnessed by my brother, Stan)

"The Army Corps of Engineers had to locate a close relative by phone," Tom Synder said, "for purpose of witnessing. They had to contact one person. I don't think they had to contact anybody else. They mailed stuff, too. A lot of people were in the process of moving. They didn't have the same phone anymore and it became hard to contact some people," Tom said. "Seventy to 75 per cent of the families of the people's graves being moved never responded."

Stan said that, when he arrived, "They were digging in the front of the cemetery in the oldest graves where Dad had two infant sisters. Dad said that, in those graves nothing was usually found and dirt was placed in a coffee can and that was what was reburied."

The "coffee can" was actually a "burial box" (Louisville). A diagram in the 1968 Army report shows that it was made out of an inch-thick "gray color lumber," three-feet long, a foot-and-a-half wide and one-foot high. Snyder, who worked for the Corps of Engineers told me that, "The burial boxes were used for real old graves. They would dig down and if they found a handle off of a coffin, or if they found soil that was a different color, they would put that in that box."

Tom wasn't a witness to the process, but his dad Fred was. "The boxes were backup for what they found," Tom said. "Dad told me that in one case they got down to a casket that did not have a vault. They tried to get under it with straps so they could lift it. He said they got it up above ground and the casket broke in half. All there was, he said, was some long red hair that fell from the casket. It was a windy day. That team of guys who were in charge, they were running across the cemetery gathering all that up, trying to keep it so they could move it."

The smiling guys with no teeth.

"A dignified manner."

"Grandma's grave was dug up with a backhoe," Stan said. "The burial vault was brought up with chains. I don't remember the coffin. I think the whole thing was loaded on a truck and transported to the new cemetery. We all just stood around and watched, not much to say. Then we took Grandpa back to Windfall and we went home, on a summer day.

"What I was told, beyond what I saw, I heard in the car, from Grandpa. He was telling Dad. Convicts. It was just one of those things that sticks with you from when you were young."