

To Marietta with Love

By M. Regina Cram

I visited my baby sister today. I don't do this often enough, and the fact that she's 2½ hours away is a lousy excuse. When my husband and I were dating, we'd drive 4 hours each way just to spend an afternoon together. In comparison, driving to my sister's place is a piece of cake.

The neighborhood was quiet when I arrived, aside from someone mowing a lawn before the onset of heavy rain. The area was so beautiful and serene, full of weeping willows and lush greenery.

I parked off to the side and made my way to my sister's residence, which is marked by a marble stone. It reads, "Marietta Tierney Waite, 1959 – 1993."

The only place I can visit my baby sister is at the cemetery.

Standing there, I thought of Mary Magdelene arriving at Jesus's empty tomb. "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" asked an angel. I asked myself the same question.

Marietta is buried beside my grandparents. My feisty mother, who lived to be almost 95, is also buried there. For years Mom's name was listed on the tombstone as, "Mary Patricia Arroll, 1930 - _____, with the year to be filled in after she died. I'm pretty matter of fact about death, but seeing a tombstone with the name of someone I had lunch with that week was odd.

I stood at the grave and spoke quietly to Marietta. I apologized, yet again, for being such a miserable older sister, such a know-it-all. I told her about her two boys, who are now kind young men. But mostly I wept. You're not supposed to bury your baby sister. You're supposed to argue about boys and borrow each other's clothes, then stuff them under the bed until they're needed for something special. We should be laughing about the time our older sister hit a boy over the head with a baseball bat because she had a crush on him.

But Marietta's candles stand forever at 34. I'm not ready for her to be gone. I want to share a room together in the nursing home with an imaginary line down the middle. Instead, I grieve for a future that has long since ended.

Visiting my sister did not lessen my grief. If anything, it highlighted how long it might be until we're reunited in eternity. How I yearn for that. I also yearn to be united with grandchildren who were born too soon, and for our son, Benjamin, whose twin sister survived the pregnancy while Benjamin did not.

Why must such pain be part of our lives?

All I know is that Jesus endured far more pain than I ever will, and I know He can be trusted. So I cling to His robe as He leads me through the darkness, and He carries me when I am too weak to stand.