

**Testimony for the House Republican Policy Committee
Suburban Memorial Garden Cemetery**

Annette Fisher

September 5, 2018

Hello, my name is Annette Fisher and I am a resident of Manchester Township. I am here before you today to ask for your help in righting a wrong that has affected many residents in our local community for far too long. Also to request that changes be made in our system to prevent this from ever happening to any community in Pennsylvania again.

I am sure you are well aware of the circumstances surrounding Suburban Memorial Gardens, located in Conewago Township, York County, Pennsylvania, but you may not be aware of why this is so very important to me. I'd like to share a bit of my back story so that you can understand why.

My father, Kurvin Luther Hess, Jr. served our County in World War II. I'd like to read a letter he received in June of 1946 after his separation from service.

“My dear Mr. Hess: I have addressed this letter to reach you after all the formalities of your separation from active service are completed. I have done so because, without formality but as clearly as I know how to say it, I want the Navy's pride in you, which it is my privilege to express, to reach into your civil life and to remain with you always.

You have served in the greatest Navy in the world.

It crushed two enemy fleets at once, receiving their surrenders only four months apart.

It brought our land-based airpower within bombing range of the enemy, and set our ground armies on the beachheads of final victory.

It performed the multitude of tasks necessary to support these military operations.

No other Navy at any time has done so much. For your part in these achievements you deserve to be proud as long as you live. The Nation which you served at a time of crisis will remember you with gratitude.

The best wishes of the Navy go with you into civilian life. Good luck!

Sincerely yours, James Forrestal”

My parents married in October of 1946. I am the youngest of 4 children and the only daughter. I was born in 1967. My father passed away unexpectedly in January of 1970, leaving my mother and I when I was only 2 ½ years old. The only memories of my father I have are from pictures and stories from family and friends. You can imagine how tough it can be for a mother to raise a small child without her husband. My brothers all helped but were all older and married with families of their own to care for. The bond between my mother and I grew very strong over the years. Her quiet but constant love helped to form me into who I am today.

My mother put her trust into a small local cemetery, Suburban Memorial Gardens. She trusted that the cemetery would provide perpetual care for her loved one, as well as for her someday. My mother and I made many trips each year to the cemetery where we would trim the marker and corner markers and place flowers on the grave. The most memorable visits for me were Memorial Day, as my mother grew peonies and she would carefully cut a bouquet and we would take them up to put in the vase on our marker.

Fast forward to 2014, when I had to bury my mother, my best friend, my confidant. I continued the tradition of setting flowers on my parent's grave. As time went by, each visit it seemed that the care of the cemetery was dwindling. Again Fast Forward to Mother's Day 2017. When I arrived at the cemetery, the grass was overgrown, the trash was overflowing and my heart was broken as the final resting place for my parents was no longer a peaceful place.

Our system has failed them. We must do something to right this wrong as those interred in this peaceful place deserve respect and honor and to be cared for unconditionally until the end of time.

Please help me and the other families whose hearts are hurting because of these wrong doings. Please make cemetery owners accountable for actions. I feel that in this case, the Martin's should not be able to profit from the sale of the cemetery, it should be taken from them, their wrong doings should be made right. The cemetery has been running without maps and documentation for far too long. These items need to be turned over to a responsible party, committee, government agency so that more mistakes are not made.

I believe that cemetery owners should be required to have insurance to cover incidents just like this. They should be held accountable to a higher court, each and every year, as they are handling funds that do not belong to them, but to families to ensure their loved ones are taken care of.

May God Bless those who are currently caring for the cemetery grounds, mowing with their own equipment, paying for the gas to operate that equipment, giving of their own time to care for those who cared for them in life.

We need your help to make this happen and I hope that my story will touch your heart in some way that will create a passion for you to right these wrongs and set us on a proper path.