



Beauty for ASHES

Musk thistle is common on the Wyoming landscape. These thistles are usually considered pests by farmers. This one, pictured left, was the only display of color in the baked brown, summer landscape, of the Wyoming high plains. Everything and everyone has a story. From ashes to beauty, from pest to splash of color, from despair to hope, from dark to light. The site pictured here in this photo-illustration, is at Martin's Cove, a memorial to some of the pioneers who lost their lives during their nineteenth century westward trek. Could these hardy, hopeful (sometimes misguided) pioneers, have known that their ashes – frozen misery, starvation, despair, death – would turn to beauty? That millions would honour them and tens of thousands would travel to follow and memorialize their trail? They could not know any such thing. They kept going against all odds, simply trusting that somehow their zeal would have meaning. They clung like barnacles to the Old Testament promise that, "God would appoint unto them that mourn ... beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning (Isaiah 61:3)." Like a rose, thorns and beauty, Martin's Cove and all that the survivors built thereafter in the American West is a reminder of beauty arising from ashes. Similarly, my first ancestor in Australia arrived in 1835 as a 14 year transported convict. He was sentenced to seven years of hard labor, effectively a lifetime banishment, given the distance of Australia with its forbidding landscape, from the homeland. His was a minor offense. He was simply part of the great "sweeping of the streets" that took place in the British Isles during the second half of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century. Hence, Australia began as a penal colony. Yet, it is now one of the more robust constitutional democracies on Planet Earth. My earliest Australian forebear lived a life of severe drudgery and hard labor. Apparently the liquor that was part of his convict rations, a "keep them quiet" strategy, never quite left him in peace. Now, my family and I live a life of privilege and freedom in both Australia and America. One of my personal maxims is to believe in (and work for) *happy endings*. I tell myself that if the ending of a story is sad then it isn't the ending, there's another chapter to be written. My personal faith in the goodness of God is a source of hope. My longish journey on this planet reaffirms to me constantly, that the promise of beauty for ashes belongs to all of us, regardless of faith or race or circumstance. Per ardua ad astra – with strength to the stars – was my high school's motto. More than sixty years after leaving that school behind, the motto still rings true. § PHOTO BY KSB

VERITAS
CHRONICLES