



**From: Kelli Williams, Chief Communications Officer  
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**Date: May 27, 2016**

**For release: Immediate**

### **On the Job with Kim Inman: Storyteller**

At first glance, White Rose Cemetery looks like any other cemetery: a mausoleum, rows of graves, flowers, flags and headstones marking the lives of those buried here. But talk to Cemetery Relations Coordinator Kim Inman for just a minute and you'll see there is more to the City of Bartlesville-owned cemetery than meets the eye. Everything here, from the flowers on the graves to the symbols on the stones, helps tell the stories of the past — a past that Inman is dedicated to preserving.

“The history of the people who are here is just fascinating to me,” she says. “We have a concert pianist, a professional baseball player. Anyone with a street named after them in Bartlesville is here. But to me, the most interesting people here are not the pioneers of the city — it's the people who worked at places like the smelters and the factories and the brick plant.

“They're the people who, at face value, appear to be the least interesting — they just lived here and worked here; they had normal jobs and families. But every one of them has a story, and they are all interesting to me. The things these people went through just to survive, just by living in the era that they did — it's just amazing. And the ways they died — from things that we can take a pill for now — it really makes you reflect and appreciate how easy we have it now, even though we don't think we do.”

### **A working cemetery**

Inman is responsible for managing operations at White Rose Cemetery, 804 W. 11<sup>th</sup> Street in Bartlesville. With the past permeating every inch of the landscaped grounds, the cemetery is arguably one of the city's most historic locations.

White Rose is the final resting place for some of Bartlesville's best known public figures — including George Keeler and Nellie Johnstone — as well as many other, lesser known residents, some whose deaths date back to when Oklahoma was Indian Territory. Despite its rich history, White Rose is still a working cemetery that continues to serve the needs of the community today, Inman says.

“I think one of the biggest misperceptions the public has about the cemetery is that there aren’t any spaces left and they can no longer purchase spaces here,” says Inman. “That is not the case. While many of Bartlesville’s founding fathers and their families are here, White Rose is very much still a working cemetery and we still have burials here. We have plenty of spaces available in the older section and are planning to open more spaces in the near future.”

The City of Bartlesville purchased the 20-acre tract in 1889 from the Cherokee Nation to construct a cemetery “closer to town” than the two then-existing cemeteries so that the recently departed could be transported more quickly during inclement weather. Aptly named City Cemetery originally, the name was later changed to Union Cemetery and finally became White Rose in 1905.

Today, Inman is happy to give visitors a tour of the grounds, pointing out rose bushes that first bloomed before statehood, and the mausoleum, which was privately owned and donated to the City — along with a trust for expenses — by Bartlesville resident Hugh Bryant upon his death in 1958.

### **History: Passion discovered**

Regarded by many of her peers as “personable and wickedly funny,” Inman began her career with the City of Bartlesville in 1996, as part-time help with the Bartlesville Public Library. It was there that she discovered her love of history, she says.

“It was part time, in the Local and Family History Room,” she says. “A lot of it was research about people — pioneers who lived here and are buried here.”

Inman says it was at a Bartlesville Area History Museum fundraiser, which she was attending as a BAHM board member, that she saw a notice advertising the job at White Rose Cemetery.

“There was a job posted on the bulletin board for a cemetery relations coordinator, and I had no idea what that meant,” she says. “But it was full time, and I needed a full time job.”

And, thanks to her mom, Inman happened to have an affinity for cemeteries.

“I tease my mom that other kids got to go to Disneyland and I went to cemeteries,” she says. “My mom was really in to cemeteries so she would take me, and I just found them to be so interesting — the histories of the people, you know. Even now (at White Rose) sometimes I see parents with their kids and they’re doing math problems and teaching them how to read the stones, looking at the death date and the birth date and doing subtraction to see how old the person was. That’s kind of what I did.”

And she got to go to Disneyland, too, she concedes.

Inman took over the White Rose post in September 2001 and used her skills to help modernize the cemetery's records, which previously consisted of just a few basic facts.

"A lot of times I'll find information that I can put online, for the public and other researchers," she says, noting the information comes from a variety of sources, including obituaries, census records, stone reading and funeral home records.

Inman also used those early years to create a location system for the graves, making it easier for people to find specific graves, and digitizing cemetery information, which improved record keeping and made information readily available online.

Today, Inman's job could well be one of the most varied in the entire City. Her days consist of completing vast amounts of research and preservation relating to many aspects of Washington County's history, as well as assisting grieving families with service arrangements, landscaping and organizing cemetery events. She also does presentations on historical documentation, specifically tombstone symbolism, which Inman finds fascinating.

"Each symbol represents something different about the person. You can look at a tombstone and don't think it says much, but if you look at the symbolism, you can find out a lot about the person. That's fascinating to me," she says.

Evidence of Inman's labor can be found on the City of Bartlesville's website, <http://www.cityofbartlesville.org/city-services/white-rose-cemetery/> as well as Find a Grave Cemetery Records, <http://www.findagrave.com>, for which Inman serves as a volunteer.

Her efforts have proved so successful, she recently earned a Citation of Merit from the State Historic Preservation Office of the Oklahoma Historical Society "in recognition of outstanding accomplishments contributing to the preservation of Oklahoma's heritage through efforts to document and share the story of and preserve the historic White Rose Cemetery."

Another of Inman's favorite projects is her work to ensure that all veterans' graves have headstones, the funding for which comes from a federal government program.

### **The events:**

#### **Memorial Day**

Inman is charged with planning and overseeing three of Bartlesville's most popular events — two of which raise money for the cemetery — including the annual Memorial Day event, set for 9 a.m. May 30 at the cemetery.

Anyone is welcome to attend the free event, which includes participation from the American Legion, the American Heritage Association, the Blue Star Mothers and the Patriot Guard Riders. Last year about 130 people attended, including local dignitaries and a Pearl Harbor survivor, Inman says.

### **Mausoleum Stories**

“Mausoleum Stories” — an event that drew nearly 150 spectators during its first showing last year — is one of Inman’s favorites, she says, because it allows the stories of the White Rose occupants to be told.

“I love Mausoleum Stories so much because we portray the people buried here who I think are the most interesting,” she says. “Marilyn Johnson with Theater Bartlesville is the script writer, and she is so good.”

It is Inman who does the research for the five or six “characters” portrayed in the annual event — usually played by a family member of the deceased or a local actor, Inman says.

“The actors wear period costume, representing the time that their person lived,” she says. “(Nationally known playwright) Joe Sears provides posters and the set, which is in the mausoleum... Marilyn is able to take the lives of very different people, who lived in different eras, and make us see how we’re all more connected than we are different.”

Money collected for the event, as well as from the Luminary Service event, is used for beautification projects at the cemetery.

### **Luminary Service**

The creation of the Luminary Service event was Inman’s way of helping those who have lost loved ones better survive the holidays.

“The Luminary Service is always held the Saturday before Thanksgiving, because the holidays are a hard time for people that have lost someone,” she says. The event includes a guest speaker, “usually a pastor or grief counselor,” music and a reading of the names of those being remembered.

Luminaries can be purchased for \$5 by anyone wishing to have their loved one recognized. Attendance is not required.

### **The challenge**

Asked what she finds most challenging about her job, Inman hesitates: The most challenging thing is not something she minds, she says, but seeing people suffer is hard.

“It’s hard when people are really grieving. Especially if their person is a child — I just can’t even imagine that,” she says. “I was told by a funeral director a long time ago that he couldn’t do anything for the situation — all he could was make things as easy as he could for the person making the arrangements. So I’ve always remembered that and tried to do that for people. I don’t know that it’s challenging, but it can be the hardest part of my job.”

Inman’s best days, she says, come when something she said or did made a difficult process a little easier for someone.

“I try to get a feel for what people need: Do they need to talk about their person or do they need to be distracted,” she says. “A lot of people come back, usually within the first year, and they talk to me. Their person is here, and they just want to touch base. It’s always nice to see them, and to see that they are working through the grieving process and doing better.”

### **The artist**

In her spare time, Inman spends time with her family — son Camden Inman and daughter Jordan Inman Smith. And, using “mostly oils and charcoal,” she paints and draws portraits, which she sells through the Bartlesville Art Association.

Inman’s compassion for people, both living and deceased, shows in her art and in every aspect of her work. It is what drives her to help the grieving and work so hard to uncover the stories of those buried at White Rose Cemetery.

Showing her visitor clippings from the local newspaper in the early 1900s, Inman reads: “A ‘special’ police officer was mortally wounded by a gunshot, bleeding to death in the street. The story questions whether it was murder,” she says. “They concluded that it wasn’t but they don’t elaborate on why.

“There are so many mysteries here,” she says.

And Inman is determined to uncover them all.