

# Belfast, Northern Ireland

1.

Walking along Falls Road—a street known until now only from a song by Nancy Griffith—my feet reach five-four-six, wander into the cemetery: "Established 1869," the sign tells me.

I find "1870" engraved on one headstone. I decide that others, too overgrown or weathered to read, could well be the requisite number of months older. And as I meander at random—wondering why, in the last century plus 36 years, so few have found words more original than "In loving memory of" or, occasionally, "Pray for the soul of"—a marker with this latter request catches my eye:

"Pray for the soul of my dear son,  
Desmond Healy, shot  
by her majesty's forces  
9th of August 1971."

And I remember, suddenly, why there are so many songs in loving memory of, all the reasons I have come to visit this city.

2.

Later I return, with a map to guide me, find the formal plots: one, flag flying, for "those who gave their lives"; the other with its "Role of Honor" beginning in 1789. You too might be stirred by the dedication here to prisoners "who died in the hunger strike, H-block, Long Kesh, March to October 1981." Even this ignorant American knows the first on the list: Bobby Sands. (I stand for a brief silent tribute.

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.....)

My eyes examine each name carved into the white marble.

But as I turn to depart, those unknown before have already slipped away. And I think again of the one I expect to recall in years to come thanks to a mother, named Healy, because she used to have a son.

Steve Bloom  
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