

Remembering All The Boys

by Elvia Bautista, as part of NPR's *This I Believe* Series

I believe that everyone deserves flowers on their grave.

When I go to the cemetery to visit my brother, it makes me sad to see graves—just the cold stones—and no flowers on them.

They look lonely, like nobody loves them. I believe this is the worst thing in the world—that loneliness. No one to visit you and brush off the dust from your name and cover you with color. A grave without any flowers looks like the person has been forgotten. And then what was the point of even living—to be forgotten?

Almost every day my brother's grave has something new on it: Flowers from me, or candles from the Dollar Store or an image of the Virgin Maria or shot glasses. There's even some little Homies, these little toys that look like gangsters.

Once my brother's homies even put a bunch of marijuana on there for him—I think my mother took it away. I think she also took away the blue rag someone put there for him one day.

Sometimes, when I bring flowers, I fix the flowers on the graves around my brother's grave. Some of the headstones have birthdates near my brother's; they are young, too. But many of them, if they have any little toys or things on them, those are red.

All around my brother are boys who grew up to like red, making them the enemies of my brother. My brother was 16 when he was shot by someone who liked red, who killed him because he liked blue. And when I go to the cemetery I put flowers on the graves of the boys who liked red, too.

Sometimes I go to the cemetery with one of my best friends, who had a crush on a boy who liked red, who was killed at 18 by someone who liked blue. And we will go together and bring a big bunch of flowers, enough for both of these boys whose families are actually even from the same state in Mexico.

There is no one but me and a few of my friends who go to both graves. Some people think it's a bad idea. Some people think it's heroic.

I think they're both being silly. I don't go to try and disrespect some special rules or stop any kind of war. I go because I believe that no matter where you came from or what you believed in, when you die, you want flowers on your grave and people who visit you and remember you that way.

I'm not any kind of traitor or any kind of hero. I am the sister of Rogelio Bautista, and I say his name so you will hear it and be one more person that remembers him. I want everyone to remember all the boys, red and blue, in my cemetery. When we remember, we put flowers on their graves.

Listen to this essay read by the author, here: <http://thisibelieve.org/essay/21255/>