

## Swimming with Ortman

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Despite this story's strange title and topic, somehow it has touched my entire family. I hope it doesn't seem disrespectful or morbid to some of you that have not been to this location I've chosen to write about for this article. That was never my intention. I only want to share history with other lake-lovers and show the beauty of the many places that this lake has to offer. Bear with me on this one. For some of the greatest experiences in life lie just beyond the norm.

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My family has a special place on Dale Hollow where we love to play. We make a conscious effort to stop by a favorite point and swim when we are in the area. When we tube and ski, swim and play, we like to stop by and visit a friend or two on Kemper Flats area of Clark Bottom.

Not the least of our friends is Ortman. We've never met anyone else in the world by that name, but we love to stop by and swim with him. This little four-year-old has touched our hearts. His two younger sisters are here, too. Little Willia and Margaret share this shore also. Of course, most of the rest of the McCluskys are here too, and we share their spot just like we were one of the family. These folks always share.

But here's the twist. Young Ortman and his sisters died over one hundred years ago. Yeah, the McClusky family buried three infants and children in this old cemetery long before this lake came along or any of us boaters ever came into being. These lads and lasses loved this river even before we lake lovers enjoyed this vast and wonderful lake. So now you know our secret. We swim with the dead. Yeah, that sounds creepy, but it really isn't what you might make of it. For instance...

There is always topic for debate about the "moving" of the Dale Hollow graveyards. Of course, many were truly moved. But many were just too old to have anything left to dig. In these cases, only a few shovels of soil were removed. So quite frankly, no matter how badly a gravedigger wanted to remove a grave...often only a few odd shovels of "special" soil were taken along with the headstone. And that is exactly what we have here at the McClusky Cemetery...graves documented as moved. So no matter how black-and-white the Corps documentation seems to be, our friends at the McClusky Cemetery are both moved...and *not moved*. They are both. And that is where my heart lies. And Ortman lies there, too, for the record.

Which brings me to a strange and touching thought I'd like to share. Ortman's two sisters share a special memorial plaque that adorns my wall. The family descendants have donated it to my tiny history wall in my office here at Willow Grove. I now care for the special plaque created by the McClusky family for the loss of their first two children.

I happily display it for all to see. But young Ortman lived long enough to have his own headstone. And that perplexes me. Because I often visit him high on the hill at his headstone at St. John Cemetery above Lillydale Campground. But mostly, I enjoy his *spirit* out on the Kemper Flats at the old McClusky Cemetery. He and his sisters are easily found. Just look for the little spirits in the clay. They are side-by-side for eternity...or at least until our lake waves wash them into oblivion. So I suggest you do what my family does. Go visit young Ortman and his family. Do it before they wash away. They are patiently waiting for your visit...and perhaps a swim. They don't talk much, but they have plenty to share.



Here is a little poem I wrote a few years ago when I took my first swim with the McCluskys...long before I knew who they were. I now know the answers to my questions.

## Clark Bottom Cemetery

As I step from boat to shore,  
And on to age-old graves,  
I wonder...were you farmers,  
Housewives, children, slaves?

And I wonder, could you have known  
About this dam they'd build?  
The dam that covered this land in water,  
The land your fathers tilled.

I wonder if...knowing now...  
What you didn't know then,  
Would you change your resting place,  
This shoreline you're within?

Would you choose to remove yourselves  
From this shallow shore?  
Would you move your age-old rottings  
From this place you once adored?

Would you remove your contribution  
From this clay you knew so well?  
Would you allow some foreign plants  
To intrude your fertile soil?

So, would you move, if you could?  
If you were given a chance?  
I, for one, would not displant you  
From this ground that you've enhanced.

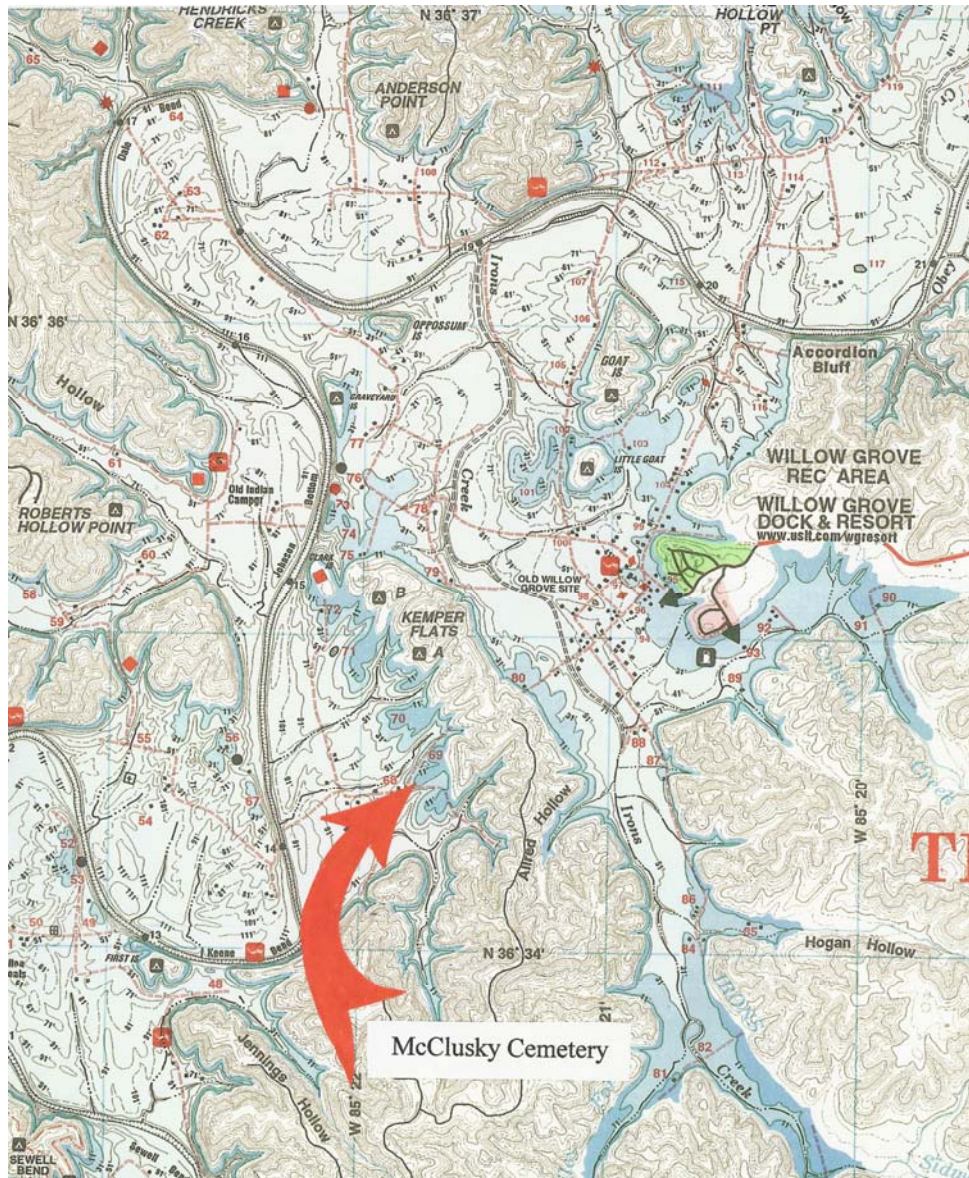
Hundreds have swam and walked above  
Your unknown watery graves.  
And, most have no idea  
Of the contribution that you gave.

But, in my heart, resides a love  
That I cannot explain...  
A tender-hearted understanding  
Of your hardships and your pain.

I think of you, my unknown friends,  
When o'er your water I go.

I think your shore's a wonderful place,  
And I just thought you should know...

That when my number's called,  
And I ascend above,  
That I just might be joining you...  
In this place that you once loved.



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