

Commemorative Bricks at Golden Gate Bridge Demolished

Thousands of people bought commemorative bricks for the Golden Gate Bridge 50th anniversary in 1987 - now those bricks have been destroyed.

Almost 7,500 inscribed custom bricks made up a walkway, which was demolished without even allowing the purchasers to retrieve them. Many were testaments of love to family and friends, or a remembrance to the people they loved. When they were purchased, these people thought they would be there forever. However, "forever" only lasted 25 years before the bridge officials made the callous decision to destroy the bricks.

The walkway was demolished in early 2012 to rebuild and update the bridge's visitor center as part of a renovation for the Golden Gate Bridge's 75th anniversary celebration in May. The district is spending funds on the anniversary celebration but chose not to spend any money to try to save the bricks.

When the Bridge District announced their intent to destroy the commemorative walkway, people who had bought bricks rushed to the scene, some even trying to use hammers and chisels to remove their bricks.ⁱ When asked about people trying to remove their bricks, a spokeswoman for the Bridge District told KTVU, "We're going to kick them off the property; it's vandalism, trespassing. There are no individual bricks being given back." To add insult to injury, the District then fenced off the pathway from those individuals that wanted to rescue their bricks.ⁱⁱ

The district gave little or no notice in advance of their destruction. Notice was posted on the District website on Friday for a Tuesday demolition. In between was Saturday and Sunday, with Monday being Martin Luther King holiday. Brick owners were barely given a chance to prevent this action. However, despite the short notice given, according to Bridge District Board meeting minutes, Bridge Manager Kary Witt knew about the visitor's plaza renovations in May 2011.ⁱⁱⁱ Most folks found out on the news just a few days before the demolition that their financial and emotional investment was going to be demolished.

The sentimental value is what hurts the most. The bricks themselves cost anywhere from \$32 to \$75 originally when they were purchased in 1987 (about \$150 today, when adjusted for inflation), but the value in things is rarely the cost. The Bridge District received dozens of letters from upset brick owners who presented a heartbreaking list of why their brick was so important to them, including:

- A woman whose husband proposed marriage with her brick;
- A man whose father had committed suicide in 1987 and whose family had bought the brick as a memorial to him; and
- A woman whose family bought their brick in memory of her father as his only commemorative marker (he has no gravesite), who walked the Bridge as part of the 50th Anniversary celebration and who died of pancreatic cancer three months later.

The Bridge District claims that the bricks were the property of the District, and not of the brick purchasers. The brick purchasers – who not only invested their money into the bricks, but their family memories – clearly disagreed. As one brick purchaser, a San Francisco man who bought a brick for his partner who died of AIDS in 1987 said, the bridge district's action showed, "an unbelievably callous disregard for people who paid to have their loved ones remembered."

The GGBH&T has chosen once again to put themselves and their agenda before the public, with another shameful act with Bridge Manager Kary Witt at the helm.

Remember; come back to GoldenGateWaste.org each week for a new article exposing waste and mismanagement on the Golden Gate Bridge.

Some of the letters from brick owners to the Bridge District are included below

From: Stephanie [stephanie707@gmail.com]
Sent: Tuesday, January 17, 2012 12:05 AM
To: District Secretary
Subject: Please share with the President/Board

Dear Board President and Board Members

In 1987 my father walked the Golden Gate Bridge as part of its 50th Anniversary celebration. He was so proud of this -- a Californian born and raised, he loved the Golden Gate Bridge and San Francisco passionately.

Three months later he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. Three months after that he was dead. I was 20 years old.

My stepmother bought us a commemorative brick to honor my father and the bridge he loved so much. He has no grave I can visit, but I have always felt connected to him just knowing that his brick was there. I smile and say "Hi" whenever I go over the Bridge or see it from the East Bay. This has brought me great peace.

Tonight watching the news I was SHOCKED to see a story about the commemorative bricks being destroyed. Not sometime in the future, when I could try to do something about it. No, it will happen TOMORROW.

Really? This is a gross desecration of my father's memory and all the people with similar stories and emotional connections to their bricks. And there are many of us. How could you do that to all of us who faithfully put our memories and our histories in your hands? How could you treat us so callously, and to do it with NO notice? And a "plaque" is NOT the same thing. This plaque will have no connection that my father's brick had.

Shock, pain, anger, cheated...betrayal. What has brought me peace for nearly 25 years has now re-opened a very painful wound.

~Stephanie Gomes

p.s. see the Marin Independent Journal article and read the comments posted by people who feel just like me. (http://www.marini.com/marinnews/cj_19739322)

From: Chris Chaffin [chris@chaffinsf.com]
Sent: Monday, January 23, 2012 4:21 PM
To: Jan Tarantino
Cc: jwildermuth@sfchronicle.com
Subject: 1987 Commemorative Bricks Demolished

To the Golden Gate Bridge Board of Directors:

My father committed suicide in 1987 and our brick was a family memorial to his untimely death. I am both angry and greatly troubled by the insensitive and heedless demolition of the commemorative pathway that was promised to remain in perpetuity. Once the decision had been made to build a new visitor center the bridge district should have taken great pains to notify people that the brick pathway would be demolished. At the very least, the bricks should have been carefully removed and then made available for people to reclaim. Instead, I only happened to read about it in the Chronicle after it's a done deal and discover none of the bricks will be saved. Outrageous! The new visitor center opens in May yet no date for a finished "tribute wall" has been announced. No comfort to the individuals and families who have lost a special place to contemplate the memory of a loved one.

Consider yourselves lucky that you're appointed, not elected officials.

Sincerely,

Christopher Chaffin
Mill Valley, CA

GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE
HIGHWAY AND
TRANSPORT DISTRICT

Mr. Gerald D. Cochran
Member, Golden Gate Bridge Board of Directors
Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District
P.O. Box 9000, Presidio Station, San Francisco, CA 94129

2012 JAN 26 AM 10:39

SECRETARY OF
THE DISTRICT

January 24, 2012

Dear Mr. Cochran,

We are incredibly disappointed that Golden Gate Bridge management and the board decided to trash our bricks last week especially with timing meant to subvert the public's knowledge in advance. It was clear that posting the news on your website on the Friday afternoon late on an official three day weekend was intended to avoid media scrutiny. Your spokeswoman, Mary, came across in emails and in the print and broadcast media as callous and uncaring, especially when she talked about throwing people off the property. It sure would have been nice if she had acted empathetic and simply said "we are so very sorry."

My husband proposed marriage to me with our brick ("will you marry me") which is why we care so much about this issue. I can imagine that people who bought memorial bricks for their dead loved ones likely feel even more passionate – with the brick often standing in for a headstone in a graveyard.

Please give consideration to replacing these bricks. I believe that it would cost less and be more meaningful to the people who placed their faith in the GG Bridge Authority when they bought the bricks 25 years ago. It would also be much more interesting to visitors at the new center than an expensive and foolish tribute display. By the way, what is the budget for that new display?

For a school fundraiser, I've used a great brick resource in Idaho. Please ask your point person to check them out:

<http://www.fundraisersltd.net/home.php>

I'd appreciate your personal response to this letter.

Thank you,

Debbie Bliss



ⁱ "1987 Golden Gate Bridge Bricks Soon Just a Memory", San Francisco Chronicle, 1/18/12

ⁱⁱ "[Purchasers of Commemorative Bricks Upset Over Golden Gate Walkway's Demolition](#)", KTVU, 1/16/12.

ⁱⁱⁱ Golden Gate Bridge District Board of Directors Meeting Minutes, 5/27/11.