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## Roadside Crosses in Contemporary Memorial Culture

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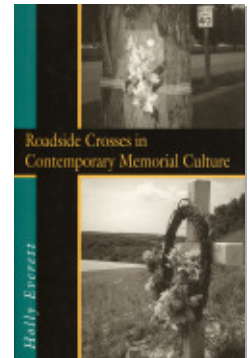
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# PREFACE

The material presented in this study represents several years of participant-observation, in the sense that I lived in Austin, witnessing the appearance and disappearance of roadside crosses, for seventeen years. I talked about them with friends and relatives, and speculated about their origins, as many of my informants have done. When I mentioned my interest in them to my mother in early 1997, she described one near her home in Austin, and told me that she knew the mother one of the women memorialized at the site.

Shilah Lamay was my first contact. In turn, she referred me to two families who had lost children in automobile accidents. I also spoke to David Canales, who had watched a friend construct a roadside cross for his brother a few years earlier. In other cases, I contacted individuals who had been quoted in newspaper articles, hoping that since they had been willing to speak to a reporter, they would be equally willing to speak to me. As might be expected, a number of interviewees expressed reluctance to open their homes and hearts to a stranger, but in most cases I was treated with a frank openness of spirit that I will never forget.

Primary research was conducted in Texas from April 23 through June 4, 1997, and from December 17 through January 11, 1998. The fieldwork process encompassed library and archival research, directed questionnaires, directive and non-directive tape-recorded interviews, and visual documentation. Crosses throughout the Austin area, as well as the state, were photographed and indexed. Information about individual crosses is based on various combinations of interviews, questionnaires, newspaper articles, and informal conversation.

Holly Everett