

OKLAHOMA CITY BOMBING MEMORIAL

A Visitor's Perspective

Wow. Where does one even begin to review something like this? I visited on a crisp January morning with the intention of stopping by to pay my respects, taking a picture or two, and continuing west. Needless to say, things didn't go as planned.

Walking down the sidewalk towards the entrance, I noticed the chain link fence that was adorned with stuffed animals, ribbons, cards, etc. All of these artifacts make up the "memorial at the memorial" as I like to call it. Also, every once in a while, these things are removed from the fence and placed in the museum so the display is always evolving.

Once I actually got to the inner part of the memorial...the field of empty chairs marking the 1/3 of the building that was destroyed by the bomb, the reflecting pool that is in spot of the old road where the van was parked, and the big black walls flanking the pool, I was awe-struck.

The chairs: Each chair is separated into nine rows--representing the floors of the building. The names on the chairs correspond to each victim and are placed in the row where they worked or were visiting at the time of the attack. What struck me most about this part of the memorial was the second row. Almost all of the chairs here were noticeably smaller--representing the children from the daycare on the second floor who were killed. Lastly, the chairs are concentrated to one corner and, when seen from above, fill out the part of the building that was destroyed--the victims make the building whole again. So incredibly moving.

The reflecting pool and flanking walls: The pool was one of the most pristine works of art I have ever seen. It was black and somber but the flowing water and reflections of literally everything around it brought a feeling of hope and regrowth. On either end of the pool are two black walls. One reads 9:01 and the other reads 9:03. The bomb was detonated at 9:02.

Survivor's tree: On the north side of the reflecting pool, there is a terrace with a huge oak tree. This tree is 100+ years old and was in the parking lot that stood on the site in the 90's. It survived the attack and is rightfully known as the "Survivor tree". Each year, the seeds are collected and planted, symbolizing that regrowth and the ability to bounce back are part of the American spirit.

The park ranger who was working, Karena, was incredibly knowledgeable and helpful. As we were walking around the grounds, she came over to us and asked if we had questions and then began to tell us the history of the attack and the memorial. I respect her dedication and service on this day in particular because it was about 25 degrees outside and she was just really enjoying teaching people about what was around.

I didn't get a chance to go into the museum, but would encourage you to swing by if you take a trip to this memorial. It is definitely something to see if you are in the area or even close enough to take a detour. The feelings of being on site and remembering the victims of this homegrown attack are something that I will never forget.