



# OPEN FORUM

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## FUNERAL HOME OR HOME FUNERAL?

By Virginia Rose

In the swirling waters of living wills and advanced directives, it is easy to become immersed in the flotsam and jetsam of life with no regard for the ultimate rite of passage, much less what lies beyond. Perhaps it is the hand of climate disruption tickling our awareness of earth's demise that a kinder, gentler way of dying is making a comeback: the green burial.

Of course, green burials are nothing new. Witness Native American burial mounds, for example. Jewish tradition condemns the practice of embalming, which emerged during the Civil War with the advent of formaldehyde. President Lincoln's dead body had to be shipped home and needed to arrive relatively intact, so to speak.

While cremation is the fastest growing choice for one's final disposition, green burials are quickly becoming recognized as an environmentally safe way to return "dust to dust." Locally, Natural Path Sanctuary is leading the way.

Located near Verona, Wisconsin, on 25 acres of rural land, the Sanctuary was established by the Farley Center in June 2011 as a nature preserve burial ground/cemetery with an educational component focused on promoting sustainable end-of-life care choices and burial practices. It is the first green cemetery in Dane County and one of only a few in the country. Directed by Shedd Farley, son of Gene and Linda Farley, whose bodies are buried there, the Sanctuary continues their legacy of ecological sustainability, social justice, and peace. Uprooting himself from his life as a homebuilder in Denver for 38 years, Shedd has taken over running the Farley Center. More often than not, he can be found digging three-foot graves, the desired depth for earth to do its work.

There are currently approximately 3,000 gravesites in the Sanctuary and 180 occupied sites (burials). Finding them can be difficult as above-ground markers are limited in size and materials used. The Sanctuary partners with area funeral homes to prepare the body, although families may choose to do so themselves. All burial shrouds and containers are required to be biodegradable, and, of course, embalming and vaults are not allowed. The burial sites are essentially camouflaged by the abundance of nature, leaving the land as undisturbed as possible while the birth/death cycle is endlessly recreated.

One cannot talk about Natural Path Sanctuary without mention of the two people whose energy and spiritual work lives on within it. Gene and Linda, long-time family physicians, dedicated their lives to healing the world of social and economic injustice. They practiced medicine on the Navajo Reservation, in rural upstate New York, and in the inner cities of Rochester, NY; Denver, CO; and Kingston, Jamaica, and were tireless advocates for universal healthcare coverage.

Believing in the importance of locally grown agriculture, the Farleys made the land accessible to those who had little resources to purchase land. Currently, a diverse group of Community Supported Agriculture businesses grow produce on land adjacent to the Sanctuary, paying rent with use of equipment. Shedd also has partnered with the Department of Corrections via the Grow Academy, which provides teenagers a labor experience as a form of community service.





Contemplating our demise might be viewed as a meditation on the poetics of life and death. As life offers us more complex choices, we may decide that less is more, and that there is a simpler, environmentally friendly way of returning to our roots as conscious stewards of our planet Earth.

*photos by author*

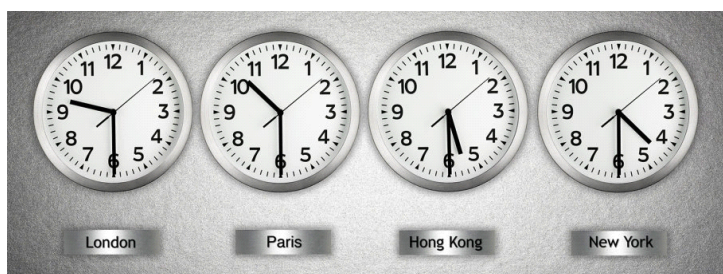
Shedd Farley



VIRGINIA ROSE

Virginia Rose is a multimedia artist who expresses herself in the realms of music, theatre, performance art, photography, and the spoken word. Her forte is the epiphany of the costumed body. She is a singer, guitarist, and songwriter in the music duo Essensual Beatz, whose eclectic repertoire includes her original compositions.

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## ***NOW'S NOT THE TIME***

Ron Schaefer

(reprinted from an earlier edition)

When Paul Revere stopped British troops on the march, he famously said, “Now’s not the time to make an issue out of this sort of thing!”

When Fort Sumter was fired on, Abraham Lincoln famously said, “Now’s not the time to make this a political issue.”

When Chicago burned down, the Mayor famously said, “Now’s not the time to look into fire safety standards in the city.”

When the Hindenburg blew up over its landing pad, the Governor of New York famously said, “Now’s not the time to look into problems with airships; there are grieving families to consider.”

When Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941, President Roosevelt famously said, “Now’s not the time to consider steps in retaliation or for making something political over Navy losses.”

When Russia threatened nuclear war by placing missiles in Cuba, President Kennedy famously said, “Now’s not the time to politicize missile launch pads close to the U.S. border.”

When the towers fell on September 11<sup>th</sup>, President Bush famously said, “Now’s not the time to deal with the threat of terrorism, as the families are grieving.”

When a hurricane battered the east coast causing wind and flood damage and loss of life, President Obama said, “Now’s not the time to look into hurricane precautions along the coast line, people are suffering. This is just politicizing tragedy.”

And yet...

When you talk to the surviving victims and their families, they say that NOW is exactly the time we should be dealing with these issues.

It would seem that the only people who are politicizing tragedies are those who are saying, “Now’s not the time.”