

# A Place of Peace

*By Nancy Johnson*

## HONORABLE MENTION

Peace Justice and Sustainability are powerful words. I learned of the Farley Center and Natural Path Sanctuary when my adult daughter made the decision to stop dialysis after many years of illness. She wanted to be cremated and have a tree grow from her ashes and I wanted something more natural. I had heard of natural burial and did an internet search which produced three places. Two of those were in Milwaukee. We are from a small town in Northern Wisconsin and Milwaukee didn't fit my idea of a place where she could nurture trees. We had recently moved to Columbus so she could be near the UW hospitals and clinics since she was being prepped for a kidney/pancreas transplant. The Farley Center and NPS seemed to be what I was looking for but would she be comfortable with the idea. This was her last request and I wanted her to be at peace knowing her wish would be granted. She was only thirty-nine and had to make difficult decisions most of her life so I didn't want to add another one by asking her if I could bury her instead of cremating to nourish a tree.

Amanda loved nature. Trees, bees and turtles were her power symbols. She had a diverse group of friends and family who she loved and who loved her. She accepted everyone. She felt strongly about social justice and kept up with current affairs. She was a member of the Social Justice committee of her church. She loved music and was very talented and creative. I knew this place stood for what she believed in as soon as I came here.

I came out and talked with Shedd the week before she stopped dialysis. He told me first about the farm. I had worked a year for AmeriCorp for the *Farm to School* program and my job was going out and meeting farmers and buying produce for the school. I learned so much that year about how important it is to grow our own food organically and when we can't grow our own to buy local. I knew Verona was a leader in the farm to school program and to find out I was being introduced to a place that was practicing everything I had come to believe was what the world needed totally convinced me this was the place I was looking for. It was exciting to find out the work of the Farley Center was to teach and promote sustainable farming to people from all over the world. What better way to practice Peace, Justice and Sustainability than with a farm incubator. I would think there is quite an exchange of ideas of the different farm methods and of what is grown with a mutual respect for each other. I've moved back up north so I don't have the privilege of buying all this produce at the farmers market, CSAS, grocery store, or even enjoying this locally grown food at a local restaurant. I hope the schools are taking advantage of this opportunity.

There was still a little snow on the ground when I first came here so I wasn't able to pick a site but we were able to ride a short way in the Natural Path Sanctuary. Enough for me to know this was where I wanted her to be. That evening I had the hard conversation that made this decision real. I wanted her to know I respected her wish to be cremated and I did tell her my understanding was that the tree didn't really grow from the ashes. I told her I had come here and asked what she thought about having a natural burial in the woods. She surprised me with her first question. "Are there bees there" Of course I had found out they do have bees in the summer and I was able to say yes. She smiled and said "Then I can feed the trees" She gave the little nod with her head that she did when she was

pleased. She never changed her mind about going back on dialysis and had the most peaceful death I've ever witnessed.

After she passed my girlfriend and I came out and picked a site under an Oak tree. When we brought her out the birds were singing, she loved birds also. She said she didn't want any Service and only whoever I wanted for support. I was going to have a little ceremony, smudge the area, lay tobacco, honor the sacred space, have a couple of readings. She had other ideas. I couldn't get the smudge stick to light and I lost the tobacco on the way. As they were placing her beside the grave the sheet fell off her feet. I didn't put socks on her so she was letting me know. She loved socks and I loved her feet. I couldn't look at her before she was buried and I suppose she knew that so she showed me her love in her way. She did let me lay cedar on her and my friend was able to read two poems, one she wrote. It was more peaceful and comforting than I could have imagined. I come here and I feel peace. She had so much love to give and that kind of love lives here.

There is no other place where she can feed her precious trees and have the bees she cared about. There is no other place that could honor such a spirit as hers. I could never feel the peace and comfort anywhere else. My soul knew and guided me here. I have nothing but love and gratitude for the Farley Center and Natural Path Sanctuary.