



THE FOREST

CONSERVATION BURIAL GROUND

Oregon's first dedicated natural burial ground

www.theforestconservationburial.org

First Burial at The Forest

Permission to share granted August 24, 2020



Life surrounded us as we approached the grave site with Scott's body wrapped beautifully in a silk shroud woven with color. Deer walked across the meadow while we watched from the edge under the protection of towering pines and firs. Though this was a reverent affair, the swallows in the nearby next box maintained their dutiful rhythm of caring for the new lives entrusted to them.

The Forest Conservation Burial Ground, Oregon's first dedicated natural burial ground, had only been officially open for burials for about two weeks when we received the call. She was a friend of the family and was stepping up to offer support in a time of need. The backstory was tragic. Two mid-life and in love sailors adventuring around the world, finding themselves on land (in Miami, FL.) to be with family and see what would unfold with the game-changing novel coronavirus. Their paths took a sharp and expected turn one morning over coffee when Scott collapsed. A few days later he would be pronounced dead. His wife, Viviane, knew that a natural burial was the choice for them, as was returning to the west coast. After a few email and phone exchanges, the burial was scheduled and travel arranged.

Viviane and her mother arrived at the ranch a few days before the burial to settle in and connect with the land in the comfort of a rustic wall tent. She found the grave site that was right for Scott's burial, and choose the site next to his to be her own resting place in the future. Viviane wanted to be a part of it all, offering to help with digging the grave and purchasing buckets of fresh cut flowers from a local organic flower farm. She cut a handful of deep red peonies for the farm house garden too. The final preparation of the grave is cutting and placing evergreen boughs inside, which Viviane also did. She was touched that in the digging of the grave, a small boulder was unearthed and placed at the head of the grave; it will be engraved and placed next year after the earth has settled.

When the afternoon of the burial was upon us, the full freshness of early summer was in the air while the sadness of a beautiful life cut short rested in our hearts and minds. Due to safety precautions, the number of guests was limited and all were wearing masks. Six of us, including Viviane, carried Scott's body from the hearse to the grave site. We placed Scott's body on boards lying across the grave. Viviane began to speak directly to Scott as she had done many times throughout their life together. Her words were an expression of a well-practiced, active love. It was intimate and tender. Each family member followed suit, approaching Scott's body and speaking to his, or his spirit, directly. Loving memories, regrets and legacy were shared. When there were no more words, the family began adorning Scott's shroud with fragrant and gorgeous herbs and flowers. The scene was pure beauty: a body that had carried a loving man, now wrapped in silk, covered in flowers and surrounded by loves ones.

When Viviane was ready, we lowered the body and began filling the grave. This, too, was invitation to be an active participant in laying a loved one to rest in the Earth. Everyone present helped in some way, and many hands made light work. It seemed we were all surprised as we completed the task by covering the mound with the topsoil that had been removed first the day before.

After placing more flowers on top of the grave, the family made their way back to the cemetery entrance to enjoy food and drink together. This was also a time of sharing memories, laughing, and considering the future (including hopes of a party at the ranch next year with all of Scott and Viviane's friends).

In some ways, there was a perfection to Scott being our first burial. Our cemetery is the first new cemetery in the state of Oregon in over 50 years, and the first dedicated natural burial ground. Scott and Viviane just happen to be software experts by trade, so they were both used to being the first to try something new. And, they were natural-born adventurers through and through. In this way, it was right.

Viviane and her mom spent one more night on the ranch before returning to Miami the next day. We noticed later that they had returned to the grave site before departure and encircled the burial mound with pine cones, one more physical act of love, honoring, and well-wishes for whatever may lay beyond.

We weren't expecting to have a burial so soon after opening, nor for the death to have been someone in the prime of life and to have died on the other side of the country. When all was said and done, the beauty and simplicity of a forest burial carried all of us through this, and we cheered knowing that this natural burial ground is here for those who know that this is the right choice for them.