

## Beginning of Sanctuary

“Sanctuary” began in the summer of 2008. We have had a farm in Clarksville, Maryland for the past 34 years. Originally, we called our home Live Oak Farm. This was slightly misleading since the great tree we named the farm after proved to be a boxelder maple and not a live oak. There was no way we were changing that name, so we stayed Live Oak Farm for all those years.

To get a feel for the place, let’s start at our beginning. We moved onto the farm in 1975. We were married for one year and were lucky enough to be contacted when the original owner, Nellie Grooms, died and left a codicil to her will stating that we had first option to buy. We had in fact tried to buy the place two years earlier but due to unusual circumstances, mainly money, we never completed the deal. In the process, however, I became friends with Nellie and helped her until very late in her life. When the attorney called us, we were shocked. We had 29 days in which to secure financing and get moved onto the farm.

After being turned down by several financial institutions, we found out that the *circa* 1860 house was not up to “code” for finance purposes. We told the sellers of this and quickly were allowed to buy it “as is.” Only later did we understand what that really meant! First off, the house was condemned before we moved in. Our lovely, new next-door neighbors reported us to the Howard County Sanitary Department the day after settlement because we were “dumping raw sewage” into the Little Patuxent River. How preposterous; why, I was one of the original founders and supporters of Earth Day at the University of Maryland! We could never knowingly do such a thing. As it turned out, sure enough, there was the toilet paper right where a pipe ran into the creek off our land. We were shocked. However, what a real blessing it turned out to be! I ran crying to Boarman’s Market to use the only phone in the community. Florentine Boarman, the owner, overheard my conversation and actually offered to lend me the money to put in a real septic system. Seems everyone on Route 108 knew we had a straight pipe to the creek and kept quiet about it.

That was the start of my “connection” with my new community of friends in Clarksville, Maryland. I became known as the “real Susie.” Mr. Boarman called

everyone “Susie”. And because that was my real name, well.... Later when I became “Loki,” the community went along with the name change, as with the many other antics I did during my 35 years of living on the land. I don’t recall ever being challenged by the community on anything. And we did indeed have some wild times along the way. Our decision to choose to live in an 1860’s home on 5.5 acres, and on a major highway, was not unique. We were truly blessed.

The heart of the farm has always been the water: the streams and natural springs. We were told and believe that this was a stagecoach depot many years ago, where the horses were watered. The spirit of the house is so friendly. Everyone, no matter their personal background, always comments that the place feels so safe and often reminds them of their grandmother’s old home. We have done little to alter the structure on the homestead. We have used what we had. And during recent times, the focus has been the great tree. Even though it wasn’t the beautiful Live Oak we thought it was, the tree is part of the oneness that is the magic of the land. It once held a nice swing. All my kids and neighborhood kids climbed it and built forts in it, and lately I put a seat in the base so I could tell stories at Halloween to my grandchildren. Then a strange thing happened. At the turn of the century, I spread the ashes of my teacher and friend Dawson Hayward under it, and the tree imploded. Only the weekend before, the tree had been honored by Howard County Rec and Parks as being the largest and oldest boxelder maple in the county. We went to an official ceremony and had my picture taken for a magazine and possibly the phone book for Clarksville.

When retiring one evening, we heard a loud explosion; I thought maybe it was a car crash. I waited... when you live on the road, you know those ominous sounds. No crash, so we went to sleep. The next morning Smiling Bear, my dear husband and soul mate, showed me what had really happened. The tree had literally blown itself apart. Parts of the branches were on the road, on the pigpen, and across the garden area. I called Rec and Parks for help but they could do nothing. The tree was so dangerous the way Mother Nature had left her that we were forced to cut it down. That tree was over 250 years old! This was not fair.

Again, however, we had a blessing. I met a new, young group of men who would do the work for half of what the local tree removal company would charge. When getting the estimate, the young black man took off his cap and bowed his head

while studying the loss and all the work that it would require. He felt the pain from both the tree and my heart. I hired him. Instead of cutting the tree down to the ground, they left the main heart and some of the branches which lasted for several years. Folks came and drew the faces contained in the tree bark, took pictures, and actually prayed while they were working. It was amazing to see what looked like an old dead tree get so much respect and honor. Then, little by little, the tree began to return to Mother Earth. The faces in the open bark changed too. Then things really started to happen. We had been doing Reiki on the land for about 10 years and having Native American Ceremony on the land at the change of seasons. After one gathering, a Shaman named JoJoPah came and walked the land for two days. She said we needed to have ceremony for the tree to continue to honor its power and presence and to increase abundance and prosperity for the land. In the last 35 years, our little sleepy town of Clarksville had grown to become one of the wealthiest, highest per capita income areas in the United States!

JoJoPah was persistent. We planned a ceremony called the Tingan Tree Ceremony, an African tree ceremony that she learned from Malidome Somme. She was coming to Clarksville to help us all. In all the years of doing ceremony on the land, we had never charged for an event. This time we did charge, and the proceeds went to JoJoPah for her work. We managed somehow to get 20 kindred spirits to participate. No one knew what they were doing, nor why. They trusted and believed in us and the land. It was a big success. As always, the neighborhood stood by in amazement. The paddock was filled with cars. Folks were seen scurrying around the land gathering twigs, flowers and entering Sanctuary spots that we had prepared for the event. We always called these sacred places by names like “The Lagoon,” “The Forest,” “The Creek,” and so on.... Most laugh when they actually see what it is I’m talking about, but then gradually they too call them by the correct names. Then all are happy.

During the Tingan Tree Ceremony, new kinds of friendships blossomed. Some of our old, long-time friends were very supportive. Others laughed and said, “No thank you, but you all enjoy.” One of my new friends, Lynda Walton, just happens to be a Master Gardener and volunteered to spruce up the tree for the event. She started digging and pulling weeds and stuff that had never been attended to in all

the years past. You see, we had lots of dogs, and they would dig up or pee on flowers and bushes. So I never bothered with tending around the tree. And now that it was naked and sparse, it really did need some TLC. Boy, did it get it! Lynda came daily with little pots of plants, shovels, and dirt. With sweat and sore muscles, the task was completed. And, in a little while, the tree was indeed happy again. I think it realized how special we thought it was again, and it got a new shot of energy for the event that was quickly approaching.

Boy, was I nervous about this whole ordeal. I cleaned parts of the field, the stream, the creek, the pond, and anything else that got my attention. I did not, however, bother with the house itself. It was summer, and we spend most of our time outside, only frequenting the house for necessities. Just before JoJoPah was to arrive, we put new prayer flags on the tipi, and it got a hole in it! Yikes, this was not in the plan. Money is always an issue for me these days. I have not had steady, gainful employment for almost 15 years. I save up and spend kind of foolishly, some say. Well, ole Bear and I decided we could not afford to have a broken tipi for this major event. So we ordered a new skin and bit the bullet on the cost. Well, the skin arrived, but we were out of time and energy, so during the big event the empty poles just stood there waiting. We had hoped that someone would volunteer to help, but we were all too busy with our personal projects to consider yet another task. And it worked out fine. JoJoPah did not concentrate on the tipi or the Medicine Wheel. She focused on the spirituality of the land and all it has to offer, and the group embraced her spirit and followed her lead in the Tingan Tree Ceremony.

We have always opened our home to the public in a most generous manner. We never think that something may happen as a result of sharing what we have. And nothing really seriously bad has happened to the farm or us. That is a lesson of the land: use what you have, and better yet, share it with like-minded souls.

This is where I want the story of Sanctuary to actually begin. The past is so important for me to recall, and not really necessary for the reader of this saga.

Attractions of the Land:

**The Tingan Tree:** a sacred tree that has been dedicated to healing and peace and lots of abundance for all who visit and support its energy. “Tingan” is an African name for the tree. Spell check does not recognize the spelling. I’m assuming it is correct because JoJoPah did it this way. At the time of the ceremony, all participants were instructed to bring yellow cloth, pieces of yellow and orange fruits and vegetables, coins, nuts and good wishes. Everyone did as instructed.

It was so hot that day, around 92 degrees. And we, of course, have no air-conditioning at the farm house. So, we brought bagged lunches that required no refrigeration and made ourselves at home on the land. We have a large patch of bamboo next to a spring-fed pond that we created. In our preparation, my friend wanted to create a secret garden room in the bamboo, but I declared we had enough rooms to take care of already. Then, the morning of the event, JoJo Pah just naturally knew exactly where to gather the group for the morning discussion of the ritual and to answer questions and steer the direction for the group. I had not slept a wink the night before the event. I was a nervous wreck. I had been warned that the Elders would “kick my ass” during the event. They worked ahead of time, and I needed peace and an acupuncture emergency treatment to get started. I looked like death warmed over as my friends arrived, eager to start the adventure. Photos of the day proved this point exactly. It did get better as I found my focus and settled into my seat next to the Elder leader and guide, my new friend JoJoPah. This new space is now called “JoJoPah’s Area.” It was indeed a secret room where attendees sat on the slope of a little hill. The bamboo provided shade, and a gentle breeze cooled the audience. No one seemed uncomfortable at all. It was another blessing, the first of many that day. Now we have yet another place to visit on the land... **The Secret Garden.**

During the course of the day, miracles occurred as would be expected by the power of the ritual. We had an African ”jembe” that my sister Lightwoman had loaned me for the day. We do a lot of drumming on the land. We have a **drum circle** that has been in existence for 104 months consecutive running. We are called the Heartbeat drummers. We have a **CD called Spirit of the Drum**. We have lots of fun and originally came together for the purpose of having music for the Medicine Wheel Ceremonies. Over time, we realized that most of the drummers did not

actually attend the seasonal ceremonies. Thus we changed our purpose. Now we drum for fun and fellowship. We do a lot of laughing, and our spirits are lifted considerably at the end of the evening. The group has dwindled in size recently. We are still going forward and hope that new folks will appear according to Spirit's perfect plan. As my Spirit teacher and friend Dawson Hayward told me, "The right people show up. It's not about the numbers." Sometimes I forget this and get caught up in the numbers and lose sight of the real purpose of our gatherings. Somehow, someone helps me remember what we are all about. I feel blessed to be able to do all that we do for ourselves and others. We try hard to be good role models for the community of people who come and share with us. It seems to have made us better people. We feel blessed and eager to continue sharing. All is well. And if you are still interested please look at some of the Places of Interest on the land known as "Sanctuary."