

## **Returning to the Earth Connecting with the Land through Play and Wonder**

It is a beautiful, wet and overcast morning. We listen to our breath flow in and out of our noses and into our bellies. The littlest among us is five years old, and we span three generations of women. This is a powerful place to breathe together, this land transitioning into another life—one that will support human bodies as they transition back to the Earth.

We arrive in ritual, with gratitude and awareness of people who walked these lands before us – the plants and insects that care for the soil and water, the mycelium that connects the roots and helps trees communicate below the surface, in the places where we cannot see.

A brown beetle welcomes us as it hurries through the grass. The green everlastings' buds begin to open. June bugs fly around the cream-colored offering plate, a recently added bird bath, the water still and resting in the silence of the morning. The tree of heaven extends its branches to us as it continues to expand along the path. We find hemp dogbane in the meadow and smooth sumac berries in the woods. Blackberry bushes line the walkway, and the purple nightshades with little yellow centers beckon us to stop and take a close look.

We pass through the gateway into the cemetery, marked by a tall tulip poplar, maples and white oaks.

When we begin to walk in the burial field, tiny grasshoppers jump away as we take each step. Dew drops cover the green grasses. We try to move slowly and carefully as to not hurt these jumping wonders. Decomposing corn husks cover the ground and crunch under our boots.

We are calling in the possibilities—of healing, of re-connection, of letting go. A cool breeze brushes our skin, complementing the humid, wet air. White and pink morning glories greet us with petals wide open.

Heidi is taking us to her new favorite place, “where the bees are buzzing on the milkweed.” And how magnificent it is. The bees hum so lovingly, satisfied from this abundant nectar. Little pink star petals draw them in. A ladybug crawls up one of the green fuzzy leaves and then down the other side. There is so much life flying and crawling in this small patch of Earth. “The bees are talking a lot,” says my 5-year-old as she spots a baby monarch butterfly. It arrives silently, flying between the flowers, landing gently with her black legs and antenna quickly moving, as a black and blue pipevine swallowtail flutters nearby.

The leaves of the amaranth in the field are moving but it's more than the wind. We stop and walk into the growing hum, watching the leaves flutter all around. We watch until we see that it is the wings of all the June bugs that are causing this gentle wave. A cicada's song gets louder for a moment and then disappears as the birdsong picks up.

What grace, what beauty the land welcomes us with. We are full of gratitude, wonder and awe—to be here in this moment. Each step, each moment calling us back to the joy within us, of learning new plants and flowers, getting to know land, and reconnecting with this part of ourselves that wants to play on a warm summer day.

On our way back, we stop to eat some of the fresh blackberries. Heidi shares that the berries remind her of her grandmother. We call in our grandmothers as we make new memories picking and eating blackberries together on this June morning.

**Emily Stewart**

Hillsborough, North Carolina

June 30, 2022