

Sacred Spaces, Healing Places

UUMSB
July 19, 2020

To Hilda,

With much Gratefulness and Love,

Your UUMSB Friends

As the pandemic began to change the way we live and worship, our Zoom services have been a lifeline for me to friends and spirituality. I've been so grateful we have this option to meet virtually, but at times, have felt a little "removed" from everyone.

At the same time, I had recently read an article in the New York Times about a Stanford University professor, Daniel Mason, who gave his students an assignment after they departed campus early. Their one last assignment was to go outside and take a photo of the natural world they had talked about during class. As he began to receive what ultimately became almost 100 photos from all over the world, he spoke of finding connection during a time of struggle and being sustained not only by neighbors but also by the oaks, the gardens and cottonwoods that are so critical to both our physical and mental well-being.

So, I started to think, why couldn't we do something similar? And my next immediate thought was I need people more creative than I am to help, so I reached out to Jose Garcia and our minister, Carol Allman-Morton, and we brainstormed ideas. Our worship service on July 19 was the result of that team effort, and the idea of a booklet to preserve these photos came from Jose. We are so happy to share both with you.

Before you move ahead to the photos, a reminder of our theme. We asked you to share a place that brings you comfort and meaning during this time and tell us why. Without any limitations on that place, or space, we received a wide variety of photos. Some of these places are ones that, as someone said, "draw you out of yourself". Others are places that allow you to go deeper and go inside. One thing most share is the concept of getting lost in the moment, an environment that offers a respite from the world around us.

And just one quote, before you move onto the photos, from one of my favorite poets and authors, the late John O'Donohue. This quote is from a talk he had in 2008 with Krista Tippett on the inner landscape of beauty. He said:

I think it makes a huge difference, when you wake in the morning and come out of your house, whether you believe you are walking into dead geographical location, which is used to get to a destination, or whether you are emerging out into a landscape that is just as much, if not more, alive as you, but in a totally different form, and if you go towards it with an open heart and a real, watchful reverence, that you will be absolutely amazed at what it will reveal to you.

May this booklet offer you a moment or two of amazement at our beautiful natural world.

Erin McNamara
July 2020

The Ol' Swimming Hole



I had a hard time deciding to use my most special place, as I have difficulty getting there now, because of the arthritis in my hips, but my memory is so strong, for this one spot, that I could not leave it out.

I have known this beautiful spot since I was a young child. This is the ol' swimming hole (looking down from way above), where I grew up fishing for trout and cooling off in the ice-cold brook water on a hot summer day. It is not even five minutes from my home now, on property that was originally my grandfather's farm.

When I first brought my husband to Massachusetts, this was the first place I showed him. The beauty and peace of this place speaks for itself.

Bonnie Benson

Newark Pond, Vermont



Sunset on Newark Pond, VT. Home to nesting loons, no running water, no power, no internet, and amazing memories. I am so grateful for the privilege to go to this place and unplug everything with my husband's family in the summers. It is one of the prettiest places I know.

Carol Allman–Morton

Along the Housatonic Flats Trail



This is along the Housatonic Flats Trail which allows me to easily engage in my walking meditation and provides an ever changing display of the Berkshire's natural beauty.

Carolyn Stewart

Tucker at Flag Rock



We selected this picture because it was taken during one of our trail walks in the Berkshires up to Flag rock.

It's an enjoyable walk for us because not only is the journey itself enjoyable, but you're also rewarded with this beautiful view.

We think it's fitting to include our dog Tucker because he accompanies us on every walk, and helps us remember to live in the moment.

Chuck Pierce & John Farrell

The Old "Indian Road"



This image shows part of the old "Indian Road" that once crossed the Taconics from New York to Massachusetts. A century of disuse has almost erased it, but I was able to track it last winter.

The Taconics are the place I feel I most belong, and I belong most when I'm hiking off-trail, not quite sure where I am, but sure of finding something beautiful and fascinating.

Dan Haas

The View from Datta's Deck



*This peaceful setting has shared some wonderful meditations.
Datta Haynes*

The Hillside Above Our Garden



This hillside near our garden is my place of respite after physical work or mental worry. Its breeze and cool shade provide relief, as does being high above the house and road, away from media and phone, pandemic and politics.

While peaceful, this modest view also feels expansive, drawing me out of myself. The AT is a few yards away, and if we were to follow it south it would take us over Warner Mountain, framed here by the trees, and then on and on, all the way to Georgia.

Dianna Downing

Right Here at Home



As we were finishing dinner a few days ago, we noticed out a window a glimpse of the sky as dusk approached. We ran outside and were greeted with a truly exceptional display of pinks, grays, blues & whites.

After having gone inward due to the sheltering in place, we found this glorious example of nature right above us. A lot of oohs and aahs ensued. It was quite liberating, the natural world right here at home.

Dennis Downing

View from our Window in St. Croix



Our winter "happy place." This is a view from our window in St. Croix overlooking palm, mango and mahogany trees. Inky enjoys it too!

Diane Moran & Richard LaRhette

Erin's Deck



This is a photo of my deck at home and I selected it because this space brings me peace, especially now. It offers security, nature, and often a cat or two.

Erin McNamara

Our Back Yard View of Monument Mt



Leyn sees this each day when performing his karate practices and I often sit outside at what we call "The View", especially at the end of the day. It reminds us of nature's beauty and the importance of counting our blessings each and every day.

Jody & Leyn Burrows

Hoover



*Hoover is both sweet and very entertaining. He makes me smile.
Sue Corcoran*

This Is My Workshop



When I'm in here working with my hands, and wrestling with the limitations of my talent, the problems of the outside world and the anxieties in my head all go away and I find some peace.

John Corcoran

Hollow Fields, Richmond, MA



I found these hillside hayfields in early May—unexpectedly, in the way great gifts come to you. The nesting birds, the immense sky, the cloud shadows moving over the waving grass—the entire hillside alive in the stiff wind. A sanctuary.

I have come here several times every week during the last two months. I walk for a couple of hours, and on the way back I sit at a bench high on the ridge, watch and listen for a while and then come down the hill.

Jose Garcia

*... And I know
that this is one of the thresholds
between Earth and Heaven,
from which even I may step
forth from myself and be free.*

Wendell Berry

Laurie & Gary's Porch

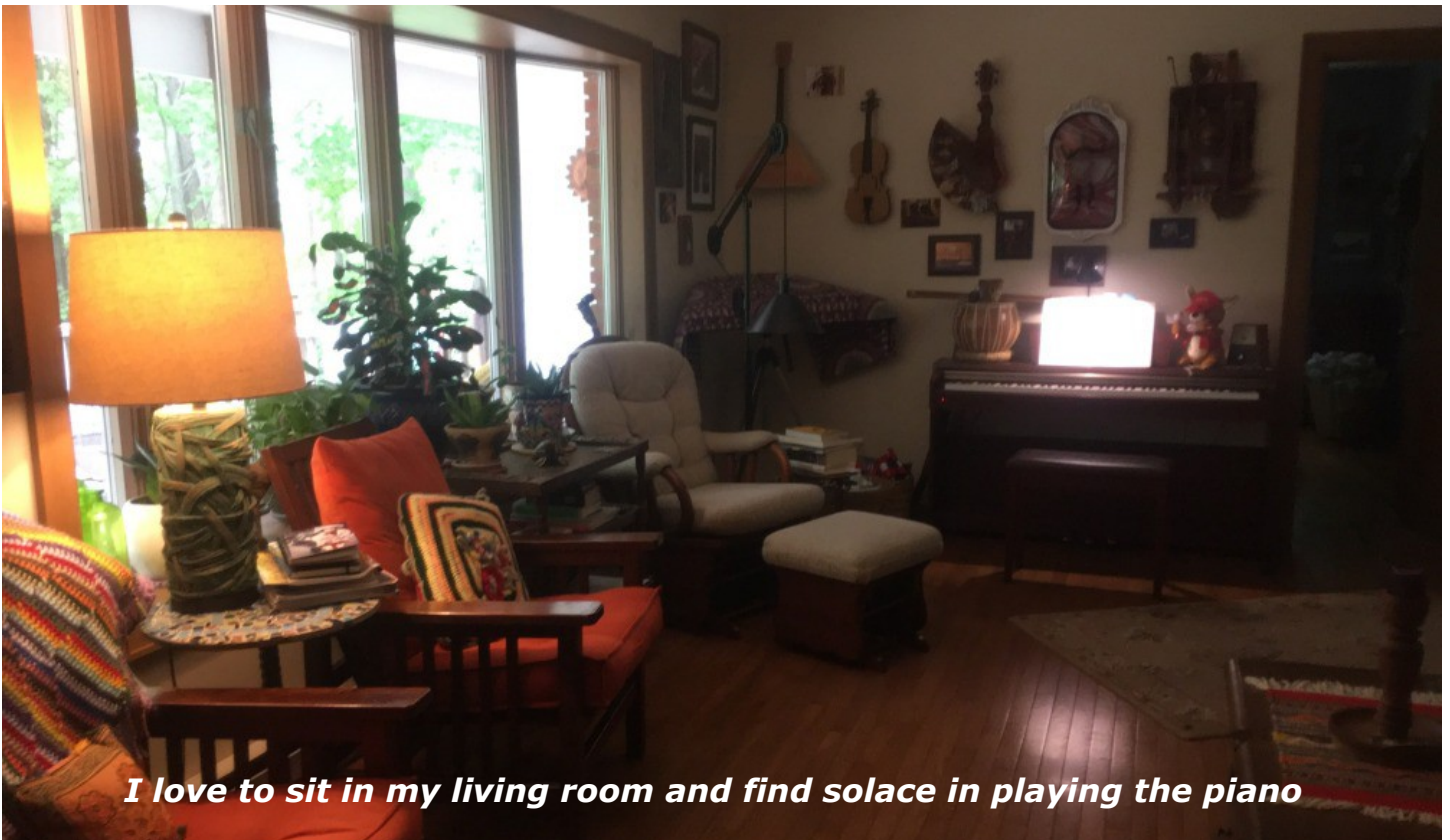


This is a photo of our front porch, which is filled with plants and is a lovely place to relax, reflect and watch the world go by. It feels like a refuge from the world.

Laurie & Gary Shaw

Like the Pileated Woodpecker who has different calls for different situations, I find relaxation in different places at home depending on the weather.

Lana Bennett



I love to sit in my living room and find solace in playing the piano



But in nice weather there is nothing like sitting by the fire pit

Something Green



Back in March, a friend was struggling with the end of winter and asked her Facebook friends to post something green from their camera roll on their phones. I had taken this photo during a hike on March 14th because, apparently, I was also in need of “something green.”

Larry Bennett

Summer & Winter from Leigh's Deck



In summer, I bring my morning coffee out on the deck and savor the beauty that surrounds me. I am so very grateful.



In winter, I can admire from inside.
Leigh Merlini

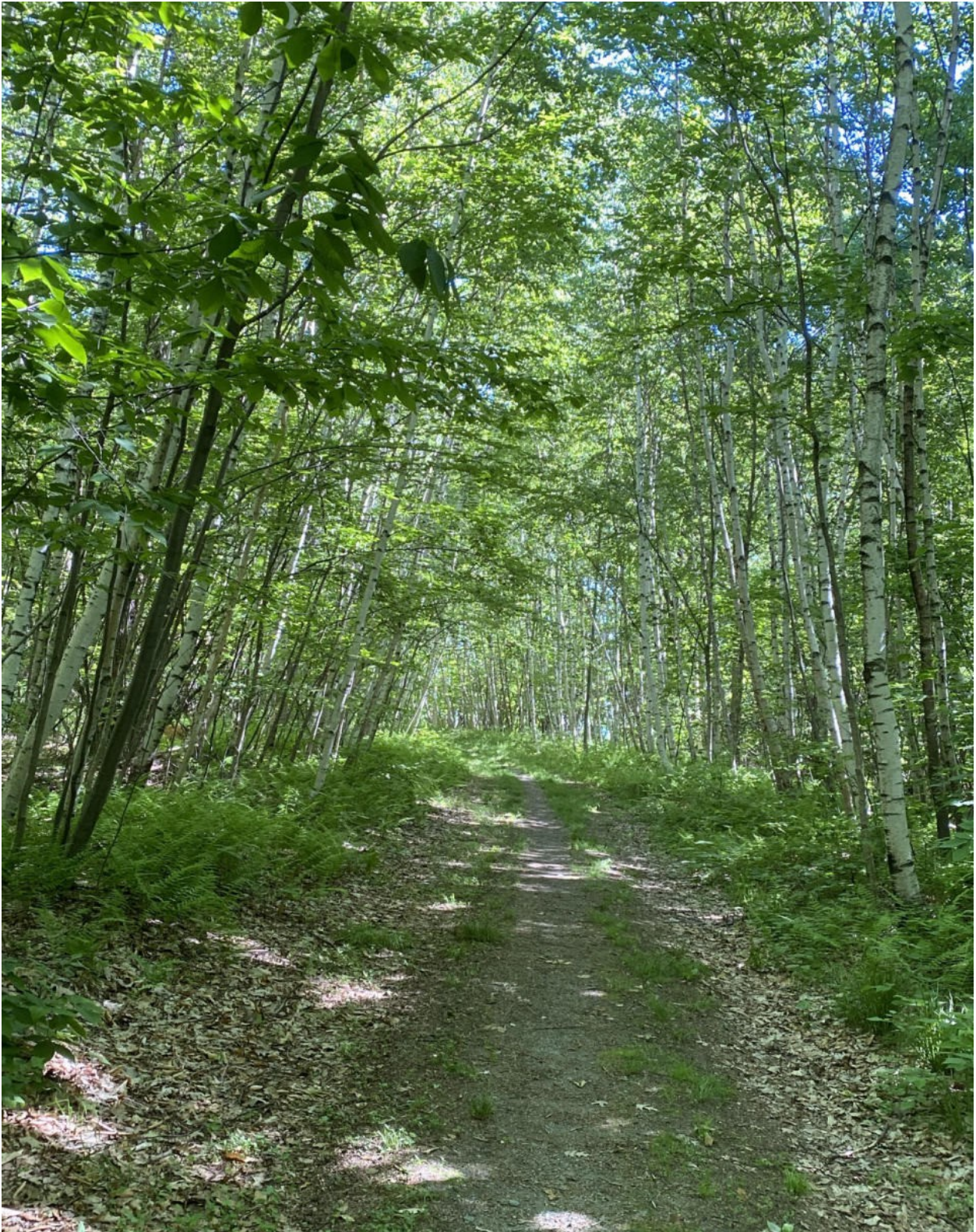
Linda's Studio



Here is a photo of my ceramic work area. I know that it appears to be a haphazard arrangement of too many items to possibly be comforting. But to me it is my personal nest, where I calmly leave the world and know how to focus. There's hardly room to turn around, but when I'm working there I know this small world is where I feel most wholly myself.

Linda Skipper

Meaning



These birches greet me at the top of the first hill on the Alford Springs Trail, which is a favorite trail these days. Hiking offers a sense of wonder to me as well as challenge. Getting to hike the same trail over the course of time brings greater joy as I experience the beauty that is part of each season.

Lissa McGovern

A Garden Renewal: Soil and Soul Work



This is a 20' x 25' garden bed that I planted 20 years ago—and left on its own. I looked at it this spring, saw its neglected and overgrown state and knew it needed TLC. What a perfect “shelter-in-place” project!

Some plants have stayed on, reduced in size, and after consideration, I had the joy of selecting new ones. What was once a water course is now a stone path, calling for low growing moss and sedum. The larger plants are blue, yellow, white, magenta, and varying shades of green foliage.

The garden has given me a delightful project and a place to visit in the morning (“to see how it's doing”), during the day (to water) and the evening (to see the late day colors,) Thank you, Nature.

Marion Jansen

*From Martha Page & Bill Young's Place
Housatonic Valley in South Lee looking toward Beartown State Forest*



Leo the cat in our screened porch



our most successful hummingbird feeder

Rhonda & Martin's Place



*There's no place like home.
A joy to work together in
the garden, watching the
bunnies & bluebirds, just
being outdoors ...*

*Rhonda & Martin Pastori &
granddaughter Cassidy
Jade & Bunny*



Serenity Close to Home



‘It doesn’t look like much, but this twenty foot strip of land and trees right behind my condo, where I am sometimes in solitude, sometimes sharing tea and conversation with my neighbor, is where I have felt safe and relaxed since the pandemic started.’

Sheryl Davies

Tommie's Labyrinth



The special place (the labyrinth that I built) that I return to over and over during these anxious times. I was 'blocked out' of my special place during the first few months of my recovery ... but it is back in my life and I am able to use my meditative walking tool once again.

Tommie Hutto-Blake

Inside Look at Beautiful Sedona



This photo is a small view of Sedona's magical landscape with red-rock high altitude desert, evergreen forests, lush creek oases.

Sedona is very special for me because our daughter lives there with her partner and our beautiful grandchild. We had been going there a couple of times a year before the pandemic, but not since then, and the potential for those trips has been—at least so far—replaced by Zoom meetings. A world of difference.

So the thought now of Sedona, of visiting there with Tommie, our daughter, her partner and grandson -- the prospect of being able again to have that experience is a great comfort. And the temporary loss and uncertainty of when family life will return is a great sadness.

Al Blake

Valerie & Peter's Rock Garden



This is our front rock garden which we started transforming 8 years ago, our first spring in the Berkshires. It was mostly wild thyme and daisies when we moved here. We've expanded it on both sides.

This time of physical distancing gave me an opportunity to advance this ongoing project, with many more hours to devote to it. With some suggestions from a master gardener, I've removed and divided certain things, and added many new plants. I enjoy going out in early evening to take in the colors and fragrant smells and to provide the blooms with a drink.

Gardening is such a joy and escape from the "worries of the world". In addition to the pleasure it brings me, I also like to think of it as a gift to the folks of Lee, as they drive up Orchard St.

Valerie Bluhm

*"Never underestimate the healing power of a quiet moment in the garden."
Jacqueline Albert*

A small but magnificent roadside pond...



On a frustrating day of feeling very cooped up Sandy and I chose to drive down a small road in Stockbridge which opened up onto a large marsh on the right and to this small but magnificent roadside pond on the left.

That moment was completely expansive and asked us to remember that welcome feeling of being part of something much larger than ourselves. We have returned to this special place and to that special awareness.

Wendy & Sandy Noyes

Laurel Lake from Zoe & Stu's Backyard



*The lake is quiet today, a silver palette
offering itself to life in every way.
To a gaggle of squabbling, diving geese,
To a wind that white-caps its surface
toward the shore, then away again.
And yes, to let us gently rock a red canoe,
my friend and I, as we quietly
study a moonlit, star filled sky.*

Zoe Dalheim

Curiosity



*Walking in my backyard, I saw three deer as
curious about me as I was about them.*

Ron Dlugosz

steadiness, persistence...hope



This is an ancient white oak on the property of Simon's Rock College that I often pass when I run on Hurlburt Road. Hurlburt is a place of peace and inspiration for me—the wide open spaces of the fields, sometimes ripe with corn, sometimes lying fallow, sometimes covered with snow; the gently flowing river; wooded areas filled with birdsong—all, in my mind, anchored by this 260 year-old tree. The tree itself, being so old, represents steadiness, persistence...hope.

Sharon Meyer