



## Natural Burial Program

### Testimonials

#### **Ben Carruth's Burial:**

#### **"I wanted to care for him completely"**



*In the late spring of 2016, Deb and George Carruth buried their beloved son Benjamin at River View Cemetery. He died suddenly, in an accident, just 32 years old. His grave is marked by a stunning limestone monument carved by Ben, a stonecarver like his father.*

*Deb has agreed to share their story to help other families understand what's possible, even in the worst of circumstances.*

#### **With the shock of Ben's sudden death, how did you make decisions regarding his burial?**

There is no preparation for this, neither emotional nor practical planning. You simply move forward from one moment to the next sifting through what has happened and how to care for this child you so love... how to care for you daughters, your husband and yourself... how to care for the dogs left behind. You stumble through each moment, whether or not to see your son... the reality of it all. And yes, of course, you must see him, you must hold him and kiss him. You must speak to him. And then you must make decisions regarding him.

#### **How did you decide to bury, rather than cremate?**

For us, the decision to emphatically not allow embalming was simple. But our plan was to cremate. We had chosen a beautiful handmade wooden box for his cremated remains. Our thought was to take Ben back to Ohio and bury him next to his grandparents, whom he adored. We thought he would be comforted to be with them; it felt right. But first we organized a time for Ben's friends to say good-bye, and to see Ben if they wished to do so. Ben was simply there, wrapped in a blanket, not "laid out" in a coffin...just there in the funeral home for any friend who wished to say a few words to be able to do so.



*Ben in his stonecarving studio*

When so many friends came to see our boy, we realized that Portland was his home and this was his tribe. Among them was a family with whom Ben had a particularly special friendship, with young boys he had befriended. Sadly, one of their sons was critically ill and passed on. It was their mother, Amy,

who transformed my thinking for my own son's burial. She spoke of caring for her son in death, wrapping him in beautiful blankets and burying him in a special place where she could visit. It was that conversation that changed everything. I realized fully that not only did I need Ben to be near us, but I wanted to care for him completely.

### **How did you choose a cemetery?**

*Where* was the question, as our one requirement was a cemetery that allowed limestone monuments, as we intended to place one of Ben's stone carvings as his headstone. Family is a great help at times like this and our brother-in-law made many calls to various cemeteries. It is an incredible blessing to us that River View allowed the use of Ben's stone, and that we were able to place him at the top of a rise under a sycamore tree, a favorite of ours.

### **What did you choose to bury Ben in?**

We chose a simple pine box and painted Ben's signature "B" on the top. He signed all of his artwork in this way. It was an incredibly special time for our family, to give him this honor and to spend quiet time together for him. He was wrapped in a white shroud made of hand-woven cloth and a few special things were placed with him as well, things we felt important.



### **How did you plan this most difficult of ceremonies?**

We were able to give our boy a loving send off. So much of what evolved was the result of staying open, asking for help, and good fortune. River View's Susan O'Brien, who coordinated our cemetery arrangements, was a wonderful aspect of it all. She is a very special woman. Holly Pruett, a Celebrant, came into our lives, another blessing. She guided us through the planning of his burial. It was all to be graveside. I shall hold Susan and Holly both in my heart forever.

### **Please tell us about the burial.**

Friends from Ohio and Portland carried our Ben to his grave and then proceeded to cover him with soil. It was important to us that those who loved Ben were able to bury him, to complete the process, if you will; to send him off through the sacred labor of only those who loved him.

I remember just sitting on a bale of straw opposite those young men, absorbing the moments as shovels traded hands and in silence our son was cared for and buried. I remember clearly my own decision not to pick up a shovel, knowing that my role was to witness and allow others to do this for us. Even the grass was laid back in place by those who knew and loved our son, my husband George and I laying the last piece together.

The stone Ben carved has been set upon a black granite base. We visit each week, bringing fresh flowers, sunflowers when possible. We have purchased graves for ourselves next to our son and for our daughters a few feet away. I know now where I shall be when that day comes.