

Let me begin with expressing my gratitude first to all of you for coming, for taking time from your work, your families, some traveling very far to be here. Thank you for joining together to celebrate a gift and commitment to future generations. Many thanks to the Land Trust of Tennessee and especially Gaston Farmer, my guide and colleague from the beginning of this process in 2021 to now. Gaston, you have been a patient guide and teacher along every step of my land trust journey—our final walking the land together before the closing a few weeks later will always be a treasured memory. And to everyone at the Land Trust, you have been so dedicated, inspiring, and welcoming. It is good to be among those who naturally and regularly think about the future and those coming after us, to be among those who every day live the values of caring for and stewarding our natural places. I am ready to help you spread the word in all ways and grow your stewardship of our state's farmlands and natural resources acre by acre.

I'm also very grateful to so many friends who are as devoted to this place as I am, and, indeed who are now helping me care for the place with as much love and attention as if it has always been in their lives. To Scott and Luke Torreano who have not only taught me so much but helped make an orchard a reality, brought together native plants, helped me understand how to care for these trees who are like family, and who watch over this place every day. Thank you to Richard Atkinson for partnering with me both to clear and plant the back field. To Jerry Smith who has been my teacher for so many years and introduced me to new ways to think about and care for this land including honoring the cemetery in the middle field, a resting place for people who also

cared for this place over 150 years ago, to Martin Knoll, Nate Wilson, Deb McGrath and many other Sewanee faculty who share my vision for this place as a natural classroom now and for years to come. And gratitude to my cousins Sandy Davis and Eddie Vincent who watch over the place and for so many years helped my mom, Marion, as she cared for the place on her own.

About this place named Mayes Place by my family many years ago. In mid 1930's my grandfather, TL Mayes, came from Claiborne County, East Tennessee to be the county agent for Franklin County. Newly trained, he came to an area still amid the depression and soon to enter another world war. Young as he was, his role was to be an advisor and to bring new agricultural knowledge to county farmers. He bought this farm and with his wife Ora, raised their three children here. They deeded over a portion to their son, Edward and his wife, Marion, and they too started a life here just a few weeks after I was born. In addition to their theater business, they built a poultry farm and sold Mayes Place Eggs around the county—hence the lushness of the center field.

After Ed died in 1986, Marion continued to live here while she worked for Farmers Bank that eventually became Suntrust and now Truist. Marion loved every inch of this ground; she planted the dogwoods, cared for the pine trees, nurtured the birds, and listened acutely for the changes in the seasons. She sat on those back steps and listened to the night sounds. She loved to mow, to care for her place. She knew every role and dip in the terrain and even when

Parkinson's disease made it not possible, she dreamed of coming home to this spot, mowing this upper field, caring for this place, her home.

And now I am the keeper of this place that I have known for so many years. I don't think of ownership or possession but rather of stewardship and making sure this land is cared for in the ways it has always cared for my family and many before. We come together this afternoon ensuring that this place will continue in perpetuity sharing its natural beauty, agricultural bounty, and safe habitat for so many birds and wild things. At a time when so many acres of farmland and natural places are being lost across our state and country nearly every day, we join with our Tennessee Land Trust colleagues to protect and care for our remaining natural places so that our children, grandchildren, and persons we will never meet will know their beauty, be nurtured by their bounty, and restored by caring for them. Here is a concern and a hope.

First the concern. Is there a risk in our increasingly global, virtual world that we are becoming placeless, unrooted, and less aware of our connection to the ground, to where our food comes from, to the necessity of protecting and caring for our natural world. Increasingly separated from a sense of place, have we instead a sense of dis-ease and find fewer and fewer places we feel compelled to care for. We see now result of that dis-ease in the devastation in nearly all aspects of our environment as our planet burns, bakes, floods, and quakes. Plain and simple, doing what we come together today to do is good for our individual and community health as much as it is good for the health of our natural places. Stewarding our natural world, being

sure with all the energy we can muster that we pass these places along protected and safe to the next generations is an imperative for the health of ourselves, our communities, our planet, our home. We ignore this imperative at our peril. Or as Wendell Berry has written:

*“The care of the Earth is our most ancient and most worthy, and after all, our most pleasing responsibility. To cherish what remains of it and to foster its renewal is our only hope.”*

And thus to my hope already being realized. I see this place and so many like it as natural classrooms bringing young people, our children, grandchildren, students back to the natural world, learning from it, caring for it, and stewarding it forward. Partnering with both Sewanee and the Land Trust, I see students all over this land, learning about the soil, the water, about caring for trees, experimenting with sustainable agriculture, how to make natural environments that both yield food and are safe habitats for wildlife. I see this classroom being so used that every day there is someone here, exploring and learning. I see these students caring then for other places, teaching their children what they learned here, carry forward their stewardship to wherever they go. I see families enjoying the beauty, relishing the fruits of the orchard, seeing native plants long vanished elsewhere. In these hundreds of moments of caring and learning, I see a spiritual restoration and a blessing for generations to come—or again, from Wendell Berry:

*“We have the world to live in on the condition that we will take good care of it. And to take good care of it, we have to know it. And to know it and to be willing to take care of it, we have to love it.”*

Thank you for coming together to realize this vision of stewarding, sharing, knowing, and caring.

Linda C. Mayes, MD

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