

# “My deepest joy is introducing plants to people!”



Common Good City Farm

## In Memoriam: Tricia McCauley, M.S., Herbalist and Nutritionist (February 25, 1970 – December 25, 2016)

Tara Thomas

On a Monday in late December, herbalist and nutritionist Tricia McCauley stepped inside the dispensary at the Maryland University of Integrative Health (MUIH). Radiant and bright-eyed, she looked up at the jars of medicinal herbs lining the shelves. She and dispensary manager Nicole Rubin spent a few minutes musing on the stinkiness of Valerian root, and Tricia picked up an order for a client that she planned to hand deliver.

She was there that day, mentoring graduate students in the MUIH’s Nutrition and Integrative Health Student Clinic – there for the last time, it would turn out, in the same clinic where in 2009 she herself stepped into clinical practice en route to earning her Masters in Herbal Medicine and becoming a licensed nutritionist.

Reflections on Tricia’s time as a student clinician and mentor were consistent. Her colleagues and students at MUIH, and in her D.C. community, were unanimous that she was kind, poised, articulate, organized, passionate, forthright and witty...oh so delightfully witty.

Tricia was adept at offering ancient wisdom at just the right moment, like this line from her hero, the 14th century Persian poet Hafez: “When all your desires are distilled, you will cast just two votes: to love more, and be happy.” Not one to let things get too serious, she was famous for her one-liners: “What’s a pirate’s favorite herb? Arrrrrrnica!”

“She embodied a vital energy you don’t see in most people,” said Amy Walker Keen, MUIH classmate. “She had this amazing energy that

radiated.” In clinic, Walker Keen remembers that Tricia was organized and quick and could incorporate science and energetics with grace.

“Tricia was like a planet with its own gravitational field. Anyone that came into her orbit was just naturally drawn closer to her,” said Tom Balles, MUIH professor and acupuncturist. “In the role of student she gave me pause: maybe she should have been the one standing in the front of room teaching, and I should have sat in the back in order to continue my learning?”

Tricia was an actress by training. A personal health challenge led her to train in nutrition at the Institute for Integrative Nutrition and to follow with studies in herbal medicine. The demanding scientific nature of MUIH’s Master’s program pushed her.

When the time came to pick a commencement speaker, only Tricia was surprised when she was chosen. Her speech beautifully combined her artistry with her new love of plant science. She quoted the Rig Veda’s “HYMN XCVII: Praise of Herbs,” described adorning herself with a crown of cleavers at the United Plant Savers sanctuary in Ohio, and proclaimed herself a “plant translator.” “My deepest joy is introducing plants to people,”

she said. (The full speech can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ZkBkF-iAQM>.)

And from 2010-2016, she found many creative and delightful ways to do that. Nutricia Consulting, a clever twist on her own name, was the home base for her clinical practice and group wellness programs, and the inspiration to write a practical guidebook to gentle detoxification, “Cleansing and Detox Made Simple.” Next came Leafyhead, a small line of “farm-to-face” handcrafted topical creations, including inventive formulas like fennel, cilantro, and coffee lip balms and the insect repellent, “No Fly Zone,” which won an AHG award for Most Creative Product Name.

“Every product had a story. Someone she knew personally needed it and so she made it,” said Olivia Ivey, one of Tricia’s “helper elves” at Leafyhead. Tricia’s proudest moment was when a salve crafted for her mother brought relief when nothing else had.

When the chance came to help turn an old ball field into an urban educational farm, Tricia jumped right in. She planted and tended the herb gardens at Common Good City Farm, making it her mission to incorporate medicinal and

---

The spring garden at  
Common Good City Farm in  
Washington, DC.

*Common Good City Farm*







.....  
An herb mandala was created by friends attending Tricia McCauley's memorial service.

Bevin Clare

culinary plants in the farm's offerings, and leading a popular year-long herbal apprenticeship at the farm. When Prince Charles visited, she was asked to speak to him about medicinal plants.

"She was a good ambassador of herbal medicine to a lot of people who might not have given it a whirl. She made it accessible and wasn't afraid to talk to people," said Ann Mezger, one of the old friends in Tricia's close-knit theatre community.

Tricia became known as the go-to person in her neighborhood, for all things green and herbal. She taught EMTs at the firehouse about herbal first aid, created a line of teas for a local teahouse, and got her calamus root extract into old-timey cocktails at a nearby bar. The Washington Post listed her latest creation for bearded hipsters - District Devil Beard Oil and 'Stache Wax - in an article of top 5 coolest, locally made gifts. It's no wonder, that she was invited back to MUIH as guest faculty shortly after graduating, and later went on to be hired as a lead clinical supervisor.

Tricia McCauley was taken from this world on December 25, 2016, in an act of unspeakable criminal violence, near her home in Washington, DC. But her love of people and plants lives on. Some people still have little pots and tins of her magical products. Leafyhead Legacy, an Etsy shop, was formed to sell her

inventory in a fundraiser for Common Good City Farm. Soon her plants will begin to emerge at the farm, where the staff is looking for new teachers to carry on the apprenticeship program. Her many herb and nutrition students and colleagues will carry seeds of her teachings into their own lives, like the new teaching garden being planted in her name at SkyHouse Yoga. An entire season is being dedicated to her at the Venus Theatre, where the director is inviting patrons to share stories of Tricia.

A sudden death can take a toll on those who remain, but it is easy to imagine Tricia would keep it all in perspective, advising the disheartened to carry on. Perhaps she would make the grief-stricken a supportive tincture, then beam brightly, and call on Hafez again to offer some healing words: "This sky. This sky where we live is no place to lose your wings, so love, love, love."

Donations in Tricia McCauley's memory can be made to: The Fund for Theatre Professionals, created to provide health insurance to the many self-employed professionals who cannot afford this protection. <https://www.youcaring.com/triciamcauley-725490> or to Common Good City Farm at [commongoodcityfarm.org](http://commongoodcityfarm.org). ■

*Tara Thomas, M.S., Herbal Medicine, Maryland University of Integrative Health, is a clinical herbalist in Seattle, WA.*