Today we interred the ashes of my dear friend, Peggy Bissell, who died in November last year. I wrote this memoir/eulogy for her. Several times, I had to stop to control my tears. She was a dear friend.

Dear, Dear Peggy,

When I think of you, I remember moments in time –yours and mine together – yours and Jon’s, yours and the world.

I see us sitting in the hospital cafeteria- the doctor and the chaplain- in animated conversation about, many things, hospice, ethics and the challenges of administration vs praxis and the simple things that women share and learn together. We talked about bigger things -Spiritual beliefs and wonderings, and almost 9 years ago when you got the diagnosis that you had triple negative breast cancer we talked about life and death -what was important? Did it make any difference if you were here or gone to another place that we do not know, but is part of so many religious traditions?

I remember special moments -days, some of them, with you- the day we hiked Excelsior Peak at Mt. Baker, the hard way, from the road. It was so steep and painful for our old knees. On the way down we shared my poles. But the conversation was good, and the views of Mt. Baker were fabulous. I remember the day I brought my grandson, Cooper to meet you. You took us to the field across the street and taught him to use a bow and arrow. He felt so special. Then you brought us back to your sweet little arbor by the pond for tea and cookies you had made – gluten free for me. Being together sharing beautiful moments -that was one of the many things that made our friendship special. We did many hikes together, and later when you didn't have the strength to do hikes we did walks on Samish island - down to the beach and still later across the road around the triangle field.

Our walks often ended with cups of tea and more conversation –you, researching a medical issue for me. You wanting to contribute to the research of triple negative breast cancer – it gave meaning to your life, even though you knew it likely wouldn’t help you. You and I shared together our beliefs about life after death. We had ideas, but neither of us knew the answers –maybe you do now.

More and more, you said to me how much you cared for Jon and how you were trying to make things as easy for him as possible at the end. Never mind the competition gardening that you had shared together over the years nor a brisk word here or a sharp word there. You knew that Jon loved you and you loved him back. I remember how you both looked the day you married. You were so in love.

I am moved sometimes to tears when I think of you and miss you, Peggy. I remember your generosity to people that had less than you. I remember how you overcame challenges in your life, like breaking the hold that the Jehovah's Witnesses had on you – in spite of the rift that you knew it would cause in your family, you became your own independent thinker. You chose truth. And yet later, when your mother, Molly, developed dementia and needed support, you and Jon created space for her and cared lovingly for her to the end of her life.

I was fascinated by your experiments with recipes -chestnut chutney, preserves of all sorts. You kept careful notes so you would know what to do next time. You also recorded bits of wisdom from books that you were constantly reading.

Dear Peggy you were above all, a physician – a healer. You had high integrity even when it caused you political capital. You cared deeply about your patients and others and stood up for them when they needed an advocate. You were exceptionally generous where your beliefs lay. As your disease progressed you gave of yourself through your blood and your body for research, to make the lives of others coming after you, with the same cancer, easier –to try and find treatments, to alleviate pain and hopefully one day to cure triple negative breast cancer.

Being able to place your ashes in the earth, is a metaphor for us tending not only your physical remains, but the well-being of our souls. We let your body go, but we have, for a long time, been incorporating your ways of being in the world in our own lives. That is how our lives are enriched and fruitful, as yours was. And it is our way of stewarding your love and values into an ongoing future of love, generosity, curiosity, integrity, and wellness.

Dear Peggy, I love you. You will live on in me and in others who have known your touch. I believe we are better people for having known you. I will always remember you- and though none of us knows the mystical truth beyond this life, our memories, at least, are one form of eternity. You were, and continue to be, a dear friend.