

Remembering Amanda

By Dr. Suzanne Simard

I was the graduate supervisor of Dr. Amanda Asay, whom we lost in a tragic skiing accident in Nelson, British Columbia recently. Amanda defended her Master's degree in 2013 and her PhD in 2019 in the Faculty of Forestry at the University of British Columbia. She did this while representing Canada in baseball and hockey on the international stage, bringing home medals and trophies, always humble and understated, and making us all proud to be Canadians alongside her. Amanda had as profound an impact on the people surrounding her in academia as she did in sport.

I cannot express in words the devastating loss I, my students and colleagues in the Faculty of Forestry at UBC are feeling at this moment. Amanda was an anchor in our department and lab group; she was our bright light, our inspiration, our grounding, our solace. She always had a joke, a wisecrack, and her dimples quick to shoot out a laugh at any moment.

She looked out for us, worked side-by-side with us, and she mentored hundreds of undergrads as a TA in several courses. She was our superhero.

As she did in baseball and hockey, Amanda had already hit a home run in forest ecology, discovering that trees can recognize their own kin. Amanda and I had no idea if Douglas-fir trees could recognize their offspring when she started her Masters, but we embarked on this study together, always joking we would 'Play it by ear.' We followed our curiosities, guided by the craft of science, and Amanda cared for thousands of seedlings growing in the presence of their parents, connected or not through their mycorrhiza symbionts. Only Amanda could have pulled off the work – her big beautiful brain and heart sorting out the many nuances and interactions between related and unrelated trees, exploring the kind of intricate relationships that make forests so fascinating.

Her discovery that older trees recognize their relatives has rocked our perception of forests, telling us that forests are societies much like our own, where trees live in community with deep, meaningful, collaborative and competitive relationships. Where parents look after their kids to give them the best head start possible.

In the past three years, Amanda had taken on studying whole ecosystems, where she was working with Deb MacKillop in the Ministry of FLNRORD quantifying the effects of silvicultural systems on carbon stocks.

Amanda was just like the trees she studied: making the world a better place for us all. Her parents Loris and George, her brother Brad, her Auntie Di, all raised the most beautiful person possible, a brilliant star in every sense, and we at UBC were lucky to be able to call her our kin. Our community at UBC sends Amanda's family love to help them through this profound loss. It is with a broken heart that I too must come to grips with the fact Amanda went straight to heaven on January 7, 2022.

For those who have not heard it already, I would like to share this song honoring Amanda's life and now legacy: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RL7J8TI-Esl>

Goodbye for now, my dear Amanda, I will see you on the other side. Love Suzanne



Amanda, far right, with fellow doctoral students, Katie McMahan (left) and Monika Gorzelak (middle).