



Dawn Sturdevant Baum
July 3, 1976 — June 10, 2023

Dawn is sunshine, a bright light in the clouds

Dawn Sturdevant Baum, 46, passed away June 10th, 2023 from complications of metastatic breast cancer. She passed peacefully surrounded by family. Dawn's light continues to shine to many.

Dawn was born to Mary Kay Baum and Michael Sturdevant in Pleasant Springs, WI during the sunrise of July 3rd, 1976. Fittingly, weeks before her birth, Grandmother Nellie Sturdevant had suggested to Mary Kay the name Meep, meaning Dawn.

Dawn came to experience life with some of her Menominee relatives. These include her half-sister Michelle Sturdevant who at age 10 lived with Mary Kay for a year. Dawn guided many including Tara Sturdevant, Craig Sturdevant, and Marisa Soto. In addition to having Menominee relations, Dawn was proud to be enrolled in the Sokaogon Chippewa Community – Mole Lake Band of Ojibwe.

In 1988 Dawn's mother Mary Kay married George Swamp. They welcomed Dawn's brother, Jake Swamp in 1989. George officially adopted Dawn as his daughter on Feb 1, 2019 after serving in that role for many important years.

Dawn graduated with honors from Madison East High School in 1994 and graduated from Beloit College with a B.A. in Religious Studies in 1998. She was an active member of the swim teams for both Madison East and Beloit and enjoyed being in and around water for the rest of her life. She began Law School at the University of Colorado and transferred to UW-Madison Law School where she earned her J.D. in 2001. In 2005 she earned the distinguished L.L.M. degree in American Indian and Indigenous Law from the University of Tulsa.

While in law school at UW-Madison, Dawn was a Victory Voice in what would become the Lambda Chapter of Alpha Pi Omega Sorority, Inc., the first historically Native American Sorority. Dawn continued her leadership in the Sorority becoming a founding member of the Zeta Pi Professional Chapter and its first president. Dawn served various leadership roles in the Sorority at both the local and national levels becoming a permanent part of Alpha Pi Omega history.

Following Law School, Dawn served as Law Clerk for the Supreme Court Chief Justice of the Navajo Nation. She then worked as Legal Assistant to the Clerk of Supreme Court and Court of Appeals of Wisconsin. In 2005, Dawn moved to Washington, DC, where she worked for the renowned Native American Rights Fund. She then worked within the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the Department of the Interior with American Indian and Alaska Native colleges and elementary and secondary schools. Spread out over 64 reservations and 23 states, the officers of these educators were glad to have one person, Dawn, as their go-to staffer. Successful there, she was called to the Office of the Solicitor for the U S Department of the Interior which advises and represents the office in judicial, legislative, ethical and legal

matters. If this is not broad enough Dawn took within these 12 years a position in the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency, the National Indian Gaming Commission and US Department of Justice in their Office of Tribal Justice. The latter mandate was to assure that federal agencies uphold Indian sovereignty and consultation requirements. Dawn was elected president of the Native American Bar Association of DC and later was a member of the American Bar Association's Council for Racial and Ethnic Diversity in Education. A founding member of the American Bar Association's Joint Task Force on Reversing the School-to-Prison Pipeline, Dawn helped develop the task force's 2016 report on how to reform and improve education for disenfranchised youth. As she moved to her Yurok position she helped implement more such reforms there.

In 2017 Dawn moved to Crescent City, CA and began work for the Yurok Tribe where she would eventually become General Counsel. At the Yurok Tribe she developed a mentorship program for young attorneys and paralegals and inspired several young tribal members to continue their education and develop advocacy skills. Dawn had a gift for bringing out the best in people. For six years she was Adjunct Professor of Indian Law at University of Tulsa College of Law, teaching Indian education and gaming law classes after work in her "free time." As part of her work with the Yurok she went to Egypt in November 2022 for the UN Climate Change Conference (COP 27) where she spoke about the importance of using indigenous knowledge with sovereignty in addressing the climate crisis.

In April 2023, she shared this recent episode of The Future as it relates to the Yurok: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x3JdV5AVOQg>. Dawn found a disconnect between what officials are *saying at the COP26 and 27* talks *what they're doing at home*. Meanwhile the Yurok are a model for accomplishing much by cooperation and partnering with businesses and governments. "*We cannot achieve healthy living without including Native nations and their wise traditional ways*. "It's really wonderful for us to bring our territory, and what used to be our territory, back into our control, to be able to use our traditional knowledge ... to prevent the massive wildfires by techniques like burning designated underbrush, keeping the forest healthy," she said. Clean, free-flowing river that will once again support one of America's greatest fisheries available for indigenous people and their traditional ways. We've done that for millennia and the rest of the world is finally catching onto what we were doing."

Dawn considered herself a strong resilient indigenous woman. She survived a devastating car accident and fought her way back to mobility. She faced her first round against breast cancer in the middle of the pandemic at the height of isolation and uncertainty. She maintained her incredible resilience in the face of struggles large and small and held onto a belief in hope and the possibility of joy.

Dawn and Jake shared an incredible bond and she took great joy in his life and friendship. They shared homes in Washington, DC, Crescent City, CA and most recently Green Bay WI, where Dawn said she wanted to be close to family, take time for recreation and nature while continuing her work as General Counsel of the Yurok Tribe in CA. Dawn said she wanted to grow old in this home.

Jake is the best brother possible to Dawn. With Jake's selfless care, love and respect his priority was to ensure Dawn had everything she needed to fight the medical challenges she faced. Jake continues to serve as Dawn's cherished brother and champion by honoring her wishes, dreams and goals.

While complications from cancer took their toll, Dawn's impact lives on through us. Dawn was incredibly selfless, never hesitating to give her time, care, and attention to anyone in need. She was a leader who conducted herself with compassion, humility, and grace – highly respected by others in her field and beloved by everyone who knew her.

She spent her too-brief lifetime effecting change for the legal rights of Native people and the protection of the earth. A gentle but powerful force, she worked diligently – passionate but unassuming, always ready with good counsel and encouragement and an easy laugh.

She had a unique gift for connecting with people, and connecting others, whether in Indian Country or some faraway corner of the world. She relished travel and time in nature and took time to experience as much of life as she possibly could as a solo pursuit or with friends and family. She made new friends wherever she went and traveled extensively, most recently paddling 90 miles down the Douro River in Portugal. Some of her other trips included Italy, France, Iceland and all 50 states. Dawn was creative and artistic, she appreciated the arts and could often be found at wine and paint nights or working on beading and basket weaving.

Though she was taken far too soon from us, she leaves behind her family and a vast network of friends and colleagues who will honor her memory, carry on her work, and remember and celebrate the singularly wonderful individual she was. How rare to shine so brightly for so many.

Dawn is preceded in death by: her biological father Michael Sturdevant, grandmother Nellie Sturdevant, grandparents Buelah M. and Vincent J. Baum, step-grandmother Patricia Calnin Baum, grandparents Grace and George N. Swamp, and aunt Beverly Baum.

Dawn is survived by her parents Mary Kay Baum and George Swamp, and her brother Jake Swamp. Also dearly missed by aunts and uncles: Sheri (Marlin) Mousseau, Sue (Ed) McDay, John Baum, Christine (Wade) Van Ryzin, Richard (Anna Threlfall) Baum, Edward (Mary) Baum, Kenneth (Jeanne) Baum, Charles (Sharie) Baum, Rosann (Douglas) Baum Milius and Rodger (Anna) Baum. Dawn is also missed by many more members of her Baum, Swamp and Sturdevant families and countless friends.

The Family is also especially grateful to Aunt Rosann for all the extra support she provides. The immediate family had a private burial for Dawn at St. Joseph's Cemetery in Appleton on the solstice. Family, friends, and all wishing to celebrate Dawn's life are invited to the Oneida Radisson Conference Center, Green Bay, WI between 3pm and 8pm on Saturday July 15, 2023 with a Celebration of Life program from 4pm to 6pm. This will be the first of what will be a series of celebrations of Dawn's life we are working on organizing. Other locations we intend to eventually hold celebrations of her life include Klamath, CA; Madison or Beloit, WI; and Washington, DC. We will of course be unofficially celebrating her life everywhere we go.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to National Indian Education Association, National Breast Cancer Foundation, Inc. or Wise Women Gathering Place in Dawn's name. If you insist on flowers know that Dawn had a strong preference for uncut or potted flowers, she felt we should find ways to enjoy their beauty without killing them when possible.