

Kerry Mansir
Christ Church Gardiner
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Since 2002, Jeff and I have made the trek from Maine to Kentucky most summers—always by car, never flying. We love a good road trip. After 2005, our road trips included 1 kid, then 2 and then 3. And while Jeff is a good sport about these trips which are a homecoming for me, I get the same question every time. “Remind me again,” he would say, “why we leave Maine in the summer to go to Kentucky?” “Kentucky is hot. It’s muggy. The lake water isn’t refreshing, he would say—it’s green and feels like bath water. And I always come home with poison ivy.”

And he’s usually right. But I have to tell you that this summer he had to eat his words, at least about the weather, because when we arrived in Kentucky it was cooler there than here—you all were having that heat wave. And while you all experienced a cold and rainy fourth of July weekend, we had beautiful weather in Kentucky. Jeff did come home with poison ivy though. And maybe a spider bite or two. But he’s fine.

It was a wonderful trip. And I thank you all for the gift of that two weeks away. We spent time with my dad. My 90 year-old grandmother. Aunts and uncles. And more cousins than I can count. After a family reunion weekend and a day in Louisville, we spent the remainder of our time in Kentucky at the family cabin on Lake Malone. I don’t have a childhood home to return to, but I have been spending summers at this cabin since I was seven. One night I was brushing my teeth at the cabin and realized that I had been looking into that same mirror for 38 years. And it was as if I could glimpse all of my past selves from the age of seven in that mirror.

Going home is a powerful thing. And it isn’t just about nostalgia. Making that journey back to our roots—those people and places and life events that shaped us and made us who we are can be joyful but if we’re honest and look at our past and our families of origin with open eyes, it can sometimes be unsettling.

On this trip home, my dad took us to the Rhoads Cemetery in Browder, Kentucky. This is the cemetery of my Dad’s ancestors and is on the land that had belonged to Captain Henry Rhoads and several generations after him. Captain Henry Rhoads was considered the Godfather of Muhlenburg County. If you are a fan of the

singer John Prine, you will remember the song where he sings, “Daddy won’t you take me back to Muhlenburg County, down by the Green River where Paradise lay.”

That’s where most of my people come from, beginning with Captain Henry Rhoads who fought in the Revolutionary War under General Muhlenburg and led a group of settlers, mainly of German descent, west to settle in Kentucky where there were grants of land being given for military service. Captain Rhoads served in the Kentucky Legislature and when a new county was formed where he had land, he named it after his former General.

It was interesting to walk among the gravestones in the cemetery. They were clearly a religious family—his sons having biblical names like David, Solomon and Absalom, Jacob and Daniel. My great-grandfather was Calvin Eden, and I was always fascinated by the choice of Eden for his middle name. Jeff and I gave that middle name to Catherine.

I spent some time researching Henry Rhoads after our visit to the cemetery. And because of the Sacred Ground group that I was a part of this past year, I asked questions while reading about the Rhoads family history that I may not otherwise have asked.

If you don’t know about Sacred Ground, it’s a curriculum to be undertaken in small groups that invites participants to walk back through history in order to peel away the layers that brought us to today, and to do so in a personal way, reflecting on family histories and stories, as well as important narratives that shape the collective American story. It asks genuine questions of our history, particularly around the issue of race, and asks us to be humble students of our past, acknowledging the harms done and the harms endured. <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/sacred-ground/invitation/>

So as I was reading about the settlement of this part of Kentucky by Henry Rhoads and others, I noticed that as they were moving in, they built fortifications along the river to provide refuge in the case of what one document called, “Indian attacks.” Reading that made me realize that of course, the land that was being given to these settlers for military service was not land that was uninhabited. Native Americans had made it their home for thousands of years. So I had to ask, “What happened to those

people already living on the land when this wave of settlers found their way there and claimed it?”

There was also the question of slave ownership that came up in my research. Apparently, not many, but some of these early settlers brought slaves with them. Would my ancestor Captain Rhoads have owned a slave?

Why are these questions important you might ask? After all, I can't change the past. If my ancestors were part of a movement that drove Native Americans off their land, or if they owned slaves, I can't go back and change that. But I believe that we can't move forward to something better without fully understanding our past. Both as a nation, and in our own personal histories.

Think about your own stories, your families of origin, where you come from, and where you've been. All of us have both positive and negative things that have shaped who we are. And while it's right to celebrate the positive influences on who we are, we can't grow without being honest about the negative things, too—things like abuse, addiction, harmful family dynamics, violence, and more. We have to be honest about our past in order to heal those broken part of ourselves so that we can pass on a healthier future to our children.

I believe that's true for our country as well. There has been a lot of talk lately about what gets taught in our schools regarding our nation's complicated history of racial injustice. Our local school board will be debating this topic this week, as a controversy was recently sparked by an AP English summer reading list that asked students to choose a book about racial injustice. Patrick, my son who will be a Junior next year, is taking that class, so our family is right in the middle of this debate.

I am always in support of truth-telling, even when it's hard. Even when it's painful and shameful. And I am convinced that we and our children can handle that truth-telling, and that in fact, it will make us stronger and more resilient, kinder and more justice-oriented.

Like the Sacred Ground work that many of us here at Christ Church participated in, I believe that our young people need to do this work, too. Leonard Pitts, Jr. calls this work of walking back through history to peel away the layers that brought us to today, **walking sacred ground**. He says, *Understand that this is sacred ground and it hurts to*

walk here. But at the same time, I “need” to walk here, need the strength, the sense of purpose, the knowledge of self, that walking here imparts.

Katrina Browne who is the primary creator of the Sacred Ground curriculum says it like this, “If we enter the sacred ground of the labyrinth to walk back in time, see the markers along the highway showing where we went astray, ask genuine questions of our history, be humble students of our past, acknowledge the harms done and the harms endured – if we can do these things, then God willing, we can eventually come to some centered spot, take stock, see, sense, feel, mourn, pray, and then turn and walk back out, together.”

This is hard work, but it’s healing work. It’s work that we don’t do alone, but in community. And I invite all of us gathered here, all of us that make up this community of Christ Church, to make a commitment to doing that work.

Let us pray:

Hear our prayers, Holy God. Breathe your Spirit over us and all the earth, that barriers would crumble and divisions cease. Help us to be honest about our history. Make us more fully your co-healers of the broken world. Unite us with all people in bonds of love, that the whole earth and all its peoples may be at peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.