



Finding My Roots
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For years I've been a huge fan of *Finding Your Roots*, the genealogy show on PBS hosted by the fabulous Dr. Henry Louis Gates Jr. In each episode he sits with a mixture of individuals and shares what their team of genealogical and genetic researchers have discovered about their "roots". As I don't have access to Dr. Gates' team, I have made use of ancestry.com, family knowledge, and my own deep research. And recently, in the first two months of my sabbatical, I had the opportunity to not only do internet searches but also visit some of the places where my ancestors were born, lived, and/or died.

My first journey was to Iron River, MI, where my mother's father was born and his mother and siblings; the place to which his father immigrated from Cornwall, England. Growing up my grandpa told me stories about this



small mining town and the conglomeration of immigrants who populated it from England, Italy, Sweden, and more, but we never got to go together. I took him with me in a box of photos that I inherited. With the help of a cousin I met for the first time, I saw the remnants of the mines where my great-uncles worked and the school where my grandpa went with his siblings (left). We visited the graves of great-aunts I never met but feel like I know because of stories from my grandpa. I even tracked down the house my great-grandmother lived in and used as a boarding

house for minors; the house where my great-grandfather courted her and where her father died. There is a hardworking, tenacious, deep love of family rootedness to this branch of my family that I hope I inherited along with resilience.

My second journey was to Middle TN, where my mother's mother was born and her parents and generations that go back to before the Revolutionary War. I spent a couple of days at the State Archives in Nashville, reading through family letters and correspondence held there, learning about branches of my family and history my mother never heard of. My brother joined me on a full day adventure locating cemeteries and graves, including a two plus hour hike through the woods to find the remains of where our 5th great grandparents are buried (right). This trip was to include branches of my father's side too, but Hurricane Helene not only caused too much damage to the roads we needed in Eastern TN and North Carolina, she also washed away the town where my grandmother and her father were born. I do not know what if anything remains. Here too I had photos of my grandmother and her family and memories of the stories she told me. Through engagement in government and developing communities, this branch passed on the knowledge that we are always a part of something bigger than ourselves and as tenders of the land (farmers) a love and care for the earth and deep knowledge that the land provides for our well-being.



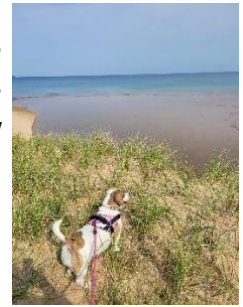
Of course, not all roots are positive. I've had to reconcile that my ancestors were on the wrong side of history most of the time. As enslavers and those who supported removing indigenous peoples from their lands, there are pieces of me that could cling to the mindset that me and mine are more important than and you and yours

or ours together, if I let them, and similar racist or dehumanizing beliefs. But this is where my faith and Christian ethic, which I inherited from all my branches, keeps me rooted in an even greater story, the one that tells me not to feed and nurture those roots. It also calls me to tell the story in the same way the books of 1 and 2 Kings tell of both those who walked in the way of God and those who did not, so that I might learn and grow and not repeat past atrocities or stand by when their ugly cousins of my generation rear their heads.

For the Reformer John Calvin (a piece of our Presbyterian roots!), “knowledge of self and knowledge of God gives us eyes to see both ourselves and the world through the lens of God’s saving intention and to attune to the voice of God amidst the many voices of the world that beckon for our attention.”¹

I have more digging to go in my roots, and I know there will be both gems and junk as I do. But there is also the truth about what I hold onto and what I let go, what shapes me and what I seek to reform for myself and the next generation. Then there are new joys I get to discover along the way, like the learning my dog, Jelly, loves the beach!

For those interested in your own Christian rootedness and formation, I encourage clicking the link to the article quoted from Tod Bolsinger below.



¹ *From Formed Not Found, A Look at Theological Formation by Tod Bolsinger*