

Continuum

One of my favorite pictures was taken the day my grandchildren, Cameron, age 7, Keith, 4, and Kathryn, 3, helped me celebrate the end of a thirty-year quest. I was finally at Opequon Cemetery. When I look at this photo, now on my desk, I don't "see" the historical marker honoring my Scottish ancestors' gift of land to their church after they settled near Winchester in 1735. I block out Cameron's incipient pout she continues to this day to perfect and ignore Keith's compressed energy ready to erupt the nanosecond my hand leaves his shoulder. Even Kathryn's balletesque leap, a bit blurry, doesn't readily register. Instead I "see" how my grandchildren tell America's story.

From their maternal side there is a long documented history of Europeans, mostly from the British Isles who came here to escape religious, economic, or military repression. Opequon's Presbyterian Church and burial ground symbolize their flight for freedom. There's also Cameron's long slender nose and my chin and Keith's striking red hair so reminiscent of my sister's childhood shade. Kathryn's cornflower blue eyes come from my father and contrast sharply with her dark ringlets that never stay in place.

From their paternal side come unknown white masters and an undocumented history of slavery. These black ancestors were not seeking freedom. Instead they were brought here in chains. This history proclaims itself in Cameron's warm brown skin the color of tea, Keith's once blue eyes on their way to changing to his father's yellow, and Kathryn's skin just the shade of long treasured parchment.

My grandchildren are too young to ever remember this day, but I do want them to eventually understand when they look at this picture that they were the ones who made the occasion special. It's more than watching their feet touch the very same ground their ancestors walked on almost three hundred years ago. It's the convergence of both their parents' stories running against the backdrop of America's that includes how my grandchildren have been robbed of half their family story. My hope is that when they show their grandchildren this picture and tell the story of this day, racism will truly be history in America.