

Modern Pilgrim

“One who journeys in foreign lands~ A pilgrim soul”

A curiosity for who came before us, and for what’s up ahead

It is not uncommon to want to trace our roots—we all have a bit of inner pilgrim in all of us. It’s been sort of a trendy preoccupation over these recent years to research where we come from and find out who our ancestors are through modern-day approaches like ancestry.com or 23 and me. The pandemic has presented a course correction for me, and as for so many others at this time it led me to exploration. This inevitably led me to voyaging throughout Cape Cod as a first-time visitor.



After 18 years in my home, the timing of the pandemic created the perfect incentive to move. I uprooted myself after a real estate acquisition debacle and ended up temporarily moving in with my 80-year-old mother. This unlikely and unforeseen situation lent itself to some bonding and discussions that may not have happened otherwise. We scoured over old news clippings, photographs and bits and pieces of our family history. When my mother shared

her mother’s obituary with me—Grandmother had passed at 55 years old. It struck me. I am 55 and very much alive, and no one in our family has any information about who came before us? Our surname was Fogg as in the *Fogg Museum* in Boston. We had roots in New England and Salem, NJ, but that’s all I knew. I had often heard growing up that

they came over on the *Mayflower* as Daughters of the Mayflower, but no one in my family could verify this.

I decided to dive deep. I downloaded the *Mayflower* passenger list and went to work. I was motivated to excavate the old fashioned way. Go to Cape Cod, live as simply as possible as they did, and explore the peninsula. I randomly chose Eastham for its central location so I could navigate north or south.

My inner most thoughts on the outermost house

Inspired by Cape historian and author Henry Beston's classic story, "*The Outermost House*", I decided to rent a tiny 250 sq. ft. cottage in the woods and sand to help launch my research. If Beston could live remotely in a bare bones shack in the dunes for a year back in the 1920's, I could certainly rough it out for a week?



Hurricane Ida made it a bit challenging for a few days, but for the most part I had a roof over my head, a small bedroom and bathroom; and worked from a small wooden picnic table outside. The abundance of nature was intoxicating. The small ponds, many beaches and hidden bayside retreats revitalized my senses. There was even rumor that the *Mayflower* had first landed on nearby First Encounter beach before it ever landed on Plymouth Rock, so I felt I was in the right place. Or so I thought. Aside from the nightly scamper of small local creatures that fought their way across the roof which I could witness from the single skylight above the bed, and the rocking of the shack in

the high winds—I was all in for the experience. Beston spoke of being drawn to the “*mystery of this earth and outer sea that the world today is sick to its thin blood for the lack of elemental things*”. I couldn’t help but think that his observation has never been more true or relevant? Wildfires in the west, flooding and unprecedented hurricanes in the east, a world pandemic and complete political putrefaction makes this simplistic living seem like a perfect reset. Nature doesn’t acknowledge our unrest? Everything blooms, swells, flies and self-sustains itself without much concern for human circumstances.

This past year taught us so much about the difference between what we really want versus what we really need. Many of us took stock in our lives lived so far. This Covid course correction was not only a curious diversion but a necessary test of my own resilience and fortitude. I had already purged most of what I owned when I moved in January, so this trip was another opportunity to experience the minimalism.

The locals tell the story

Armed with only a faded download of the *Mayflower* passenger list and a few time-worn letters from my Fogg family forebears, I had no idea Where to begin? There was a beautiful library located right in Eastham, but I decided to go with a more traditional route—talk to the locals. My first meal was at *Caroline’s Bar and Grill* right in town where I met Cathy, the resident oyster chucker who could trace her lineage here back many generations. Cathy mentioned growing up with a Peter Fogg, a homebuilder in town who has a wife Mary. I was thrilled to find my first piece of confirmation. I listened to Cathy’s stories of *Caroline’s* history and of the struggles that came from years of multiple ownership since her family sold the original establishment. She spoke of her own

family memories and of the mythology behind the residents and visitors who have passed through. It dawned on me that finding people to speak with this week was one thing, but then trusting their stories from their own subjective memories was something else? If I'm going to create and record something that I can finally pass along to my family and heirs, I wanted to get the facts straight.

That's the intriguing thing about memory—I've learned myself as time goes by that we interject subconscious changes to those memories. I found through some research that this is true for most of us. For instance, I've always loved going to Newport, RI and felt a special connection to the longitude and latitude there. At the center of town stands a colossal white church that I remember being called St. Catharine's church because it matched the unique spelling of my own first name, Catharine with an "A" in it. When I returned to visit last year and walked the grounds and accompanying graveyard, I was baffled that the name over the door simply read, Trinity Church. How could this be? I actually found myself stopping people to ask, "has there been some kind of a commemorative name changing event?" "Did the church go through some transformative renovation?" No, it did not. It was always called Trinity Church. Later that same year I visited Spring Lake, NJ, another favored summertime stopover and there it was. The large gold-domed church also in the center of town revealing its name, St. Catharine's. In my own mind's memory I fused one nostalgic memory with another.

Knowing that this tricky little caveat in our memory system could influence my research, I decided to sift through some genealogy records at the library. So in the wake of hurricane Ida, I found a day of refuge at the Eastham Library. It turns out that Peter Fogg had a brother Eben who passed at a young age from lung cancer and had scores of kinfolk, but would they be related to my family? We have

lung cancer in my family, and sure they all smoked back then, but was I grasping at straws? I summoned up the courage to make the phone call—one that was never returned. Now what? I found Peter's homebuilding business and thought to just go knock on the door, but thought better of it. I set off to Wellfleet for a much-needed meal and to engage with more locals. As I indulged in a Meyer lemon and tarragon martini, it was here that I met a young man who grew up not far from the *Bookstore & Restaurant*. The nearby cemetery bore the names of most of his relatives, as did the street signs in town. This is where I learned that all of the passengers from the *Mayflower* have streets and lanes named after them. I had just come off of Standish Way. Now I understood. I decided to start taking a closer look at these named streets, as well as treading through the cemeteries that dotted along Route 6 and also look at the headstones. I was met with dead ends all the way through.

As I meandered up the Cape stopping along the way to visit Chatham, Truro, and finally Provincetown, I sought out what was distinctive about these towns—what made their history come alive. I fell in love with Cape Cod. After stealing time at the local beaches taking in sunsets to avoid the \$25 per day entry fee, I learned from an elder man at breakfast one morning that there was a place up in the dunes in Wellfleet called the *Beachcomber* where your \$30 entry fee would go toward your food for the day. So, I headed out for a day by the sea to do some writing hoping for some oceanic inspiration. It was here that I met Rachel and Chris. With one seat left at the bar and Covid distancing still in mind, I was apprehensive to sit down. It was then that I looked in a proverbial mirror and found Rachel. She and her partner Christopher were well familiar with the Cape, and we started a dialog as I had done with so many others that week. But this was different—this was a sort of homecoming. It turned out that Rachel and I had an uncanny career

and life history that seemed to mirror each other in almost every way. We were both now in a lifetime romantic relationship that we found later in life, no children, great circles of friends and had careers that held a common thread—philanthropic cause-related communications, marketing and advocacy. She had traveled to Kenya to help serve the people there as I had gone to India a few years back to do the same. We both had an entrepreneurial spirit and had spent a lot of our time on projects to create a better future for others. She shared my intolerance for injustice and worked to create impact wherever she landed. This is someone I wanted to work with in some capacity in the future.

Was this solo retreat that was motivated by a need to find a breakthrough family discovery a possible process to find my very own next steps in my journey? This seaside escape provided much more than I had anticipated. As of this writing, I'm still hoping to find any member of my Fogg Family, but, the journey took its own course. Home now in New Jersey and covered with one of the worst cases of poison ivy I've ever had and a journal full of my notes and findings, I stand at a new crossroads.

Bio: Laura Quinn is a free lance writer and published author who resides in Morristown, NJ and who will no doubt be back to visit the Cape whenever she gets the chance.