

2022-09-03 Montgomery Testimony by Barb Dickman

We are told: "You don't know what you don't know." That sure described me before the eye-opening pilgrimage to Montgomery. We visited The Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration, Sunday Worship Service at Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church, the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, Dexter Avenue Baptist Church Parsonage, Rosa Parks Museum and Rosa Parks Bus Stop, the Dr. Richard Harris House, and a guided walk in the Centennial Hill neighborhood.

The displays of iconic things like the segregated lunch counter and stools from the Montgomery County Courthouse, the Vons Book Store, the Barbershop. The places where civil rights leaders and everyday activists not much different from you and me worshipped, were discriminated against, hidden from danger, beaten, jailed, flogged, lynched, and murdered. And the stories: some I knew, most I didn't. Stories about famous men, and then the women. Rosa Parks, of course. But so many more, working behind the scenes and in the face of danger. Leading and following. Without them there was no civil rights movement.

We weren't poor growing up but we sure weren't rich. I was able to freely walk or ride my bike throughout my neighborhood, join Girl Scouts. I knew I could go to college. I also knew that I needed to have jobs to help pay the bills. When I first heard people talk about "white privilege" I was offended. I worked hard for what I've achieved, and my husband could tell the same story. What I came to understand from our pilgrimage is that "white privilege" isn't about making it easy for whites, it's about whites not having to overcome the barriers to achieve that are faced by those who aren't white.

I was ashamed by many things I saw and heard about in Montgomery. It opened my eyes to a history that wasn't taught in my schools, to racism

that my black friends growing up (and as adults) rarely mentioned but must have experienced. And I brought home a commitment to do what I can with what I have learned...to call out mistreatment towards others because they are different... and speak up and take actions to help those being held back, discriminated against, discounted, deprived of fair treatment, due process, suitable and affordable housing, adequate medical care, appropriate education, and advocate for ways to tackle the long list of racial injustices hiding in plain sight.

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