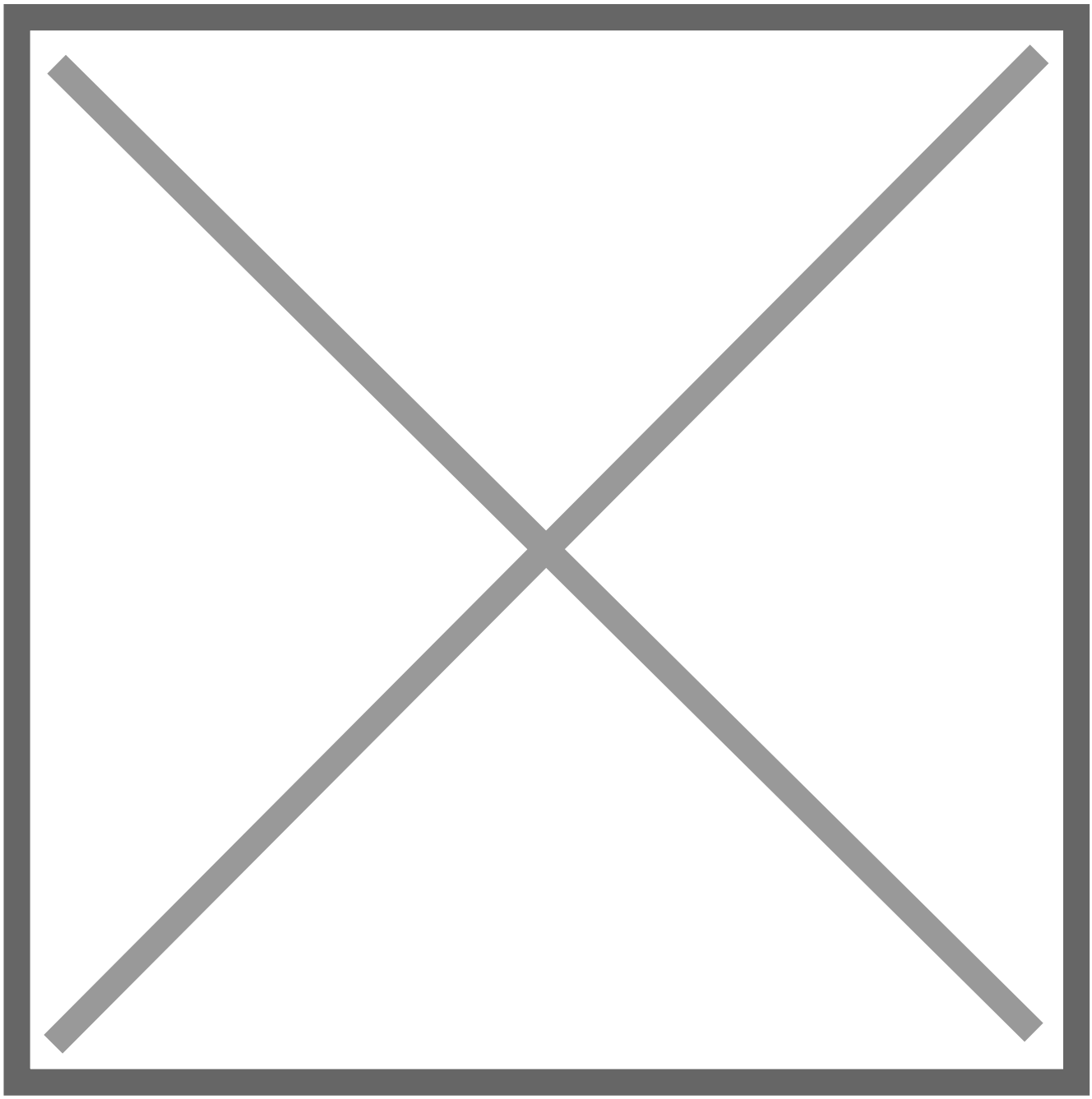


Sister Tracey and her housemates admire a rainbow near the border wall. (Provided photo)



by Tracey Horan

Contributor

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August 21, 2020

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One of the first things I do when I move to a new place is check out the running route options. My move to Nogales, Mexico, a year ago was no different. What was more challenging, though, was finding that the area near our house, with its steep streets, cars parked helter-skelter, and lack of sidewalks, is not conducive to running. At first, I would drive to a park to run, but after a time, one of my housemates and I began exploring the big field next to our house. With its sandy slopes and rocky ruts, it wasn't quite like the rolling green fields of the Midwest I was used to, but it was ours. (Well, it belongs to our landlord, so close enough, right?)

We began mapping out a route around the perimeter of the field, and over time, the weight of our repeated steps carved a path through the spiky weeds that at first scratched our ankles and left spines in our shoes. I used a mapping app to track us, and we found that the lap we had created was about half a mile. That way we could calculate how far we were running or walking.

Now, a year later, you can distinguish two paths through the grasses greening with the monsoon season: one from my feet, another from my housemate's feet. By my calculations, we've walked or run that path nearly 500 times.

I remember thinking early on, "This is going to get old fast." After all, we always run in the same direction, the same route. There's not a lot to see — a bunny here or there, maybe some pigeons and some trash, but spiky weeds dominate the landscape. I generally prefer variety on my hikes or runs. I like to try new routes.

Surprisingly, though, something about this route keeps inviting me back, and I haven't gotten bored. Part of this may be the comfort of familiarity: My legs now anticipate the ups and downs; my feet know where to step. Amidst lots of other changes — transitioning housemates, learning a new ministry and a new community, living in a language that isn't my first, then experiencing countless shifts during the COVID-19 pandemic — this now-worn path is one comforting constant.

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At the same time, I know I find variety in both how I bring myself to the path, and how the path changes over time. Some days I come to the path yearning to run through tough feelings — anger or sadness or helplessness. Other days, I find my joy and gratitude propel me. Wildflowers come and go, bird songs change, and the way the light is cast on the mountains to the north can paint them deep blue or light brown or fiery orange. The cast of characters changes, too: Sometimes just me, sometimes me and my running buddy, and sometimes all my housemates and other guests decide to get out for some fresh air. Over the past month, our new dog Pirulín has also become a regular on the path.

As I've struggled to find deep connection with the Holy One during the pandemic, this path has been a grounding force. Returning to the path has been a grounding practice, an act of faithfulness. For me, it parallels the spiritual journey: ever ancient, ever new. It is a place I can always go back to, a place both familiar and surprising. Making the choice to step onto the path frees something in me. I feel at home there, even when I might not in other places, or even inside myself.

This path, like the spiritual path, is not mine alone, and it is not an escape from the world. In fact, sometimes it jolts me back to reality. Last week as I ran with Pirulín, I stopped in my tracks as I came upon a blanket laid out on the ground next to a big plastic bag. As I got closer, I recognized the bag and its U.S. Department of Homeland Security label. This is the standard issue bag people receive their belongings in when they are deported from the United States. I imagined the migrant who owned it may not have found a place to stay when they were dumped in Nogales during a pandemic, and so decided to sleep out in the field. There was no name on the bag, but I prayed for its anonymous owner as I continued on my run. Sometimes if I run in the morning, I encounter families making their way down the

hill from the cemetery near our house to the Kino Border Initiative (KBI) migrant center to get breakfast. For that short stretch, we share a sacred path.



The running path near the house in Nogales, Sonora, Mexico (Tracey Horan)

Lately as we've entered monsoon season here in the Sonoran Desert, this path has also been a place to take in storms as they move across the sky. From one minute to the next, the layout and colors of the cloud formations change. I have to be careful to watch my step sometimes because the show is so enthralling. I can't help but gaze upward. In these moments, I experience the spiritual gift *wonder and awe.*

In this moment in history and in my own life, I feel an invitation to lean into the gift of wonder and awe. Yes, I am moved to act in solidarity with asylum seekers waiting here in Nogales, Sonora, who have been tossed aside by the U.S. government despite fleeing for their lives. Yes, I am called to work toward being more anti-racist in my words and actions. Yes, I must add my voice to many others calling for material support for the most vulnerable among us during the pandemic.

And there's more: In the midst of this active labor alongside others building the reign of God on Earth, there are also moments when I feel my own smallness, when I am in awe at the strength of movements and transformation I had nothing to do with. There are moments when I fear the strength of the wind and embrace the beauty of the storm all at once. And underneath my feet, whether I am conscious of it or not, the path — the Holy Sustainer — remains blessedly constant and true.

We all have practices and places that can be home for us in the midst of upheaval. Sometimes returning to those grounding rituals is the most prophetic action we can take. These days when even the most familiar things can seem foreign, I pray that we may all venture into the grounding practices of wonder and awe; that in walking the path before us, we may know both our strength and our smallness, and that all of it is rooted and grounded in Love.

[Tracey Horan is a member of the Sisters of Providence of St. Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana. She is the education coordinator at the Kino Border Initiative in Nogales, Arizona, and Sonora, Mexico.]