Columns



Corbin Hannah's mother, left, and Hannah sit at a tea house in California during their last trip together to see the whales. (Courtesy of Corbin Hannah)



by Corbin Hannah

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Encouraged by a poem, I went to my backyard and placed myself, belly down, on Earth. I was grieving the death of my mom. I connected to Gaia, Mother Earth, aware of all the ways she holds, tends and nurtures me. I let my grief pour out in tears and whispers to the only mother I have left. Knowing that all is interconnected and nothing ever dies but changes, I reached out to connect with that specific love I experienced as my mom.

This is the time of year when Catholics and many other cultures remember all saints, all souls and all our ancestors. As a descendant of white colonizers, I inherited and was conditioned in the worldview of white, "Christian," cis/heteronormative/able-bodied male supremacy through violent authoritarian domination. (Christianity was co-opted by the Emperor Constantine. A different kind of Christianity emerged that aligned with the Empire instead of the Kin(g)dom of God.) Growing up, I was enculturated into the empire's story of Jesus, where connection to my ancestors wasn't an option and, if it was, a forbidden and evil option.

Not knowing how to honor my ancestors, I have relied on the hospitality of others who have invited me to experience their ways of honoring ancestors — such as *Día de Muertos*. These experiences have helped me remember the importance of knowing where I come from. As I began to explore these relationships, I wondered, "Who are my ancestors?"

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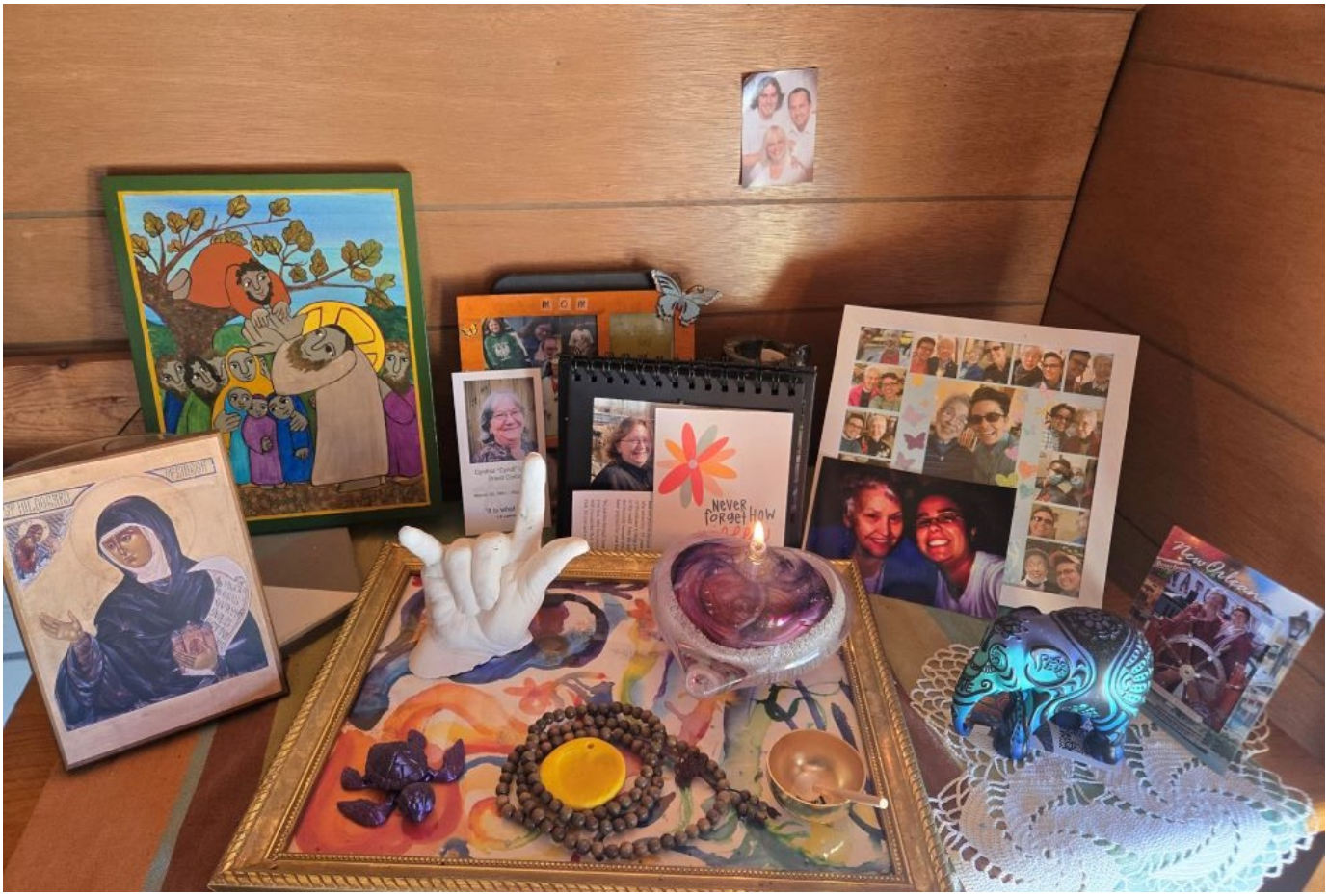
I imagine that all who have gone before me are my ancestors. I have ancestors in blood and Spirit. I think of my European ancestors and Granny Rene, Grandma Lee, Glen and Cyndi. I have been influenced by ancestors in Spirit — Jesus of Nazareth, Siddhartha Gautama, Dorothy Day, William Booth, St. Mother Theodore, St. Francis of Assisi, and many Sisters of Providence.

My ancestors are within me — my biology, personality and worldview. I am here because of what they learned, experienced and did. The decisions they made, the wounds they caused and healed, and the journeys they took — for better or worse — shaped and continue to guide me.

Finally, I have come to realize that all beings that have gone before me are my ancestors — the rooted beings, swimmers and crawling/walking ones; mountains, rivers and air; planets, stars and dark matter who have come and gone — they all

contributed to this moment. I am from stardust, and to stardust I shall return.

Thich Nhat Hanh calls this our "interbeing." Pope Francis speaks of it in *Laudato Si*'. All are interconnected. We are one with all life. I cannot exist separately from the rest of my human and more-than-human siblings. My beingness is tied to all who have been, all who are and all who will be.



Corbin Hannah created this altar honoring her ancestors. (Courtesy of Corbin Hannah)

When I acknowledge and consider my ancestors, it places me within a bigger picture of the love unfolding in the universe. I am a part of this mystery of life — the giving and receiving, growing and loving, the death and rebirth.

My next inquiry was, "What does it mean to remember my ancestors? How do I honor the love my mom grew and planted in me?" In addition to seasonal rituals, I hear the invitation to learn from their mistakes and carry on their love. I can take time to connect and remember who they were, the way they shone and all the ways

they struggled. This calls me to take both the wisdom and the hard-won lessons of our ancestors and find ways to apply them to our times.

I acknowledge that my mom made many mistakes. We did not become best friends until I was in my 30s and we had done a lot of work to heal our wounds. I forgive my mom for the pain she passed on to me. I know she did her best. I am also aware of the love that she poured into me. She gave me wisdom and wholeness that was not offered to her, which she gained through much suffering and compassion.

As I look over the long arc of human existence, I hold the vision of Jesus. I see the human tendency toward fear, which we inherited from our lizard ancestors — fight or flight, freeze or appease. Jesus highlighted that we also have the capacity to transmute our fear into love. Love is our birthright as children of God. It is now my turn to take what has been passed on and transform it.

Honoring my ancestors also means I must wake up to all the lies within and around me. I must unlearn the violence of the greedy, worldly empire, remember my origin of Love, and choose to be a loving/healing presence. I must decolonize my mind, heart and actions, and contribute to the Kin-dom of God on Earth.

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As I desire to weave back together the wispy threads of wisdom of my English, Irish, French, German and Scottish ancestors' ancestors, I lean into the Indigenous teachings available to me now. With gratitude, I bow to those who held onto more harmonious ways of knowing and being in the face of violence and genocide. I am forever indebted to the carriers of truth in my life — whether in word or deed — who have supported me in my ongoing conversion from lie to truth, fear to love.

So, back to me lying on Earth aware of this deep interconnection, feeling for my mom. Knowing she is not gone but just exists differently now, I ask myself, "If I could connect with my mom's essence, what would it feel like?" Then, in contemplation, I listened — connected to breath and bee, light and flower, sound and soil. It is hard to describe what unfolded. I can say it was a profound experience of love, peace and belonging.

When I connect with the ancestors now, I feel them at my back, holding me up, giving me strength, encouraging me onward. May we lean into our ancestors during

this chaotic time. Knowing we have the power to choose love over fear, let us continue building the loving community Jesus taught us is already here, within us.