

August 9, 2022  
Nairobi, Kenya

**Re: On the move in the USA – visiting family and friends, appreciating culture and learning history**

Dear family and friends,

Today is election day in Kenya, so I have the day off. Let me share about my July travels to the USA – while they are still fresh in my mind.

I was in six states this time – New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York, Virginia, Missouri, and Kansas. What a privilege.

**New Jersey** – to see my sister and brother-in-law, on the lands of the Lenni Lenape, and meet up with adult children. My sister asked me to publish her poetry, and I'm thrilled about the prospect. She's helping her husband paint the house after they closed off part of the balcony overlooking the bay to make a workshop.



**Pennsylvania** – to attend the wedding of my brother-in-law's daughter at Morris Abortorium at the University of Pennsylvania. We were thankful for a beautiful sunny day for the outdoor event with about 50 people. I teared up a bit when the groom's grandmother walked him down the aisle and when my brother-in-law did the same for his daughter. The wedding couple wrote and shared beautiful and touching vows for each other. Was fun to be around so many women scientists – friends of the bride – from Delaware, South Carolina, and Massachusetts.



**New York** – to meet up with Inga and Naceo, go for a walk in Prospect Park in Brooklyn, and enjoy an outdoor concert at [Elizabeth Street Garden](#). I shared an apartment with Inga in the Sunset Park neighborhood of Brooklyn after completing my university studies. Friends ever since!



New York City is magical – as always. I appreciated the signs, by groups of children, that line 8<sup>th</sup> Street in Brooklyn – to teach passersby about types of trees and their characteristics

and remind us to keep their environment clean. As for Elizabeth Street Garden, a very pleasant pocket park in Manhattan, community members and activists are working to preserve the space from developers. Is it so bad to have such a green space in the neighborhood where people may commune and chat and appreciate the day, the music, and each other?

See [www.elizabethstreetgarden.com/donate](http://www.elizabethstreetgarden.com/donate)



**Virginia** – to meet up with Linda Holmes and with her daughter visit the Hampton University Art Museum and William & Mary in Williamsburg. I met Linda when I was living and working in Dakar, Senegal and she was a writer-in-residence in Popenguine, about 44 miles (70 km) south of Dakar.

Hampton University<sup>1</sup> is a historically black university (HBCU) that has a [new president](#) after the previous one wrapped up almost 45 years of service, and so it is an exciting time of change.



We visited the Hampton University [Museum](#), the oldest African American museum and one of the oldest museums in Virginia. I saw for the first time “The Banjo Lesson” painting of 1893 by Henry Ossawa Tanner and – one which made me smile in a different way – “The [Bagpipe](#) Lesson” of the same year. We also appreciated the incredible, moving, and thought-provoking works of [John Biggers](#).

<sup>1</sup> Founded in 1868 as Hampton Agricultural and Industrial School, it was established by leaders of the American Missionary Association after the American Civil War to provide education to freedmen. Hampton University’s main campus is located on 314 acres on the banks of the Hampton River. [Hampton University Names Alumnus and Retired Three-Star General Darrell Williams as New President | Hampton University News](#)





Denise Kofas, Elizabeth Catlett: In her Studio, 1947, Photograph, Courtesy of MoMA Storage

I was impressed by the drawings, paintings, and sculptures of **Elizabeth Catlett** (1915-2012) – who spent time in Mexico and imbued her works with concerns for social justice. Her works illustrate a commitment to “equal rights for African Americans as well as indigenous Mexicans; affirm Black identity, motherhood, and family; and celebrate a future of miscegenation and racial harmony.”<sup>2</sup>

Linda and I visited [Emancipation Oak](#) where educator and dressmaker [Mary Smith Peake](#) (1823-1862) taught enslaved and free Black Americans to read at a time when



that was outlawed. The tree’s nickname comes from the 1863 gathering of the Black community to hear the first Southern reading of President Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation. We also visited the gravesite of Mary Smith Peake at **Elmerton Cemetery**. For the soldiers and others who maintain Elmerton and adjacent Bassett cemeteries, volunteering is an opportunity to pay respects to ancestors and learn history and more about their community.<sup>3</sup>



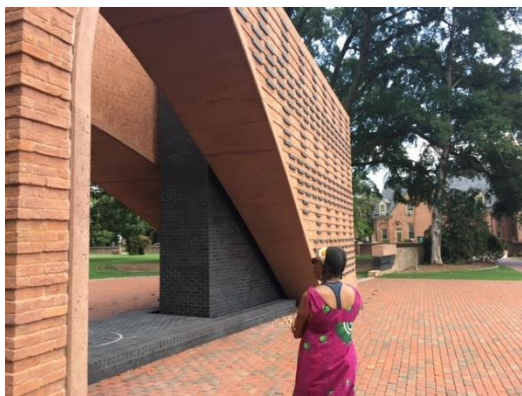
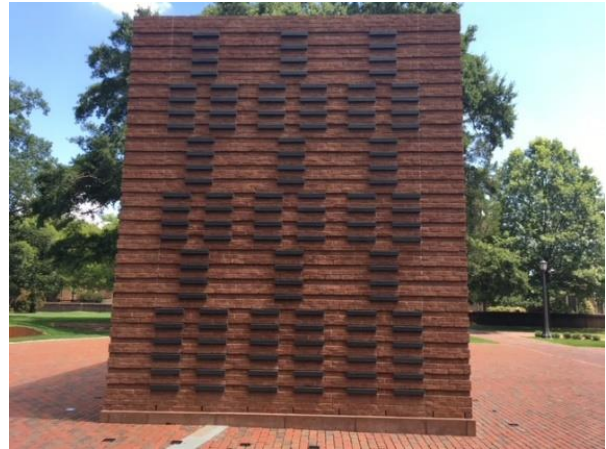
The next day, we traveled to Williamsburg, to visit William & Mary, which, like Hampton University, has a [new President](#). Katherine A. Rowe was named in 2018 – the centenary of the first women enrolled at William & Mary – as the first woman president in the 325-year history of the institution. She is promoting agendas of innovation and of diversity.



<sup>2</sup> *Elizabeth Catlett: Art for Social Justice*, edited by Klare Scarborough, 2015, and published by La Salle University Art Museum, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (photo is from p. 2 and quote from p. 5)

<sup>3</sup> [Volunteer soldiers clean Hampton’s historic Black cemeteries: ‘They deserve the respect.’ – The Virginian-Pilot \(pilotonline.com\)](#)

We visited [Hearth Memorial to the Enslaved](#)<sup>4</sup>. William & Mary enslaved African Americans for 172 years, and the monument acknowledges these individuals who built, maintained, and helped move the university forward. For more information and the statement on “Slavery and Its Legacies” by the Board of the University, see [The Lemon Project](#), a member, along with 100 other universities in the USA, Canada, and the United Kingdom, of the [Universities Studying Slavery Consortium](#). The Lemon Project is generously funded by the Office of the Provost at William & Mary.



<sup>4</sup> Watch the moving [memorial dedication](#) of May 2022, including a reading of the names of those honored and an explanation of the significance and symbolism of the memorial and hopes for its future.



From 1760 to 1774, about 400 free and enslaved Black children, between the ages of 3 and 10 years old, studied at the [Williamsburg Bray School](#). The school building, which was moved from its original location, was recently rediscovered and is being restored. During Black History Month in 2023, if all goes well, the building will be moved to the grounds of Williamsburg's living museum, which comprises 600 restored or reconstructed buildings and educational outreach. The historic building is to become “a focal point for research, scholarship and dialogue regarding the interconnected, often troubled, legacy of race, religion and education in Williamsburg and in America.” According to a rich five-page [press release](#), the “Bray School partnership will facilitate continued research and interpretation, and a deeper examination of a number of aspects of history through the lens of the Bray School, including perspectives from families whose children attended the school and the motivations of white slaveowners who sent them there.”

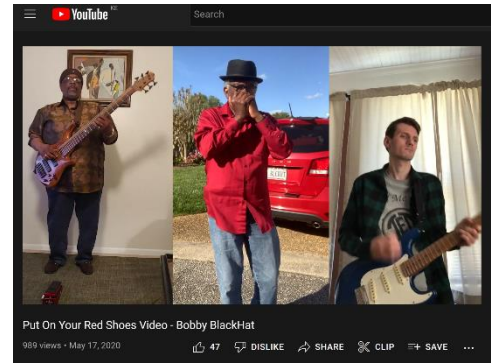
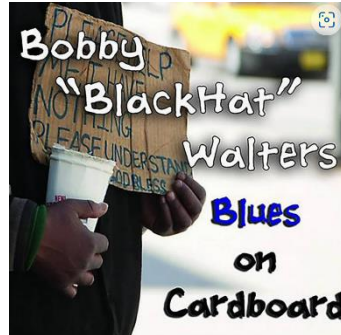
We were able to chat with the friendly foreman at the school restoration site.



← A list of 30 students that attended the Williamsburg Bray School in 1762, along with their ages.



Then we headed to Newport News for dinner and enjoyed harmonica music live on the square. Check out Bobby “Blackhat” Walters singing “[Put on Your Red Shoes](#)” and “[Blues on Cardboard](#)” – *could be me, could be you, livin on the edge of doom, no one is immune... now his whole life story is written on that cardboard sign, could be me, could be you...*



**Missouri** – to see my brothers and other family, attend Willow’s wedding (see p. 11) in Kansas City, and visit friends and **Liberty Legacy Memorial**, honoring over 750 persons buried (many in unmarked graves) in the Black section of segregated Fairview and New Hope cemeteries.





See news coverage by Kellie Houx:  
[Clay County Juneteenth 2-day event](#)  
[unites merriment, gravitas |](#)  
[Community Living | mycouriertribune.com](#)

Thanks to citizen research and community mobilization, stories of **midwife Lucy Jacobs Stewart** (early 1850s - 1939) and others are shared at the Liberty Legacy Memorial and its website:  
[www.libertylegacymemorial.org/read-the-stories](http://www.libertylegacymemorial.org/read-the-stories)

See the following short videos about Clay County African American Legacy, Inc., Liberty Legacy Memorial, and the 2022 Clay County Juneteenth Festival.



**Our Many Branches: Dedication of the Liberty Legacy Memorial**  
 on June 18, 2022 in Fairview Cemetery: <https://youtu.be/QQYlha3jYyM>, 8 minutes

About the Liberty Legacy Memorial and the  
**annual Clay County Juneteenth Festival** in 2022:  
<https://vimeo.com/711630702/57b4855948>, 3 minutes

**Highlights of the Clay County 2022 Juneteenth Festival**  
 including the unveiling of the Sankofa bird sculpture at Garrison School Cultural Center:  
<https://vimeo.com/723878548/a46d0e13c2>, 2 minutes

*Last night, I tasted strange fruit beneath my pillow... searching for a better peace of mind,  
 and this morning, I woke up for the first time...*

These are activities that unearth history, honor Ancestors, celebrate culture, promote learning, and bring a community together and enrich it. "It takes many hands," as Shelton Ponder of Liberty says.

See more information on reparatory justice: <https://networkadvocates.org/advocacytoolbox/educate>



**Kansas** – to attend a memorial service for Aunt Roxanne and visit Lawrence to see my friend from university days at KU, Suzan Hampton (architect, teacher, photographer).



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Wish come true:  
['No' prevails: Kansas votes to protect  
abortion right in state constitution |  
The Kansas City Star](#)



At the Lawrence Arts Center, we attended a talk and viewed a [film](#) about Mothers and Artists and family-friendly art residencies, appreciated “Multicultural Crayons” (pictured below on the left) by Pilar Agüero-Esparza, and visited the “[seeds of tomorrow](#) / *semillas del mañana*” exhibit by Jonathan Christensen Caballero. “Latin Americans are part of the history of migration in Kansas and an integral part of the fabric of the United States. From the Mexican families who labored for the Santa Fe Railroad to Central American factory workers who continue to feed us today, Latin American stories represent hope and faith for the seeds of tomorrow.”



That about wraps up my travels through six states and several cities. Thanks for your interest.

I realize that today is Mom’s birthday. She would have been 83 years old. She died in Liberty, Missouri when she was 81. Happy Birthday, Mom. Dad died in December 2013 and Mom in December 2020. They are both buried in Resurrection Cemetery in Lenexa, Kansas.



I’m not sure how much people read letters these days, so I generously sprinkled photos throughout – to make the experiences comes alive. This may be more like a photo album with comments or Facebook postings enhanced.

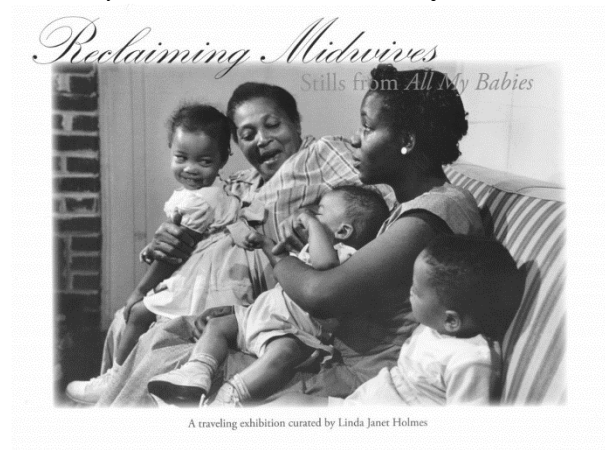
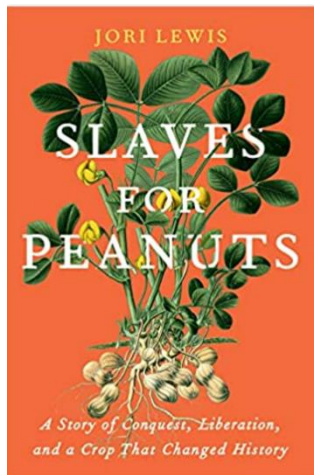
Sincere and heartfelt thx to all those who hosted me during my journey. I appreciate the places to sleep and wash and the meals and conversations and walks we shared. Sending love to all readers who took a moment to engage with the thoughts and photos (and links). Hope you enjoyed the journey. Wishing you a good rest of your day.

Much luv,

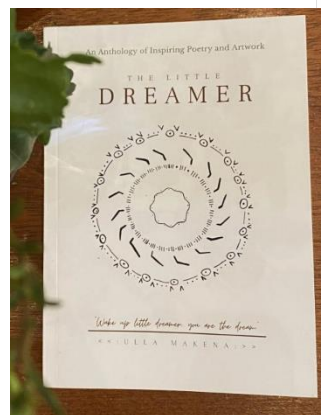
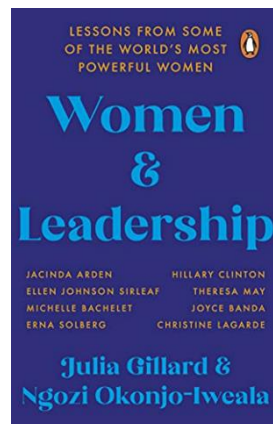


Kathryn Toure

P.S. Here are some books, most by people I know or have at least met, that I was traveling with (in paper or electronic format) or reading just before or after my travels and that I **heartily** recommend.



[\*More Than Just a Neighborhood\*](#) is a mosaic of East Lawrence, Kansas stories, poems, songs, and photos, showing the magic, resilience, creativity, and spirit of this community-oriented neighborhood. Proceeds from the sale of the book go to [St. Luke's AME Church](#).

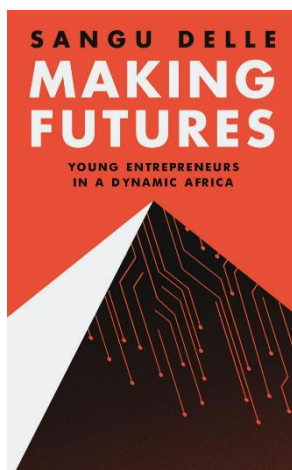


#### MORE THAN JUST A NEIGHBORHOOD



EAST LAWRENCE, KANSAS

available from  
[Provisions Kenya](#)



Though I think we should do away with war and stories about girls marrying kings, perhaps we can learn something from the story of [Ndabaga](#), said to have lived sometime in the 1700s, who questioned gender roles and “drew courage from challenging circumstances.” [Order your copy](#) of the book, listen to a reading of “[The Tale of Ndabaga: Rwanda’s Warrior Queen](#)” or watch “[The Tale of Ndabaga](#)”





Acupuncture Clinic, Kansas City  
Kearney, Missouri

5



Padre Miguel (1933-2022),  
a Kansas City friend who lived and  
worked for three decades in Bolivia



Lawrence, Kansas



w my godmother in Kansas City

Hampton, Virginia



at Willow's wedding, Kansas City



Lawrence, Kansas



← Caught covid  
after this photo in  
Kigali, Rwanda but  
recovered in time for  
the above travels.  
Grateful.

gathered in New Jersey



\* As the first African American and Native American sculptor to earn international recognition, Edmonia Lewis (c. 1844-1907) challenged social barriers and assumptions about artists in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century America. **Highly recommended:** [www.youtube.com/watch?v=v80jKH24Y18](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v80jKH24Y18)