

# "Every Step is Home" Book Review

by Mel Schlachter

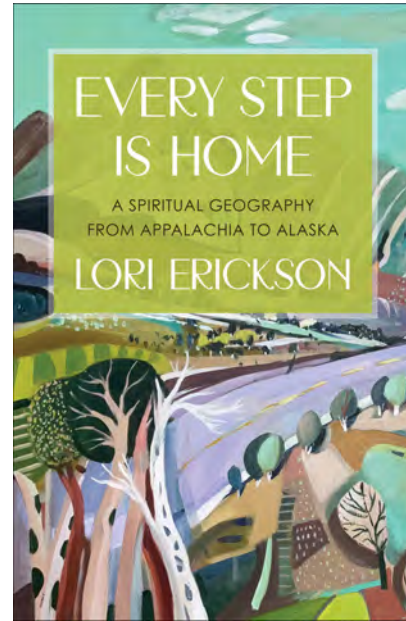
Aficionados of Lori Erickson's book series on the theme of her blog "The Spiritual Traveler" will find her new book "Every Step is Home: A Spiritual Geography from Appalachia to Alaska," expanding the ground for her spiritual encounters. She trusts, of course, that it will expand our ground too.

Erickson's earlier book "Holy Rover" took us to remarkable holy sites around the world. This new book starts out pursuing "the sacred in America" by visiting special places deemed holy, presently or historically. Then her "sacred scan" looks to the four elements of earth, air, fire and water; expands further with animals and lights in the heavens; then picks up the sacred in relationships, a theme she explored in depth earlier in "The Soul of the Family Tree." Is there anything left to be sanctified?

Erickson reports that some impetus for this book came from the COVID pandemic, plus death of family members. Her wanderlust needed to avoid virus-laden plane flights as much as possible, so she and her husband Bob Sessions (who contributes some fine photographs to the enterprise) set off around this country to new places and a few familiars.

She stays focused on the sacred as it is present at each site. Her visit to Tennessee's Dunbar Cave suggests that spiritual experiences have "a physical trigger" for her, which indicates to her the place is sacred. What makes a site holy? Is it because many people will have a unitive, healing or transformative experience there? And thinking of Moses and the burning bush, can one person find any ground, anywhere, imbued with sacred energy? Could Erickson find a comparable experience in the heart of a major city?

Our author is less interested in these questions than she is establishing the credentials for a given place or an element of nature. She does it well. The dirt of El Santuario de Chimayo in New Mexico literally grounds us in the experience. Some places may have a familiar ring for us—California redwoods, Hawaiian volcanos, northern lights—others like Chaco Canyon, the mound builders of Ohio, and the hot springs of Oregon, not so much. We receive her experience, and also rich background information for every subject. Erickson has done her homework, making the mystical elements of her quest anchored, like Chimayo, in context and history



as well as her "physical triggers." In the latter she teaches the reader one path into apprehension of the holy.

My favorite chapter in "Every Step is Home" is "Mounds: The Ancient Ohio Trail." I visited one of those mounds a long time ago, when kids could still play games on them and the anthropologists had not yet exerted good control and information boards. In recent times I have visited many mounds along river bluffs in Iowa. They can give a visitor a strong sense of presence, of an awesome purpose that may remain unknown to us even if we can share its effects as a gift from spirit ancestors. Erickson gets it.

And she wants the readers to get it, to immerse themselves in holy places, holy pilgrimages bringing one's own yearnings. Nothing aloof or cult-like here. Lori Erickson is an Episcopal deacon, and one imagines fulfilling her vocation by encouraging others in the path she has found so rich and life-giving.

*The Rev. Mel Schlachter is a retired Episcopal priest and pastoral counselor residing Iowa City.*