

Part 1: My Story

We are all familiar with the insanity of the year 2020. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck America, and school went fully virtual, I realized how impactful social interaction and a consistent schedule are on a person's mental health. I missed my friends and began to struggle more and more with feelings of anxiety. Beyond the pandemic, our country has been struggling with issues of social justice which only adds to the turbulence of this year. These factors contributed to a couple defining moments in my life such as a more definitive realization of my political perspective and also a desire to reconnect with nature.

The information that's been drawn to my attention as a result of the Black Lives Matter movement is astonishing. To me it is unbelievable that people still have to fight for equal rights in the year 2020. My new political point of view inspired me to ensure that myself, my family, and all of my friends are registered to vote and have a plan for voting in November. The most effective way to achieve social change is through political participation. Therefore, there is no excuse to sit out an election.

As I became more anxious and isolated this year I knew I needed something to ease my mind. I used to go hiking all the time and I realized there was no reason not to renew this hobby with the proper precautions in regard to the pandemic. I knew reconnecting with nature would give me something to do and be beneficial mentally. As a result, I've made an effort to go hiking, biking, or walking at least a few times a week. These outdoor activities have helped me feel more grounded and eased my anxiety throughout the pandemic. (See the photo below for a recent picture of a sunset I took while on an evening walk.)



Part 2: The Story of my Ancestor

Whenever I speak to my grandfather on my Dad's side about family history there is always one particular ancestor he's eager to talk about. My ancestor John Howland was one of the passengers on the Mayflower ship which carried the first pilgrims to the new world. When he left England on the Mayflower he was an indentured servant but throughout his time in Plymouth he served as an assistant to Governor John Carver and he even signed the Mayflower Compact.

While the history from this time is turbulent and I'm certainly not proud of all of the actions of my ancestors, it is still fascinating to know I'm a descendant of one of the first englishmen to reach America.

An interesting fact about John Howland is that during the voyage across the Atlantic, during one of the many storms experienced by the Mayflower, he actually fell off the ship! I cannot imagine what it would be like to fall off a boat in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean during a storm. Luckily, he was able to grab hold of a rope hanging from the ship and was pulled back on board to safety. I think this moment was probably one of the defining moments in John Howland's life.

While my life and John's are extremely different, and our defining moments don't appear too similar, I think there's still a connection to be drawn. Practically the entirety of John Howland's life was unprecedented. After all, he was one of the first pilgrims to arrive in America and he was literally thrown into uncharted waters. In a different way, the year 2020 has also been unprecedented with a civil rights movement occurring simultaneously with a global pandemic. Just as John was rescued from the ocean I'm sure we will make it out of 2020 and move on to a better future in the years to come. (See the photo below from mayflowerhistory.com for a depiction of John Howland in the Atlantic Ocean.)

