

## The Stories We Drive Past

Crazyhorse Drive.

“What a funny name,” I think as we pass the green and white sign on the way to my grandparents’ house. I’ve passed this way hundreds of times in my childhood. As usual, the sign prompts me to imagine a horse with ballet slippers pirouetting behind the pine trees that line the black-top country road.

But this time is different. In my mind, I flip through hundreds of pages of my history textbook, and then, it clicks. Crazyhorse is not an insane equine. He’s the leader of the Lakota tribe, victor at the Battle of Little Bighorn, named for his courageous dismounts in battle. And this place, this road I’ve driven on since childhood, is named for him, a tribute to the bravery of this Native American hero. The people who named this road remembered him once, and they want me to remember too.

No one sitting in the car with me would have even noticed this epiphanic moment, but this revelation would be the beginning of my search for meaningful signs in the world. And I found them everywhere.

Bowie Lane, named for Travis Bowie, a hero at the Battle of the Alamo, and a paragon of Texas Pride.

Amistad Circle, meaning friendship in Spanish, an homage to the rich Spanish heritage in the southern United States.

Brazos River, also Spanish for arms and short for Rio de los Brazos de Dios, river of God’s arms, speaks of the faith of the early explorers.

I could go on and on because every place has a story to tell. Every place has a history, shaped by the lives of those who have gone before us. Their signs tell us not just where we are going and how to get there, but where we have been.

All too often, education seems like a collection of disparate facts or figures that students put on notecards to study for exams (and then promptly forget), but the true joy of learning happens when those disparate facts create networks of meaning that give rise to a story.

For me, the best stories are those that connect cultures, languages, and histories. Years of studying Spanish have not just been about asking, “¿Dónde está el baño?” at On The Border Mexican Grill, but about asking my co-worker, “¿Cómo fue la fiesta de cumpleaños de su hijo? It’s about comforting a child at my church when she says, “Tengo miedo porque mi mamá está enferma.” Spanish provides the connection between

my world and theirs. Likewise, studying history is not about memorizing dates and presidents, but about understanding ongoing hostilities in Afghanistan in the context of centuries of conflict. It's about understanding the struggles of my great-grandparents who treated themselves with ice-milk during the Great Depression and now have a special delight in a daily bowl of creamy Blue Bell Homestyle Vanilla. History--and a shared bowl of ice cream--provide the connection between my world and theirs.

All the connections I've made since that day on Crazyhorse Drive have inspired me to develop a deeper and richer understanding of the world around me. Crazyhorse Drive is no longer about the street that Google Maps tells us to turn left on when we go to grandma and grandpa's house. And really, it's even deeper than the great Native American hero. It's a sign that reminds me of my own journey, a life-long quest to listen and learn from the stories around me, to see and understand the signs of the present that mark our past and shape our future.