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## Road Trip 4 Hope Report No. 7 (Final Report) February 16, 2018

As I've reacclimated to the Minnesota deep freeze, I have spent time thinking about what I learned on my speaking and listening road trip to the South (#elliesroadtrip4hope; #humansconnect). Here are some thoughts.

I met many welcoming and kind people. I was welcomed to the home of a family with a transgender boy, a fifth grader (thank you Chris and Val, Meghan and Westley!), interviewed on the Tallahassee ABC affiliate (thanks Casey and Jade!), made the reason for a special meeting of the Birmingham (Alabama) Bar Association Diversity and Inclusion Committee (thank you Martha, Jennifer and Dana!), interviewed on Mississippi Public Broadcasting (thanks Richard and Liz!) and given platforms to speak at Ole Miss Law School, Vanderbilt University Law School, and McKinney Law School at Indiana University (thank you Bri, Cody, Jenny, Wende' and Trevor!).

I also met others along the way—some whose hands I shook; others were strangers who didn't appear fazed by the incongruity between my masculine voice and female appearance (and other femaleness).

I also saw the South with all its beauty—a new part of the country for me. While I observed a fair number of Confederate flags and roadway signs with the word "Jesus", another item was nearly nonexistent: Trump signs. With nearly 3300 miles on the trip odometer, I saw no more than five such signs or bumper stickers, total. That's way less than I had anticipated.

I wonder what that says. Maybe nothing. Or maybe something.

On my journey, I found Court Square in Montgomery, Alabama where you can view opposites of America within a hundred yards of each other—one side of the square has a placard about Montgomery's thriving slave trade as late as 1859. On the square's opposite side a second placard commemorates the bus stop where Rosa Parks boarded a city bus on that fateful day.

All you need to know about Americans—the best and the worst of us—is right there in Court Square.

And what about the original purpose for my trip—to find out what it's like to be "other" (especially LGBTQ) in the South? What did I discover?

An interview on Mississippi Public Radio taught me being "other" in the South is no different than it is in the Upper Midwest or anywhere else in America. There are those who are intolerant, who want to marginalize humans who aren't part of their "tribe." At the same time, however, I found that these people are in the minority. Most people, I'm now even more certain, want to do the right thing relative to people who are "different" from "us."

It's just that, as I've always believed, we are all so afraid. Social media and politics prey on those fears, and in doing so, we become even more afraid.

Most of all, I relearned that people are hungry for hope. Hope that we can get past our divisions; hope that our children will have a chance for a real future; and hope that each of us can matter in a world that seems increasingly isolating and nullifying.

Lastly, I was once again reminded that we all simply want to love and be loved. Everyone wants this.

More than ever, I am convinced that my message of compassion for others and for one's self is the right message. Tied to that is reminding about our interconnectedness and human commonalities.

I am determined to help lead the way on how to get past the divisions that are eating a big fat hole through our collective soul. That leading will be my remaining life's mission.

Will you join me on this journey?

I hope so.

*ellie*