

The Earth Speaks: Honoring the Lives of Joseph McCoy and Benjamin Thomas

The earth speaks.
Listen to the stories
from beneath our feet.
Gather the soil, touch it, smell it,
reply with your breath
and heart.

This hallowed ground
witnessed despicable deeds.
It cries in pain.
Let us open our ears to hear
the mobs, fists, whips, guns, and chains.
Let us comprehend the horror
of the noose on the lamppost.
We must look back
to sense the wounds and grief,
the wrongs inflicted
on the agonized and the aggrieved.

At the same time
we ask this soil to teach us
about where our ancestors
walked and worked and loved,
the places they learned and played,
slept and ate and prayed,
held weddings and baptisms
and communal celebrations.
They honored the living and the dead,
protected and uplifted each other
with love and kindness.

This earth tells vital stories.
We feel the deep foundation
gripping the stones we walk on,
the roots of the struggle for freedom
that keep trying to reach upward
to emerge and grow, until today.
We are still learning to make way
for rays of light
to nourish them.

As we cup this sacred soil in our hands,
we become grounded in history,
surrounded by messages from the earth
and blessings from the sky
to keep listening—
like rain on an autumn day
as it touches everything:
our schools, homes, neighborhoods,
the river and the trees,
these tangible memories of Joseph and Benjamin,
and the earth
that continues
to speak.

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<https://www.alexandriava.gov/cultural-history/soil-collection-remembrance-event>

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