



Roger Baker stands on Rabbit Lane in Erda where he has spent several hours walking and thinking about life's lessons. He has written "Rabbit Lane: Memoir of a Country Road" about those

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A walk down Rabbit Lane

Roger Baker urges everyone to find their own special place to connect with the past, with nature and the divine, and to 'reveal ourselves to ourselves' ♦

On his first walk down Church Road in Erda, Roger Baker startled a great-horned owl. It flew up over Rabbit Lane, redirecting Baker away from the noise and congestion of nearby state Route 36.

He turned down Rabbit Lane and started a personal journey that has lasted for years. During the decade and a half that Baker walked there, he recorded his experiences with people and nature, and most especially, the life-lessons he taught and learned with his family.

In 2016, Baker, whose vocation is Tooele City Attorney and avocation is writing, published “Rabbit Lane – Memoir of a Country Road.”

“It’s a wonderful walking road,” he said. “There’s no better in all the country.”

As its name suggests, the book focuses on Rabbit Lane, a small road that stretches north from Church Road in Erda to Stallion Way in Stansbury Park.

“My book is the life story of that road,” Baker said. “It is not intended to be a history of Rabbit Lane or of Erda, but it is intended to tell the story of the road, some of the people that have been affected by this road, the farming, the nature, and especially the story of myself and my family as we spent 18 years nearby.”

Rabbit Lane is a public road just one-block long. Baker said the county recently passed a resolution closing it to motorized traffic and making it a pedestrian and bicycle trail.

“I’m very hopeful,” he said. “Many people have pushed for this to happen and I’m hopeful that this book has contributed to this effort.”

Baker said part of the book’s purpose is to show how important it is for people to find a special place to go where they can think through life, get answers and feel peace.

“A place has the ability to reach people’s hearts and to heal and transform,” Baker said. “This book represents 15 years of walking meditations on this road and everything that I observed and thought and felt as I did.”

Along with personal stories, the book includes poems he wrote as he walked, and even songs he composed for his children.

“It was really scary to put out there at first,” Baker said when asked about the personal nature of the book’s content. “I’ve kind of settled into it a little bit.”

Rabbit Lane wasn’t always a part of Baker’s life. His father worked as an attorney for Johnson and Johnson, so Baker and his five younger siblings grew up in the East.

“I was born in Brazil and grew up in New Jersey,” Baker said. “My parents are both native Utahns, and it was natural to come to Utah to go to college. I did that, and I never left.”

Baker applied for the Tooele City Attorney job in 1993.

“I was hired for that job, and I’ve been here ever since,” he said.

As he settled into the community, Baker developed a love for the people in Tooele County. His admiration for the people living along Rabbit Lane enriched his life. Many of them are featured in the book he wrote.

His favorite stories from the book concern a man named Harvey, who is one of Baker’s personal heroes.

“Harvey lived on Church Road right next to Rabbit Lane, and I would pass his house every day as I walked,” Baker said. “Harvey was a mountain man with a foot-long white curly beard.”

Chapter Six in the book tells about Harvey’s land and his animals, and how Baker’s children got to know him.

“It has funny anecdotes of my children meeting him and his animals, his skunks and raccoons and foxes,” Baker said.

Harvey was also friendly with the Goshute tribe and other Native Americans, and his land was consecrated by them so that it was an acceptable place for their ceremonies. Baker once had an opportunity to join in a ceremony.

“I participated in a four-hour sweat ceremony,” Baker said. “That’s chapter seven of the book.”

Harvey has since moved to Enterprise, Utah.

“He remains my hero and a really good friend,” Baker said. “When he left, a part of Erda left with him.”

There were other heroes along Rabbit Lane. Baker wrote about his experiences with an aged farmer named Austin and his wife, Mary.

He wrote about other farmers, too, and he wrote about people who trapped muskrats along the irrigation ditch along Rabbit Lane. He wrote about how people hunted rabbits for food there before cattle ranches became the norm.

He also wrote about his friend Reza, who walked with him once down Rabbit Lane. For Baker, talking with these ordinary heroes contributed to life lessons that he learned and thought about as he walked.

“I’m not a historian, but I do connect with people and things from the past — people that have passed on, and times that have changed,” he said.

Baker has seen several changes in the 25 years since he moved to Tooele County. Tooele City took over Tooele Army Depot when the army moved its civilian operations to other locations. The city got a new City Hall, a new library, and a new pool, and the Tooele City leadership worked to permanently protect the foothills from development.

The changes continue.

“The population has grown from 14,000 to approximately 35,000,” Baker said. “There are a lot of new homes and a lot of new businesses.”

Even Rabbit Lane was transformed.

“It went from a dirt road to a paved road,” Baker said.

The shifting ecosystems and fast pace of life were some of the main reasons why Baker liked Rabbit Lane so much. It became a place to slow down, think and feel, and get perspective.

There were times when he needed it. There were difficult life events to process.

One chapter in the book focuses on an event early in Baker’s career: He had to make sure the details of a computer-graphics video reconstruction of a father murdering his wife and children were correct. The gory photos and the disturbing nature of the images were plenty to deal with, but he also had to come to terms with the fact that the murderer was acquitted in spite of the video.

Walks on Rabbit Lane helped him to get centered and back on track.

“It is the zero meridian line,” he said. “Everything east of it has an east address, and everything west of it has a west address. It is the zero coordinate of the county.”

Rabbit Lane was a quiet place for Baker to hold conversations with his seven children about life and lessons he wanted them to learn. He wrote about teaching his children honesty, communication and respect for nature.

“Many of these stories are the thoughts and experiences I had as I walked Rabbit Lane with my children,” he said. “My children are the heroes of the book. The road is the inanimate protagonist.”

Rabbit Lane was a place for fun times, too. There were trees to climb. In the winter, Baker tied sleds to the back of his truck and pulled his children across the snow on Rabbit Lane.

And it was a place for Baker to compose special lullabies for his children.

“As I would walk on Rabbit Lane, I would find myself beginning to hum,” he said. “The tunes would just create themselves one note at a time. Then I would add the lyrics. Over the course of weeks and months, they finished themselves, and I would write them down.”

The book was 19 years in the making. Baker kept notes for the first 15 years. It took another four years to compile the notes, expand them, edit them and format the book.

“One of the things that I tried to accomplish with this book was to show that there are Rabbit Lanes everywhere in this country and everywhere in our hearts,” Baker said. “If we look, we can find special places that help us connect with the earth, connect with our past, connect with nature and the divine, and reveal ourselves to ourselves.”

By now, Baker knows a little bit about himself. He enjoys making decorative wooden lamps and other wood arts with his children. He enjoys Brazilian jazz and folk music. He’s proficient in speaking Portuguese, he plays the guitar and the piano, and he likes to hike and ride a mountain bike.

Above all, he loves his family.

Baker has since moved from Erda to Tooele City, but he still seeks small, quiet places to walk and to think. These days, he often finds peace walking in Settlement Canyon.

“That’s one of the main points,” he said. “Everyone needs a Rabbit Lane. You find your Rabbit Lane no matter where you are. No matter where you go, find it, and treasure it, and preserve it like the county is preserving this road.”

“Rabbit Lane: Memoirs of a Country Road” is available on Amazon.com.