

Homebodies

What is a home? Could it be a memory, a loved one, a place? I've lived in many houses for a majority of my life, volleying from one house to the next, then back again. My association of home became lost, along of my sense of belonging, due to the constant shifting between families and customs. Through research and self-reflection, I found that home is formed through the memories and experiences that truly resonate within us. No matter where you go, your experiences and memories will always stay with you. Your home is always with you.

While the term “homebody” typically means someone who enjoys staying home, I decided to flip the term around: home stays with you. I chose to make dolls with houses as bodies to represent the mobility of home. The “homebodies” are made with thrifted fabrics and hand embroidered detail. These materials embody the comforting feeling that home delivers.

Sophia P.
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Finding Home

Sophia P.



What is home? Could it be a memory, a loved one, a place? I've lived in many houses for a majority of my life; volleying from one house, to the next, then back again. Through this, I've lost a my sense of home, a sense of belonging. In this paper, I analyzed the most influential moments in my life, the good and the bad, to grasp what "home" means to me.

28 BIRCHWOOD ROAD

My first home. A two story condo in the Bretton Woods complex in Coram, New York. This was also the root of my childhood. The homeland of make believe.

The condo next door was always vacant. Tenants came and went each coming year, leaving 27 Birchwood to morph into a lifeless carcass. Until one day, as if someone above was listening to my prayers; a family moved in. One husband, One wife, and One kid¹. The thought of becoming friends with that one kid made my mind race.

One morning, I mustered up enough courage to introduce myself. I plotted my impeccable plan of action, rehearsed my verses, and prayed for a successful execution. I scrambled down the stairs. Dad was in his usual spot, sprawled out on the couch watching whatever sports game was on.

“Dad, I’m going nextdoor, be back soon.”

“Ok honey, good luck!”

I made my way to the door suddenly appeared ominous and uninviting, looming over my small, feeble, body. My hands gradually moved towards it. My knuckles grazed the wooden door and I froze. I was frozen. *Retreat, Retreat!* I shut my eyes made a mad dash for home. The panel door flung open and soon enough I was back where I started. A few hours later, I made my second attempt. This time I took my ball and played aimlessly outside their kitchen window, hoping someone would notice². A small woman entered the kitchen, looked out the window, saw me, then left. Silence. Then, then front door handle started to fumble. I watched cautiously as the door opened. A tall girl with shaggy brown hair

“Hi, my name’s Wendy, wanna play?”

From then on, Wendy and I were best friends. In the tortuous winter, we were no longer kids but fierce adventurers, exploring the vast tundra that surrounded us. The 1st hole mound became our fort, refuge from the blizzards that came. We equipped ourselves with walking sticks, selected only from the most worthy branches. Our sleds raced along the hilly terrain, but our trajectory was always set to the jagged branches below. In the summer, the woods became our home. I would gather the moss used for bedding while Wendy would construct our houses out of sticks and string. We’d settle into our bungalows, indulging in pop tarts and fruit roll ups, enjoying the gift of the warm summer breeze. No worries. No cares. No responsibilities. We made time capsules, filled to the brim with crumpled post it notes, containing our deepest secrets and burning questions. We never got to answer them³. After the sun went down, we’d go to my house for dinner, thankful for the liquid gold⁴ on our plates.

¹ It was very rare for a family with kids to move into the complex. Bretton Woods was largely populated by the elderly.

² Yes, I was an incredibly awkward kid and still am to this day.

³ Wendy moved away a year before I did. I tried to keep in touch with her, but she never returned my calls. I’m still pretty upset we never kept in touch. I wonder what she’s doing right now.

⁴ Velveeta mac and cheese was a substantial meal when I was younger. I’m pretty sure it’s one of those foods that I ate so much of it grew cloy with time.

Suzanne was my other neighbor. There really wasn't much to her besides the brown frizz on her head and her striking fuchsia lipstick. It always managed to find its way onto her, also, striking yellow teeth. She was quiet and conservative, but always managed to make an appearance when my dad was outside re-mulching the garden. I'm almost certain she had the hots for my dad. One summer night, Wendy and I were on the front lawn watching the stars above. Suzanne came outside. She told us about the constellations hiding in the night sky and how to find them. She told us the stories behind Orion's Belt and Leo the lion. I wish I could remember the factual information she gave us, but I do remember feeling enlightened by her knowledge.

Occasionally, my dad and I would have lunch at Estelle's⁵. I always felt uncomfortable going there, not that there was anything wrong with spending time with sweet Estelle, but there was a lingering omen in her home. It made my stomach churn. I wonder if she sensed it too.

She made us pizza-bagels once. Her feeble body moved from the quaint kitchen to a doily covered table, her hands trembling - disturbing the plate with the carefully arranged delicacies. Table talk usually revolved around the never-ending changes made to the condominium and work, but transitioned into reminiscing precious memories. Sometimes my dad would leave the table to answer important phone calls. It was just me, Estelle, and the countless tchotchkes, hiding in every nook and cranny; watching, waiting. She would gently lift up her head, as if her body pleaded *slowly now, not too fast*, and gathered up enough hysterical strength to shift herself towards me. She took my hands and smiled. Just smiled. When it was time to leave, she would sneak a chocolate in my pocket.

In these people, these stories, these experiences⁶, I found my foundation; my origin. Wendy showed me the importance of imagination, Suzanne showed me how to interpret constellations in the night sky, and sweet Estelle showed me the somber beauty of solitude.

GRANDMA

In elementary school, I remember getting a worksheet asking who our superhero was. Others would answer with a notable sports star or fictional characters. When asked who my "superhero" was, I always responded with "grandma." My fondest memories of my childhood were the ones spent with my grandma. I found home in her homemade "grandma's soup"⁷, a delicacy made only for and only eaten by the grandchildren. I found home in her grey Hanes sweatshirts, the ones that were covered in snot because she insisted that I blow my nose into her sleeve instead of a tissue. I found home in her phrases, "you wanna smorgasbord, I'll make it fresh," or "put on two pairs of socks or you're gonna freeze"⁸. I found home in our annual trips to Carvel, the soft serve and chocolate bonnets. I found home in the silhouette of her figure sitting on the steps, smoking a cigarette, mashing up the ash that fell to the ground. I found home in our

⁵ Estelle was the kindest 90 year old woman that lived two houses down. She lived alone, but never seemed to mind; she was fiercely independent.

⁶ In Taiye Selasi's TED talk, she mentions that the places cherishes the most have "shaped her experiences" and that experience is where she's from.

⁷ A soup made with meatballs, carrots, celery, chicken broth, and pastina. While the ingredients are simple, no one can replicate the soup the way my grandma made it.

⁸ Grandma never put the heater on in winter because the oil bills were too expensive. Instead, she opted to wear her black puffer around the house. The thermostat always read 50 degrees, but her house felt cozy and inviting.

games of footsie and the stories she'd tell me before bed about my mom and aunts and the hysterical laughter that followed. Grandma was home.

As time passed, grandma grew ill. She lost her appetite for her favorite foods. The browns and greens in her eyes were muted by sickly yellows⁹. In 2010, the day before Christmas eve, she was brought to the hospital. Cancer. She no longer wore her grey sweats, instead her frail body drowned in a hospital gown. The doctors and nurses soon replaced the company of her family.

When my grandma passed, I didn't know how to mourn, when to cry, what to say in response to "I'm sorry for your loss" or "how are you feeling?" I don't think I fully registered what happened until now. I feel like I'm experiencing it all over again.

9 HARMONY LANE

After my parents split, my dad met Paula and her two daughters, Ivanna and Valentina. My instincts sensed that there wasn't enough room for me in Paula's brittle heart. I felt like I didn't belong in their presents, and her daughters saw that as an advantage to isolate me as much as possible. I would stay by my father's side as much as possible until I was eventually shooed away by Paula and was encouraged to play with the other girls, even though I knew they wanted nothing to do with me. A year later, my father proposed to her. He was blinded by her spontaneous personality and youthful looks but was blind to aspects she kept hidden. We eventually moved into a house together where the endless tears and anxiety only intensified. The deep silence between me and my new step sisters lasted for another nine years. The constant longing for my mother grew and grew every day, but there was no way to escape the tight grasp of my new stepmother. Every day, I would be taunted by the praise she would give her daughters, while I would sit and wait for my share. I would spend days alone in my room while Paula would go out of her way to spend time with her daughters. I was heartbroken.

As the house decayed¹⁰, so did our family¹¹. I could hear it from my room, the yelling, the accusing, the lying, the crying. Then silence. Sometimes I was afraid to go into the kitchen, fearing that Paula would be sitting at the island, wine in hand, eyes glaring. I feared being alone with her.

Once, we were in the kitchen together. Alone. Quiet. Should I break the silence, I thought. She parted her lips to speak.

"Sophia, do you hate me?"

"No." I lied.

"Your father and I have been fighting, I'm sure you've heard."

"...yeah."

⁹ Jaundice is the yellowing of the skin and whites of eyes due to the increase of bilirubin in the blood.

¹⁰ The house was built in the 80's and hadn't been updated since. The walls were covered in tacky paneling that concealed the even tackier wall paper underneath. The roof of the house was beginning to rot. When it rained, the ceiling often leaked for days.

¹¹ Dare I even call them family?

“Do you want me and your father to stay together?”

“Yes, of course!” I lied.

“Sophia, you are the reason why we are fighting, you caused this. Your father and I were both happy until *you*.”

“I’m sorry,” was all I could say through the streaming tears, but what the hell was I sorry for? I shouldn’t have been held responsible for her happiness and the deterioration of their relationship.

REFLECT

Home has always been a very difficult topic for me to discuss, there are too many different ways to interpret it. Home could be found in my mother's voice, softly singing The Rainbow Connection before bed. Home could be found in my dad's repetitive lectures, though I hated them, I knew that it he really cared about me. Home, however, could not be found in a house. Though houses seem to be the universal sign for “home,” I never related to that connotation. Pico Iyer, author, says that home is like a project, constantly being upgraded with different improvements. These improvements he mentions are the experiences that are taken from different places and are put together to form one’s “home”¹². Taking the time to reflect on these aspects in my life have allowed me to construct my own “project,” taking bits and pieces from my experiences, whether they be good or bad, and piecing them together to form my home.

¹² Iyer, Pico, director. Where Is Home? Ted, Ted, June 2013,

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