



Home Is...

BY **HADEN D. CONRAD**, CLF MEMBER, VIRGINIA

When I was born, our house was a two-story grey box with a big rock in front of the house the size of a Volkswagen. The builders found it while digging out the basement. Its resting place in the yard was as far as they would move it.

When I was six or seven years old, my parents added on a sunroom and a two-car garage. Our red doors and shutters became black. Each day during construction I came home to a place that was literally different from how I had left it that morning. But still, there was the big rock out front, so I knew I was in the right place.

Years later, while I was in seminary, my parents added on again. The house even changed color and became green, with the doors and shutters a darker shade of green. The big rock is still out front. Even though some things look very different, I still feel it's the same home. I know where I am and where I belong.

But not everyone has that same experience of home: neither the same continuity of family location nor a big rock to let you know you are in the right place. Military families, for instance, move often (and are frequently separated from one another) throughout their service. Yet the sense of home does not diminish from this reality. Home is not just a place we see with our eyes, but a feeling to be held in our heart.

It's not the rock that makes it home—it is what the rock stands for that makes it significant. Country singer Joe Diffie sings, "My footsteps carry me away, but in my mind I'm always going home." Home is a place we can always go, a refuge to retreat to, a place we can always be no matter where we are or what we have done.

There is an old saying: *Home is where the heart is*. The reason why such expressions become old sayings is because in these words a deeper truth resonates within us: where the heart is, home is. In order to find that peace, that refuge, that sense of belonging, we have to find that rock that marks our spiritual home. We have to be at home within ourselves, in the most holy of holies, the human heart.

This was something I thought I knew, something I learned a long time ago, but I have only recently come to experience the truth of it. Whether you call it the Reign or Kingdom of God, the Absolute Truth, universal Consciousness, the Essence of Being, ultimate Reality or the Fullness of Love—whatever you may name it, home lives and resides in us. And when we realize this truth we know that no matter where we are or what our circumstances might be, we are always home.

This idea of home as a place within the human heart is especially important to me now, given where I currently reside. You see, I am a convicted felon, a sex offender, and for the next few years I will be living in accommodations provided by the Commonwealth of Virginia Department of Corrections. I have made some terrible mistakes, and I must pay the consequences for my actions. In addition to the years of prison, I have lost a wife, a chance to follow my calling and vocation in ministry, and the respect and trust of those whom I have served and love. The vast majority of my personal relationships have been permanently shattered.

Still, in spite of everything I have done and all the pain and anguish I have caused, I still have home. I still have that place of acceptance and belonging. I still have that sanctuary of grace and love. I still have that rock to mark my spiritual way. Yes, I will be able to go home again and again and again. And while it may be a while before I set foot in that physical place, it does not mean that I cannot venture there now. Indeed, in my heart I have been there many times, and will be there many more, despite my 8'x12' reality. ■

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Quest

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Home is where
one starts from.
—T. S. Eliot

A monthly for religious liberals

THINKING ABOUT HOME

- HOME IS. . .
Haden D. Conrad
- HOME IS WHERE YOU PARK IT
Susan Maginn
- FINDING HOME
Christopher Benson
- BY THE WATERS OF BABYLON
James Ishmael Ford
- FROM YOUR MINISTER
Meg Riley
- RESOURCES FOR LIVING
Lynn Ungar
- COMING HOME
Lynn Ungar

...It took me two decades to finally find a spiritual home. And not just any home, but one with many rooms that I truly believe has love, respect, and honesty for all...

—Billy, CLF Member and Prisoner.

Help CLF continue to be a spiritual home with many rooms, by making a contribution of \$25, \$50 or whatever makes sense for you. Give at clfuu.org or call 1-800-231-3027.

CLF Nominating Committee Seeks Leaders

FROM THE CLF NOMINATING COMMITTEE: **A.W. "BRAD" BRADBURY, REBECCA SCOTT, KAY MONTGOMERY**

The Church of the Larger Fellowship's Nominating Committee seeks CLF members to run for positions on the Board of Directors beginning June 2015:

- **Directors:** three for a three-year term
- **Treasurer:** for a one-year term
- **Clerk:** for a one-year term

Board members set CLF policy and approve the budget. The Board meets in Boston twice annually and periodically by conference calls.

For more information, including Frequently Asked Questions, visit www.clfuu.org/boardofdirectors/nominating. You may nominate yourself or another CLF member for any of these positions.

Please contact the CLF office at nominating@clfuu.org or 617-948-6166 by **January 15, 2015**, with your nominations. ■

Home Is Where You Park It



BY REV. SUSAN MAGINN,
SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

"Trans or Rez?" A bellhop asks this question of Barton Fink, title character in the 1991 Coen brothers film. *Barton Fink* is set in the 1940s, when the bellhop (played by Steve Buscemi) was likely clueless about the possible transgender or immigration implications of his question.

"Trans or Rez?" he inquires, to find out if Barton is going to be a transient guest of the hotel or a long-term resident. When I move to a new place I always have a moment when I look out and I wonder, "Will I call this place home?" And Steve Buscemi's whiney voice will inevitably pipe up and ask me: "Trans or Rez?"

How do you know when you are ready to become a resident, to settle in, to call it home? After all, a place is only a home because you call it that. There is nothing inherent within any dwelling that makes it *home*. Home happens in the individual relationship, in the space between you and the place.

But what do I know about what makes something home-worthy? Not much. I've moved something like 30 times throughout my 43 years.

I lived in St. Louis for nine of my childhood years, but in four different houses during that era.

I lived in New York City for most of my young adult years between 18 and 31, but moved so often I'll have to guess that I lived in at least 12 apartments and two houses. (I won't even attempt to count all the roommates.)

I lived in Portland, Oregon for six years, five of which were actually in the same house. Throughout my entire life these five years were the longest I have ever stayed in the same dwelling.

I was bred to move. My early childhood was shaped by my father's career

in beer distribution, so every other year we moved throughout the South whenever he was promoted. Eventually our family returned to St. Louis, where both of my parents were raised and where both sides of my family have lived for six generations.

So when people ask, "Where are you from?" I usually say "St. Louis," feeling my grandmothers smile down at me. Recently, however, I've taken my nomadic tendencies to a whole new level: I live in an RV with my husband and our two children.

Our RV life (*La Vida RVida* in Harvey the RV) began after a series of unplanned events that resulted in my husband working online from home while our children began homeschooling. So we were suddenly not geographically bound by a job or a school. We realized that we could live anywhere and we could move at any time.

We started dreaming of a life with very few possessions and very few expenses. A life where we could teach the kids by exploring the world—where we could play outside and be warm and dry all year round.

Wanderlust started to set in, and we were hooked. After a year of blog trolling and jettisoning every bit of our furniture, we eventually had an empty house and new plan. We found our ideal rig and our ideal campground. We would live at Campland on the Bay in San Diego in a 34-foot, fifth-wheel trailer. There's a bedroom with a queen sized bed that extends over the cab of the truck and a little room with bunk beds for the kids. In between the two bedrooms are a kitchen, couch and dinette. The couch and dinette are built onto a platform that slides out to expand the square footage when the trailer is inhabited. It's like a 300 square foot, two-bedroom house.

James B. Twitchell wrote a cultural commentary called *Winnebago Nation* in which he chronicles the place of the RV in American culture. He talks about RVs and the notion of

“farsickness”—how we humans yearn for what is far away and wonder what happens when we follow curiosity all the way to its end; how for some, the RV catalyzes a desire to cut loose from dulling routines that keep domestic life afloat.

When we moved into the RV, we knew our family could travel if we wished, but we decided to do the radical thing: stay put. We fell in love with San Diego in general and with Campland in particular, an RV park with a beachside location, marina and pools, plus dodgeball every Tuesday and Thursday. We easily settled in and called it home.

Staying put allows us to avoid paying

We are all earthlings.

for an expensive truck, gas, weekly campground rates and creating all the pollution associated with RV travel. Staying put allows us to maintain friendships, book clubs, violin and karate teachers. We live in our RV much the way someone would live in a small beach-front apartment, except our neighbors can change every day.

Part of why it has worked for our family of four to live in such a small space is that we all spend so much of our daily life outside. San Diego weather is almost always lukewarm, year 'round. My husband takes conference calls while walking through the campground's parks and beach. My kids roam free, climbing trees, skateboarding and biking throughout the campground where cars are only allowed to travel at 5 miles per hour. My daughter reads for hours in the hammock. We often eat meals and host guests at our picnic table.

They say home is where the heart is and that there is no place like it. And maybe this is true. Maybe home is where we can realize our deepest, truest selves because our surroundings inspire us to find that sweet spot between being engaged with the world and being at ease and at peace.

At home we find the people with whom we are deeply connected and inspired, people who remind us why we are here—here in this place, here on this land, here in this life. When we are at home we find places to rest and we find places to express ourselves, places to be silent and places to be heard.

We each have our own preferences, attractions and inspirations about the places we call home. One person's “Trans” will be another person's “Rez.” One person's place of home will be where another person will say, “Nice place to visit but I wouldn't want to live there.”

But are there any truths about home that are true for all of us and not just left to individual preferences? Is there anything in life that is always transient for all of us? Is there anything in life that is always permanent for all of us?

The simplest response to this question is that we are all earthlings. We may all have our preferences about the particular nook that we find most inviting, but ultimately Earth is the one home that we all have in common.

I was recently reminded of what it means to be an earthling when it was unusually busy at Campland. The place was packed—sold out, in fact, with lots of pop music playing from campers and from golf carts cruising around. Lots of people sitting in circles around fires, eating meals outside, greeting one another with hugs, laughing, riding bikes and scooters, nearby swimmers calling out “Marco! Polo!” It was hard to even walk through the campground because it was so full of people.

And then I woke up very early the next morning for no particular reason. I went outside into the cool of pre-dawn to see the place so full of campers, and yet so still it seemed deserted. Just hours ago the same area was full of games and meals. But in the quiet glow of morning, there arose an endearing, simple truth: we are all just soft creatures of the Earth who retreat into the dark cave of night to find rest. Some-

how we all know how to keep that silence, how to protect it for one another.

Our bodies are of the Earth. We gravitate toward rest and reflection in the cold seasons, just as we gravitate toward growth and activity with the warm seasons. Our energies rise and fall with the full and new moons, even when we don't know it's happening. We are home with Earth, getting familiar with our closest neighbors, those native plant beings and animal beings, our fellow earthlings.

Our years in these bodies are limited. None of us are permanent residents of Earth. We are all passing through this body and this life. We're all transient. None of us are “Rez.”

However, whenever something dies we could say that this being goes back to the Earth. Our body's particular combination of elements will give way and it will perhaps shape-shift into ash and be scattered in a river or more slowly become one with the dirt, nourishing the soil for future life. Perhaps on a chemical level these transformations and permutations of being an earthling on this planetary home are endless, eternal.

“All life is impermanent,” the ancients tell us. “To live in harmony with this truth brings great happiness.”

And in this ever-evolving world, on ever-evolving Earth, amid these ever-evolving bodies, perhaps there is a Love that remains a constant and mysterious presence; a Love within which every breath is held and released; a Love where we live and breathe and have our being, in every moment, in every dimension; a Love from which we each have emerged in birth; a Love into which we will return in death.

When we ask ourselves what is it that makes a home, we can certainly look toward our relationship to the local people and places that call us forward. We can certainly look toward the building and the land where we live. But we can also look within to see that we are really just made of Earth and Love and we are always already home. ■

Finding Home

BY CHRISTOPHER BENSON,
CLF MEMBER, FLORIDA

I can think of few words more powerful to me than the word *home*. It is the word that gives me hope, while at the same time it seems to be nothing more than a dream. It is both unattainable and so absolutely vital to me. When I first started my 15-year prison sentence, I couldn't imagine ever going home. To me home was nothing more than a fantasy.

Perhaps it has been that way for me for a long time. Home was something fleeting, all too often attached to some geographic place, or some group of people. Home was something that could be taken away, or could change at a moment's notice. Perhaps most important of all, it was something over which I had no control.

I grew up in many different places, and eventually I began to lose myself. Eventually my actions led me into a kind of self-imposed exile. The only place I was at home was in the streets. I met many people, had many experiences. I did the best thing I had done in my life until that point: I had my beautiful baby boy. That was quickly followed by the worst thing I had ever done, or maybe just the worst thing I ever got caught doing.

In any case, the state of Florida gave me a "home" for the next fifteen years. But of course this place is no home. I was more lost than ever. I began looking back at all the places I had lived, all the places I had called home, all the places others had called our home. And a strange thing began to

happen. I began to search. At first I don't really think I even knew what I was searching for.

I, like many people in my situation, began to search for a measure of faith, for a religious home. Something more permanent than the transient physical homes people like me had occupied. But so many of the faiths I tried were just too restricting, too dogmatic. For me they felt like the multitude of places that others had called my home. I didn't move to those places willingly, and it seemed those faiths didn't want me as I was, with all my nagging questions and doubts. I wanted so badly to find a place I belonged, a spiritual home. But the faiths available just weren't right for me.

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people around me are my
people, with all their
triumphs and tragedies,
flaws and virtues.

So once again I was homeless. At this point it was something I think I was used to. Not belonging, not fitting in, always on the lookout for the next temporary respite. So I wandered, taking a proverbial nap here or there, but always waking up in the morning feeling like this wasn't my home, and these people were not my family. I was lost. But I was also becoming acutely aware of how badly I needed a spiritual home. After all, this body is but transient. To always seek to find home in the physical is to always be disappointed. The more I came to understand this, the more acutely I was aware that I just didn't fit into any of the myriad "homes" around me.

Then a strange thing happened. Someone introduced me to a different faith, called Unitarian Universalism. At first I was skeptical. I mean, I found this faith in a so-called Faith Based Dorm,

a dorm in which I wouldn't live for long. (Let's just say we spilt along religious lines, and I once again left a "home.") But I gave UUism a chance. And I slowly began to realize it wasn't just me giving them a chance; they were also giving me a second chance. The Church of the Larger Fellowship embraced my questions. They were not telling me what to believe. They accepted me as I am, with my questions and flaws.

And the CLF made me question myself, my definition of the very concept of home, of family, of friends. I'm not one to lightly speak of powerful spiritual moments, of miraculous signs or experiences. I may not have seen a



flash of light or experienced a hallowed voice, but I truly had what was for me a miraculous moment. I remember writing

an essay for a CLF correspondence course, and we were asked to imagine being locked in a subway car with a group of people forever, and to imagine them as being our people, to find acceptance with these people and to embrace them as our own. I couldn't have asked for a more poignant exercise. It was truly an enlightening moment for me. A revelation, if you will. Wherever I am, the people around me are my people, with all their triumphs and tragedies, flaws and virtues.

The next logical step in this thinking is the understanding that home is the place where you find acceptance, not the physical space we occupy. And I have truly found a home in the Church of the Larger Fellowship. More than that, they have truly, truly helped me to become a better person. I no longer look to an indefinable and uncertain future for the promise of home. Every letter I get from the CLF, every essay I write, every time I use their teachings to help someone around me, I feel a little closer to home. ■



By the Waters of Babylon

BY JAMES ISHMAEL

FORD, MINISTER,
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CHURCH IN
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By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down, and we wept when we remembered Zion. In the midst of it all we hung our harps upon the willows. They that carried us away captive required of us a song. They wanted us to sing of joy. "Sing to us," they demanded, "one of the songs of Zion." But how shall we sing the Lord's song in this strange land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill. If I do not remember you, if I do not hold Jerusalem as my chief joy, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth. — Psalm 137: 1-6

Home, we are told over and over, is where the heart is. And I think there's something for us in that.

Psalm 137 dates from the Babylonian captivity, somewhere in the sixth century before the Common Era, a very important moment in history. What we have is a small community of intellectuals and craftsmen from that mix of people in what we today think of as Israel and Palestine who had been carried away to Babylon. Who they really were is complicated, but let's call them Judeans.

It's hard to say how much they thought of themselves as a people separate from their neighbors before this time. But during that captivity and exile something happened—a spiritual alchemy, a distillation of ancient fables and stories into a holy book containing a more or less coherent history and, even more important, a promise. During those years much of what we would think of as Judaism came to

birth, all brought together in a dream of home, of separation, of exile and a promise of returning to that home.

And that's our story, isn't it? Do you notice that in your heart? Do you have that sense of dislocation, of your heart's longing? It seems most of us are not settled, are not at home. We have different ways of saying this. Somewhere within our hearts there is always a knowing of our home which whispers, which calls to us in our dreams. In the midst of whatever conditions we're caught up in, we feel this urge, this need, this longing of our hearts.

Last year I was visiting with a liberal Congregational minister. Good person, smart as a whip. I really liked her. As happens for people in any shared trade, eventually we began to talk shop. She said how she saw her job as ultimately reminding people that we are resident aliens, that this place we find ourselves in is not our home. Rather, she said, she calls the people she serves to remember they are in fact citizens of heaven. And here, well, here they—we—are just passing through.

This very place
is heaven.
This very heart
is the mind of God.

This really bothered me. And while I hadn't thought of it in quite these terms before saying it, I had to respond that I couldn't disagree more. My mission, my work, is to recall people to the fact that our home *is* here. In a larger sense we are citizens of *this* world. And, more intimately, our knowing is found in *this* body. This place here, this place now, this being and nowhere else, is our true home.

What this speaks to is a fundamental difference in approach to matters of spirit and how we should engage life.

Of course, people who believe their home is somewhere else don't always ignore this place where we actually live. In fact, they often do good work, even great work to alleviate suffering and to care for the world.

But it becomes a dividing of the heart. And this split, if not watched carefully, can be dangerous. There are two additional lines in that Psalm which we usually don't quote, where in their longing and despair the Judeans wish the most terrible fate for their captors. We need to be careful, missing where home is, lest we wander forever, as the 18th century poet Hakuin described, "like someone in the midst of water, crying out in thirst, like the child of a wealthy home, wandering among the poor."

While this is our home, we usually need to wander, to travel, to seek in order to find it. Weird, maybe. But it is the way things are. So, I don't disparage pilgrimage and wayfaring. But it is to a purpose.

There is a story, attributed to various Jewish sages, of an honest and godly but poor young man, who lives in a small ramshackle house in Kiev. The young man dreams of a treasure buried by a lamppost near a bridge. He takes off on his pilgrim way and wanders until he finds the location in his dream.

But, shovel in hand, he is stopped from digging by a watchman. When he confesses his reason for being there, the watchman laughs at him and says he himself has dreamed for years of a hidden treasure buried in a poor man's basement. But he wouldn't be bothered to look for it. It's just a dream. The young man realizes that the basement the watchman described is his very own back in Kiev. He returns home, digs and finds his treasure.

So here's the message. This very place is heaven. This very heart is the mind of God. And these very hands are made to do the work of the divine. ■



From Your Minister

BY MEG RILEY
SENIOR MINISTER,
CHURCH OF THE
LARGER FELLOWSHIP

A trend which began in the San Francisco Bay Area is now spreading to other cities—the trend of hipsters paying four or five bucks for a piece of toast. Toast. You know, like you make in the toaster.

Now, when I first heard this, I presumed that it was the dream child of someone who was playing “The Emperor’s New Clothes” with food; some con man or woman saying, “Let’s see to what lengths over-moneyed, under-purposed people will go to eat what’s hip—something that will cost us almost nothing but which they will all agree is so good that it’s worth shelling out for.”

But in fact, according to an article in a magazine called *Pacific Standard*, this trend toward toast is due to a woman named Giulietta Carrelli, who runs Trouble Coffee and Coconut Club in San Francisco. I recommend the entire article to you if you’re online. The author is John Gravois. What fascinated me is that this woman, far from being a cynical hipster, began selling toast out of her own vulnerability and need.

Giulietta Carrelli has a rare kind of mental disorder that had kept her from steady jobs or housing. Her inner life would become so complicated and overwhelming that she would, from time to time and unpredictably, simply not know who she was. In these periods she might walk aimlessly for months, disconnected from everyone and everything. She would quite simply lose her identity.

But an old immigrant man she met on the beach changed her life. He listened to her story and then asked a powerful

question: “What is your useful skill in a tangible situation?”

Carrelli knew immediately—she was good at making coffee. When she was able to hold down employment, it was generally as a barista. And cinnamon toast had always been a source of comfort to her, so why not for others? At bottom, Carrelli says, Trouble—the tiny coffee shop she opened in a one car garage—is a tool for keeping her alive. “I’m trying to stay connected to the self,” she says.

What might it look like if we shaped our lives in very particular ways that would help us find our way home each night?

At the coffee shop, Carrelli is personally known by hundreds of customers. These days, during a walking episode, Carrelli says, a hello and a call-out by name from one of these casual acquaintances in some unfamiliar part of the city might make the difference between whether she makes it home that night or not. “I’m wearing the same outfit every day,” she says. “I take the same routes every day. I own Trouble Coffee so that people recognize my face—so they can help me.”

Reading this article, I was struck by Carrelli’s genius. She has structured a life that keeps her remembering who she is, that enables her to find her way home every night.

I was also struck by the fact that her genius was so noticeable that others tried to emulate it. But, I would propose, they copied the wrong part. They copied the form instead of the substance. The form it takes for Carrelli to find her way home is running a coffee shop and selling toast. That is her useful skill in a tangible situation. The substance of Carrelli’s journey, however, is creating a life that allows her to

remember who she is, and to use her very particular gifts.

For those of us who don’t want to open shops and sell toast, I recommend considering what it might be to emulate the substance of Carrelli’s life. What might it look like if we shaped our lives in very particular ways that would help us find our way home each night?

I am aware that for many CLF members “home” may feel distant. Many of you are in hospitals, on various kinds of trips or overseas work assignments, in prisons, the military or college, etc. Many of you are members of CLF precisely because you are looking for a spiritual home in a time when your former physical home is in transition or absent.

I love thinking that the services of CLF are clues to help the people in our community remember who they are, to find their way home. Maybe it’s a daily meditation, or this newsletter, or your personal interaction with others that connects you to yourself.

The great African American theologian and minister, Howard Thurman, wrote, “There is something in every one of you that waits and listens for the sound of the genuine in yourself. It is the only true guide you will ever have. And if you cannot hear it, you will all of your life spend your days on the ends of strings that somebody else pulls.”

You may be far from the place which you physically bond with most, which means home to you. But, in hearing the sound of the genuine in yourself, in transforming that sound into a particular shape for your life, may you find exactly the support that you need to create a spiritual home wherever you are. ■



November 2014

REsources for Living

BY LYNN UNGAR, MINISTER FOR LIFESPAN LEARNING, CHURCH OF THE LARGER FELLOWSHIP



I've been enjoying looking at pictures of tiny homes lately—little bitty houses made of cargo containers, recycled materials or just a lot less traditional building materials. There's definitely an appeal to a house that's no bigger than you need, that pushes you to have less stuff and spend less money and use up less of the planet's resources.

But I was a little taken aback by an article about such a tiny house (one that could even be towed around), which finished with this declaration: "The Morrisons' home reflects a physical and mental place all of us strive for. They're free from debts and bills, mind numbing routines, a permanent address, and everything else that prevents us from being the people we want to be" (<http://news.distractify.com/people/itty-bitty-house/?v=1>).

Really? Is that what everyone wants, let alone what everyone strives for? Does having the daily routine of household chores and a permanent address keep us from being the people we want to be? Sure, most of us aren't big fans of chores. Those of us who are parents, and have to work out what chores to have our children do and how to get the kids to actually do them, might have a little extra stress wrapped up in the process. But is there nothing good about tending to a particular place?

Don't people, at least some people, want to settle in for the long haul with neighbors they know and gardens they have tended long enough for trees to bear fruit? Isn't there something worthy in all those daily chores of sweeping and dusting and cleaning the refrigerator? Not that I'm really a fan of any of those tasks, in and of themselves. But I have come to value being a homemaker.

Homemaker isn't a title that gets very much respect these days. When people ask what you "do," they expect to hear about

the work that you do outside the home. But whether or not a person has a paying job, it turns out that the work of making a home is vital for our happiness.

Of course, what making a home looks like is very different for different people. Maybe you have a showplace of a home where people come for parties and admire the view. Maybe you struggle to keep the rats at bay or pray

daily that your home can be a refuge from

dangers of the street. Maybe you are committed to keeping your home a place of calm and order where people can relax, or maybe you are dedicated to building a home where kids can be creative and express themselves—even if it means drawing on the walls.

There isn't a right way of making a home, or a right kind of home to make. But home-making at its best does answer a particular longing: to be welcomed, to be at ease, to be included. Recently a high school friend shared the sad news that her father had died, and there were many of us who responded with memories of how her house had been a place where we always felt welcomed, at home. Both of her parents were true homemakers, with a gift for creating a home not only for their own family, but also for a group of rather odd and not necessarily very well-adjusted teenagers.

In my last years of college I discovered that home-making was not the special realm of settled, middle-aged parents. I made friends with a couple whose tiny apartment was always open to their community—a place

where we gathered for long discussions about life, the universe and everything, while our hosts popped in and out of the kitchen, periodically appearing with exquisite cupcakes or truffles or other homemade treats. It seemed, at the time, like a kind of magic.

Perhaps it was. There is a special kind of status that we give to things that are homemade—created by the people who make homes. A hand-made quilt is far more valuable than its machine-made, department store counterpart, even if the stitching is not so even. The very fact that it has been touched, over and over, by human hands gives it some sort of magic

that increases its worth in our eyes. Even chain restaurants and giant canned soup manufacturers will tell you that their products are "homemade," or at least that they taste

like homemade.

Now, I'm willing to bet that plenty of us have been in homes where the cooking quality was not something you would necessarily choose over even the most ordinary chain restaurant menu. But "homemade" food, even if it has never seen the inside of anything but a commercial kitchen or a factory, tries to hold on to a bit of the magic that comes from someone making a meal just for you.

The labels on the menus and the canned soup labels may be false, but they point to something real. To create something homemade, to make a home, is to create a space for connection. It is a declaration of welcome, a demonstration of caring for the particular individuals who enter in. It is an affirmation of the good things that you can find not in the exotic location of your dreams, but right here, in this ordinary place, which is, in the end, where we are most likely to become "the people we want to be." ■

But home-making at its best does answer a particular longing: to be welcomed, to be at ease, to be included.



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Coming Home

1.
It happens with the simplest gestures:
a door swung open,
a light turned on in the hall,
the snap of a lock as it opens
somewhere unseen inside.
All of a sudden the world
turns inside out—
or rather, outside in—
and I can't remember
what it means to be a stranger.

2.
*"It takes a heap of living
to make a house a home."*
Perhaps. But we know
that homes are built
not just by living, but by building.
Homes are built by tricky choices
when you cannot see the result
and must imagine.
Homes are built by days
of patient effort, painting
stroke after stroke

until the color shows pure.
Homes are built by rebuilding
the ceiling when the ceiling falls,
stripping away old layers
'til the wood comes through,
trusting that when you
connect the wires the electricity
will flow through after all.
Homes are also built by
slow minutes curled together
on the couch just looking.

3.
How to judge a house:
Are the foundations firm?
Is the structure sound?
Can you live with the neighbors?
Will you stay warm through the winters?
When you enter, are you captivated
by the quality of light? ■

*By Lynn Ungar, CLF minister for
lifespan learning. Her book of poetry,
Bread and Other Miracles, is available
at www.lynnungar.com*

