

Searching for a place to call home is not always easy



PEOPLE often talk about gratitude these days. The one thing I am always grateful for is a roof over my head, especially in the far north of Scotland!



Northern Drift

By Monique Sliedrecht

I am ever more thankful for this reality in light of the news of people losing their homes through hurricanes, fires and war.

But what is home? If you look on the Habitat for Humanity website, you will see a list of quotes from people who describe what home is to them. Many of the words that come up are 'safety, security, stability, sanctuary' (The four S's).

One person writes: 'Home is the base where everything begins.' That is saying a lot. In many ways, we are best able to operate from places of safety and this may be the most precious and elusive state in the world. A place of safety, a true sanctuary...

Perhaps now more than ever we have been led to think about home in a



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new way, seeking what is important to us, what will make us feel 'at home'.

Not many have the luxury of choosing where to live. Many people in today's world are simply allotted new 'homes,' whether it is their preferred place or not.

The United Nations Refugee Agency reports that today, 'one in every 95 people on earth has fled their home as a result of conflict or persecution.' In the past few weeks alone, thousands have fled from the country of Afghanistan, leaving their houses as well as their country, culture, and birthplaces. It is a truly heartbreaking situation, a tragedy with huge consequences for so many.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn writes in One Day In The Life Of Ivan Denisovich:

Swallows have two homes.

"Freedom meant one thing to him - home. But they wouldn't let him go home."

Recently I was lent a set of films by the Russian filmmaker, Tarkovsky. The first one I plan to watch is his Nostalgia. It got me thinking about this word too. The word 'nostalgia' derives from the Greek and it really means 'the pain of longing to go home'.

In the last year and a half, the isolation of the pandemic drummed up a feeling of nostalgia in me - for 'home,' for those things associated with the culture of my upbringing, for family in Canada. That feeling has been particularly strong in the last week or so, after the coming down of my exhibition and the

metaphorical landscape changing in front of me.

A kind of longing or 'homesickness' is stirred up in me in an unexpected way and I crave the company of family and kindred spirits.

But what is the deepest remedy, when even returning to places can mean the realisation that all has changed, and more importantly, that I've changed? So often, things are not as they once were.

Perhaps the truth is that 'home is where the heart is'. So where do I place my heart? With that comes a sense of ultimate belonging.

"Belonging is not something we negotiate with the external world, it is something we carry in our hearts." - Brené Brown.

With autumn fast approaching, the swallows are getting ready to make their epic flight to distant lands. An intriguing fact about swallows is that they have more than one home. Is their heart in South Africa or is it in Scotland?

The swallows embrace both and their 'homing' instinct takes them between the different places. They will return again in the spring. Already I find myself longing for that time of return, a nostalgic moment, and I remind myself to embrace the present and all that it offers.

■ Monique Sliedrecht is an artist, blogger and podcaster based at Freswick - www.moniqueslreedrecht.com



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