



*Home is Where
Stories Unfold*





The role of home

in our lives and the diverse elements which comprise the 'home' experience has always fascinated me. I have recently, once again, (as I did post 9/11 and during Covid) found myself contemplating it even more deeply as home feels like a powerful refuge from today's unpredictable, chaotic, anxiety-provoking outside world.



Our homes are more than

physical structures and financial assets. For most of us, they are imbued with profound psychological and emotional meaning. A house is just a structure, whereas a home has a broader sweeping and warmer connotation. Home has a deeper, more emotive significance as it has heart, a house does not. Carl Jung posited that the home is powerfully symbolic and psychologically significant as it is a reflection of our identity and therefore ourselves. The construction of this space is consequently intertwined with our personal narrative and frame of mind. And for those who spent many years living in one house, they form the backdrop of our childhood memories — the places we celebrated birthdays and anniversaries, played games with siblings, listened to parents telling stories about their lives, argued heatedly about subjects such as college choices, shared confidences with close friends and experienced the pains of a first crush. One hopes that, in later years, one can look back fondly on that place as being physically and emotionally comfortable, cozy and nurturing – a repository of love, togetherness, conviviality and stability. The square footage does not count; it is more about the depth of the love and warmth which emanates from the people inhabiting the space – especially at periods of significant transition or emotional turmoil.

Home has always been synonymous with a feeling of physical safety and security coupled with a sense of deep emotional wellbeing. It is one's refuge, safe haven, personal sanctuary where one can just be and become. The layout of the space, objects, furniture and color schemes each contribute to the creation of a nurturing, inviting space.



“The first word that comes to mind is that home is a place of comfort and refuge. And the refuge aspect is important as it’s about a sense of safety. I spent so much time alone working in my basement as a child – making arts and crafts projects – like dollhouse furniture for my sister and refurbishing antique furniture. It was my way of coping with my world and Nature around me. The house and the garden were my refuges in terms of figuring out my life and my place in it.” (Jon, G.,)

Part of the beauty of home is the sense of ease and belonging it provides. It is the place where one has the freedom to be oneself. It is the space that features items we choose and like, and, as such, reflects those aspects of our own personality back to us. It is where we can retreat from an outside world we might wish to avoid for a while – alone or with those we select as our inner circle. It is at home that we gather, connect and socialize, and create meaningful relationships and memories. Home can be described as the place which epitomizes an ‘open door, open heart’ policy as it’s about welcoming people into your heart and space. And while precise elements of a homey ambiance may differ from person to person and even across cultures, it is a universally understood concept that home is the place where we have our favorite possessions and bond with family and friends over food, drink and authentic conversations.

As an adolescent, one of my respondents viewed home as an oxymoron. For him, it was a much-needed retreat from an unkind world he only accessed when necessary. But it simultaneously felt like a prison or place of solitary confinement because, as the target of adolescent bullying, he was reluctant to invite people into his home. Over the years, he bolstered his self-confidence, learned to stay away from unkind, judgmental people and has become a person who enjoys inviting and entertaining guests he knows he can trust.

“Home is where people who love me and accept me come. We bring joy to each other and better our lives together. Home is an inviting place where we can laugh and feel. It is where I can be my authentic self.”

Home is synonymous with

authentic living and is also the place where sentimental attachment happens – be it to a specific room in the home and/or to pets, objects, scents or clothing. For many, it is impossible to discard a storybook if it triggers fond recollections of reading it on a parent's lap, giggling at pictures and then being given a Good Night kiss. Paintings or family photos which are inheritances from cherished parents or grandparents also create a sense of home in a broader sense as they represent the chain that links generations of people and their respective homes. How precious it is to recall the office where a much-loved father sat happily, his family photos hanging directly across from his favorite chair so that his beloved ancestors kept him company during his workday. Because home is a piece of a person and their heart. Leafing through pictures of a beloved pet, long since gone, can also trigger feelings of nostalgia for the physical home of yesteryear in which the pet nestled at one's feet. And familiar home scents – such as mom baking her famous chocolate cake, bread or Oma whipping up a guava pudding – can still instantly evoke the feeling of home in a powerful way, even decades later.



Additionally, every home has a set of values which is imparted to and shared by its residents. These might include kindness, honesty, a strong moral compass and integrity and/or a focus on academics, sports, Art and/or music. The hope is that the values transmitted in the home become a prized legacy which live on even when an individual moves into a new location. Meeting others who share these values can instantly forge a connection and enable individuals to feel that they are 'at home' and comfortable with each other. In contrast, people with different value sets may not bond with each other as easily. Abandoning core values with which one was raised can signal a breakdown of a family relationship and fuel estrangement from the people and home from which one emerged.

A group of seven people, including men, women, and a child, are seated around a wooden table on a patio. They are engaged in conversation and eating. The scene is set at sunset, with a warm orange glow in the sky and string lights hanging above the table. The background shows a grassy area and some distant buildings.

Valued shared experiences

from an old home can be transported into a new home when one relocates with one's loved ones and/or meaningful objects such as a grandmother's candlesticks or a grandfather's woodwork creation. This is because the people and items both help create a 'love' vibe and revive fond memories. During an interview I had with the popular designer, Michael Aram, he shared that he left NYC for Florida during Covid and relocated with only a few possessions, believing that "you don't need much to make a home." He bundled his partner and children into the car along with some clothing, pillows and stuffed animals, and drove all the way to Florida. After a few nights in a hotel, they found a house, purchased some mattresses, bed linens and started their new life there. Their new home was constructed from the love and togetherness they felt for each other and transplanted; the material possessions, he felt, were just purchased as necessary daily items for living.

That said, a house becomes a home when one places one's own stylistic touch on it. There is certainly a sense of pride and ownership in a home as one strives to make the inside and outside surrounding area reflect who one is. Piecing together a space artistically and thoughtfully rather than haphazardly throwing items together is obvious to those who enter it and is simultaneously a way to telegraph one's soul. Perhaps it's a grey accent wall – just because one fell in love with the paint color named 'flowerbox!' Or perhaps it's about placing a family of big, fat ceramic sheep by the front door just because they look cute and funny! Interiors that feel like neutral, institutional spaces typically fail to create an impression of the warmth and coziness associated with home.

Aram's beautiful photo frames are designed with the intent of having these objects help its owners explore and re-explore special moments in their life and consequently become the harbingers of joy. By way of illustrating this, he recalled when and who had gifted him with a cute little Indian bowl from a trip abroad and described one of his favorite crystal pitchers with a crystal lid which he uses for his iced coffee.



Thoughtfully crafted photo frames can be treasured long after the featured flowers from a wedding bouquet fade. Importantly, Aram also notes that objects can be “sad” if they aren’t appreciated or if there are too many of them. He is an advocate for decluttering, boldly stating that “clutter blocks your mind.” This attitude is shared by Peter Walsh, an Australian dubbed “The Get Your Whole Life Organized Guy” by Oprah. Peter notes that “Clutter isn’t just the stuff on the floor. It’s anything that gets between you and the life you want to be living” a profound statement which speaks to the mental and emotional benefits of decluttering in any space one occupies including one’s home. Cluttered physical space can lead to restricted mental health. Removing or controlling clutter can relieve anxiety, boost mood, sharpen one’s focus, be energizing and enhance one’s physical health.

For many, Covid helped reinforce the power of home and its role in an individual’s narrative. Home centrality was coupled by increasing interest in and excitement about expressing one’s personality and sharing some elements of one’s life story with others. In an effort to infuse fun, joy and beauty into their home, many purchased additional home accessories and engaged in projects to keep everyone busy! Some painted or redecorated areas to enhance it esthetically. Others took greater pride in their culinary creations and food presentation became a ‘thing’ – a way in which to perhaps augment their appreciation of home and existence within it. During this time, love for their home led many to create and share their individual cozy experiences with others as a way of bridging the isolation gap caused by lack of access to friends and extended family. Some started posting pictures of fancy meals just to change it up and to connect with others who were also stuck at home.

A sense of home away from home may also be created in places that are not one’s own home and/or which one has never visited before. This is either because the place stirs a part of one’s soul as there is something familiar in it – perhaps because one has studied the language, or read about its history, architecture or food - or because it was a loved one’s birthplace. Taking a favorite fragrance or item along on a trip can also help create a sense of home even when one is not physically there.

Objects clearly play an important role

in the creation of home as they are repositories of memory and joy which is important to many. Broadly speaking, these fall into two categories: items to spread joy, beauty and richness to the fabric of one's life and/or those which help create memory/story. In Aram's words:

"These items are the opposite of coasting through life. They aren't about money.. it's about making it special. It doesn't take money, it takes heart."

-Michael Aram

This might be a collection of canvas prints of some of the favorite foods one has sampled in different locales over the years with loved ones – repositories of pleasant memories transported back into one's home. Home-made objects - including pieces of Art created by one's children – also create a special brand of "home-iness" – different from those crafted or bought from a store or online. Aram noted that even the setting of a table can be a piece of home artwork. He cited a visit to a neighbor whose husband is increasingly disabled and described how lovingly and beautifully she arranged the food on his plate so that it looked like a masterpiece.

By incorporating objects from a previous owner and a previous time into today's world, objects can link one generation to another in a special fashion. Usage of a great grandfather's mug or silver cup or wearing a great grandmother's gold brooch helps keep one's ancestors and their legacy 'alive' in a meaningful fashion. For Aram, precious memories include a metal rice pilaf spoon used by his Armenian grandmother to stir her rice pilaf. One entire side of the spoon is now worn away, yet serves to remind him of the multiple yesterdays of cozy togetherness experienced with his grandmother and family as well as the taste of her rice. Although he now uses this spoon to concoct 'whimsical stuff,' his children also love it so that it feels like a 'from generation to generation' item whose usage gives rise to extraordinarily meaningful memories which he calls 'anti-generic moments.' Objects that are still "precious in your heart" are the ones that are impossible to discard; these might include Winnie the Pooh cereal bowls that one's children used when very young, a former love's laminated college ID card or pictures selected together with a loved one on a vacation as it creates a deep connection between you and a moment in time.

Losing one's home

or leaving it because one is moving to a different location can feel like losing an integral piece of oneself. My childhood was spent in one house in London; I can testify to the diverse palette of emotions I experienced there and the gratitude I felt for the house's walls which guarded all my secrets for over two decades!! I was the last member of the family to leave the house after it was sold. Before closing the front door for the last time, I visited each room, took photos and said goodbye to it, tears streaming down my face. Painful as it is to admit, I surmise that the new owners quickly erased our family history from the house and started to craft their own. However, our attachment to the house and the decades-long stories we experienced in it are now part of our family's cherished legacy – lovingly recounted in the book I wrote about it, entitled “Goodbye. No. 73.”

Lastly, home - in the broader sense - is where one's family/racial/ethnic history is. Where one feels safe, protected, understood and content; close to family, neighbors and a community who care for and about one another. It is where people are always ready to extend a hand and help each other. Sometimes they know you well and love you, and sometimes they connect with you just because they are familiar with your face, your voice and your friendly eyes as they always see you at the bus stop or on the line at Starbucks.

Sadly, the increasing number of mass shootings across the U.S in places that have familiar, 'home-like' status – schools, stores, places of worship, workplaces, theaters – has led to heightened anxiety about venturing out into what feels like a dangerous and unpredictable world. And for many, the footage of October 7th 2023 terrorists invading Israelis' homes - as they lay asleep in their own beds or innocently ate breakfast at their kitchen table in their pajamas on a Saturday morning – instantly destroyed the universally accepted norm about the sanctity of home. In the wake of this brutal rampage, home instantly lost its safe status. One continues to wonder if it is possible to recover from the trauma of having one's safe haven defiled because safety and emotional wellbeing have traditionally been synonymous with the word 'home.' Moreover, the visuals of the replacement spaces to which the hostages were taken – long, narrow, poorly lit, claustrophobic, poor-smelling tunnels - epitomize a hellish landscape and thus represent the antithesis of all the elements traditionally associated with home and humanity.

When all is said and done, it seems that the prevalent divisiveness, hatred and violence in today's world serve to reinforce the meaning, power and beauty of just being 'home' – a place which affords us the opportunity to surround ourselves with objects which bring us joy, create memories and let our stories unfold.



TIMELESS LIVES

Article written by:

Tanya Krim, Founder of Timeless Lives

tanya@timelesslives.com | www.timelesslives.com