

Home is Where the Heart is

When I was ten years old, I came home from school one day and my parents told me we were going to look at houses for sale. All I could think about was how much I loved our house and I didn't think I would be able to live anywhere else. It was where I had spent the last seven years of my life. It was the only “home” I could remember. It was where I had grown up, learned how to ride a bike and celebrated so many of my birthdays. It held all my memories that had shaped me as a person, so the thought of leaving it was terrifying. Since then, my view of what home is has significantly evolved. As I've grown older, I've realized that while a house can be part of a home, the word “home” holds a far deeper meaning. It's not just a structure with four walls and a roof, it's a feeling, a connection, a place of comfort and belonging. Home is a simple word, and at first one might think it just represents where one lives. But upon reflection, home is much more than that and can mean so many things. Those things may differ significantly from person to person.

The literal definition of the word home is the place where one lives permanently, especially as a member of a family or household (“Oxford Languages and Google - English | Oxford Languages”). That could be in a house, townhouse, apartment etc. It can be owned by you or maybe a family member or it could be rented. From one perspective, this definition makes sense. After all, everyone needs a roof over their head, a place to sleep, eat, and live. But to someone without a physical place to live, they may think this is a pretty accurate definition. Homelessness is a major issue, and having basic shelter is of great importance. In 2023, an estimated 118,329 people in Canada experienced homelessness in an emergency shelter (“Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada - Homelessness Data Snapshot: The National Shelter Study 2023 Update”). When most people think about homelessness, that

physical space and shelter is really all they consider. But from a basic survival perspective, physical shelter is the most important to humans, especially for those located in colder climates. So to the 118,329 people who were affected by homelessness in 2023, the previous definition of a home would be pretty accurate. Fortunately, I have had the privilege of never having to worry about not having a place to call home, although ten year old me was very worried about not being able to feel at home in a different house.

Another way to look at what “home” can mean is that it isn’t the physical space you live in, but having the feeling of home. It could just be feeling safe, secure and comfortable in a space depending on someone's values, culture and personal experiences. Sometimes you have to work to create that feeling of home by filling it with its own personality to make it your own. That could be as simple as placing some family photos around. It could mean surrounding yourself with familiar items from childhood or having elements of your family around you such as pillows, blankets or even stuffed toys. You can put a scented candle or air freshener in every room to make it smell familiar or cozy. You could put up your favourite paintings, play your favourite music or buy plants to make any house feel like a home. Some people can do that anywhere while others might find that more difficult. If my house suddenly lost all of those things I mentioned, it would no longer feel like my home. It would just be a house, which is why the feeling of familiarity and personality is so important to me in creating and having a home.

Home can also go beyond the walls of a building. It can be found in our surroundings, whether that be the climate or nature around you or even the country. To many people that are not originally from their current place of residence in Canada, who have moved or are living abroad, they may not feel at home anywhere in Canada but only in the country where they

were born, or wherever they spent their childhood. No matter how beautiful or comfortable the new place may be, it might still feel foreign. Your surroundings can give you a sense of familiarity and comfort. The systems of another country that you are used to can make you feel at home. Your surroundings may also bring back memories which make you feel at home. The people you surround yourself with may also make you feel at home, friends and family can give you a sense of belonging and companionship which makes you feel safe, loved, and understood. Even if everything else changes, like your address, your job or your city. Being with people who truly know and accept you can make anywhere feel like home. Sometimes, home isn't a place at all, but a person or group of people who bring us peace and happiness.

The loss of a key family member can also have an impact on a person's view of home. Grief is a dynamic feeling, and varies widely from person to person. If a loved one is no longer there, it's possible that it may no longer feel like home. It could feel cold and empty. Alternatively, for others, being in the physical space where time was spent with the person who is no longer there could provide comfort. It might become the only place that can feel like home because of those memories of times past.

As I am about to embark on my post-secondary education, I will be moving away from my parents and the only house I can remember living in. It is both exciting and frightening. I will miss the people, the place, and my pets. But I now have a better understanding of what makes a home. Wherever I live while at university may only be temporary, but I've learned that there are many ways I can make it feel like home.

In conclusion, I think home is a concept that can be interpreted in many different ways, all of which are all correct. It is not just a physical structure or place to live, it's shaped by our

experiences, our surroundings, the people we love, and the memories we carry. While ten-year-old me feared leaving behind the only home I could remember, I've come to realize that home is something we can carry with us and even create for ourselves, no matter where we are. It can be shaped by the people we love, the objects we cherish, and the environment that surrounds us. Whether it's a childhood bedroom, a new apartment, or simply being with the right people, home is where we feel most like ourselves. And that feeling, a sense of comfort and belonging, is what truly defines home.

Works Cited

- "Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada - Homelessness Data Snapshot: The National Shelter Study 2023 Update." *Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada / Logement, Infrastructures et Collectivités Canada*, 29 November 2024, <https://housing-infrastructure.canada.ca/homelessness-sans-abri/reports-rapports/data-shelter-2023-donnees-refuge-eng.html>. Accessed 27 April 2025.
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