

INTEGRAL AT HOME
A TRAVELBLOG



SUSAN WRIGHT
A DECADE OF RIFFING ON HOME
2011 - 2020

Leaving Home – August 6, 2011

Today I'm leaving home for 5 weeks of travel. Leaving home is an odd concept for me because I've only considered this, Vancouver, my home for the past 3 ½ months. Yet somehow it already feels like I belong here. I have settled in quickly and effortlessly to my new apartment, neighbourhood and city.

It's also odd because the place I'm going to, Toronto, has been my home for almost 40 years – it's where my friends and family are, it's where my history is, my memories, my youth. And yet, it doesn't any longer really feel like home. I wonder why that is...

I'm looking forward to this trip because it's a chance to revisit my former home as a visitor, to look at it with new eyes. I'm not sure what I'll see. I know I will delight in seeing loved ones – there, nothing will have changed. We will pick up where we last left off as though no time had passed. In that sense, I am taking home with me and will find it there in the connections to close friends and family. But the rest, I half suspect, will fall away, becoming somewhat distant, no longer part of me.

In classic stories, the hero has to leave home in order to grow, to weather storms and return with new maturity and understanding. I am, in this sense, returning home after a year's absence having weathered two moves, a house sale, and a change in work circumstances. But I am also leaving my new home and it is bittersweet.

I looked around the apartment this morning before leaving and it felt so much like home. I hated to close the door. I said goodbye to my grandson last night and shed tears as he said, "Good night Granny. Have a great trip." I will miss him terribly. In the short while I have lived close to my son and his family, they have become a big part of my life, a joy beyond measure. They are home.

So here I go, excited about the adventure and what will unfold, and a little melancholy about the home I am leaving behind.

The Family Picnic – August 7, 2011.

Today I attended a family picnic, an annual gathering of the clan from grandparents to newborns for an afternoon of play, talk and lots of food. What is it about these events that speak so much of home?

This year the picnic was at a new location and I thought perhaps it would be different, a new sense of place that would change the dynamics. It's true... it had a somewhat different feel and there was chicken instead of burgers and sausages but essentially it was very much the same. New places, same faces.

The sense of coming home that surrounded the picnic seems to harken back to gatherings around a campfire or hearth (has the barbeque become the hearth in modern

times?). The fire has always been the center of family activity, where adults and children have gathered over the centuries to share a meal and conversation.

Home and hearth for me conjure the coming together of the generations of a family with all their shared history and stories. The old ones are part of the celebration even though they are no longer there – this is grandma’s recipe or auntie’s dish – and the young ones are welcomed and passed around to cuddle and bring into the family circle. So history has a lot to do with home, continuity, permanence, not having to explain, knowing all the inside jokes, being part of the group, accepted, loved, without having to try very hard.

And so in summer all over North America, families of all sizes and stripes come together for a picnic. There is a pull toward this kind of home, just a day or even part of one, perhaps at a park or in a family member’s yard, at a cottage or cabin or beach. The food is lovingly prepared and offered by each group to share while catching up on news keeps the conversation flowing. Yesterday, as I sat observing this familiar scene I have participated in since childhood, I was washed with a sense of home and the gift of family.

Home Away from Home – August 8, 2011

What constitutes a home away from home? Today I arrived at a friend’s house and it felt like a homecoming of a kind. I have been thinking about what makes this so. Is it that I have a key? Is it that I know what to tell the taxi driver? That is about location, geography, familiarity.

I also have a feeling of the presence of my friends who live here even though they aren’t home. They have offered the house while they are away but they are present in everything because they have built and furnished it with love and care. I know where they like to sit, the history behind most of their treasures, and how their morning routine unfolds. And I know where I will sleep here, where the dishes and cutlery are kept, and my computer automatically connects me to the internet when I arrive.

So this same sense of being comfortable pervades the space and my experience of it. There is none of the clinically efficiency of a hotel room, or the strangeness of being in someone else’s house when they’re not home. They are home, and so am I. As I write this, I remember all of our shared times in the house, our shared conversation about it as it was being built, the family parties and occasions I have participated in here. I am a part of this home’s history as it is part of mine.

I realize I have a number of homes away from home – not dozens but a few. They all share this common sense of familiarity, intimacy, ease. They are places I have stayed, enjoyed the experience, and where I have become acquainted with not only the space but with others and with myself. Some connections are of course deeper than others and

this sense of home away from home can be an instantaneous connection or take some time to develop.

How I appreciate these oases in life's travels!

The Cottage Part 1 – August 9, 2011

The summer cottage is an iconic part of family life in Canada. Known by different names in different parts of the country – the camp, the cabin, the lake – the annual cottage season marks a return to nature, to relaxation and to recreation. I am spending the next four days at a cottage 'up north', which cottages usually are, and thought I would write about some aspect of cottaging each day I am here.

Today it seems fitting to write about getting to and from the cottage. It is something of a hero's journey to go cottaging – you leave the ordinary world, you take along the things you will need for the trip, you face some challenges along the way which you overcome to return a different person than when you left.

In my case, four friends left the city bright and early this morning with a distinct sense we were setting out on an adventure. We had packed the car so full we were crammed in amongst the bags and cases. We had shopped for all the groceries we would need, including almost a case of wine to be sure we were well fortified while we were there. As far back as I can remember, this packing of the car is a ritual of departure that speaks to who you will be and what you will be doing while you are gone. My mother, for example, would not leave home without her electric frying pan – it was an absolute must have and always seemed to be a problem to pack into the trunk. I always take lots of puzzle books and a couple of trashy novels, representing an intention to slow the pace of life almost to a halt and recognizing we will be away from the usual shops and malls.

With divided highways and fast cars, it is a less arduous pilgrimage than in previous years but it still takes us over three hours with a couple of stops. We are welcomed at the dock by our friends who arrive in their boat to pick us up and spirit us to a giant slab of rock among the waterways of Georgian Bay. As we step ashore into this wilderness home among the trees and rocks and water, we know this is not the ordinary world but it is a kind of home.

The Cottage Part 2 – August 10, 2011

Each day in cottage life is more or less the same, endless variations on a theme. The day begins slowly, people spilling out of bedrooms at different times, coffee put on, the first exchanges of words as the kitchen comes alive. Gradually, breakfast convenes and plans for the day are discussed. Some will go to town for provisions, there will be swimming and napping, sunning and kayaking, reading and cooking, perhaps a hike or walk or water skiing.

For the handy or restless among us, there are always jobs to be done. One of the delights of cottaging is the process of invention, the rigging up of an outdoor shower, the making up of a stage for performances, the creation of water games. Because cottages are usually less well constructed, there are usually a myriad of repairs and projects in process, any of which can be taken up or put down depending on one's mood. This sense of invention extends to the cooking as well, how to fashion the peach cobbler without the proper ingredients or an oven that can be counted on. Rather than a frustration, these 'hardships' are part of the fun. A power outage is an opportunity for candles and ghost stories, a rainy day means indoor games and cards.

Cottages are family places, multi-generational and extended families of birth and choice. They tend to be small for the number of inhabitants so outdoor space is as important as indoor. There is much more interplay among grandparents, cousins, children, friends, than would otherwise be true, and a common parenting is often provided within and between cottages. If a child needs to be rescued, fed or encouraged, the adult present plays the role.

The cottages of my youth were often places for women and children, although with two career families and the blurring of role boundaries, I'm not sure that is necessarily the case today. My mother took us to the cottage at the end of June and we didn't return home until just before Labour Day. My father would join us for his three weeks of holiday and whenever he could but our summers were largely spent with aunts and cousins in a collective family assembly where an observer would have difficulty putting mothers and their particular children together. As a child, I obeyed whatever 'mother' was near and rarely were there disputes. Once, though, my aunt extended the privilege to cutting off my waist length hair in a bowl cut, literally creating a bob by cutting around a kitchen bowl. My mother was outraged when she returned to find my tresses gone and me a delighted child.

The Cottage Part 3 - August 11, 2011

I'm writing this after dinner. Out the window the boats are going by in the soft light of dusk, their engines humming to signal their passing. In the kitchen, the dishes are being done by hand, a special ritual of washing and drying and the accompanying conversation that doesn't seem to happen at any other time – it's a process that is lost in the city.

Today has been a typical cottage day. We packed a picnic and took the boat to an island further out where friends spend the summer. The boat ride was wonderful, flying along among the islands and trees, gazing at the variety of docks, boats and buildings. There is something about water, a fundamental element of life along with the air, earth, and wind, all coming together in this blissful experience.

We picked up our friends and went to the outer rocks for lunch, hauling our baskets of food, towels and bathing suits, bottles and jars to the perfect spot. We ate and drank until we were stuffed, passing all the makings and fixings around the circle until we

could eat no more. We then wandered among the rocks, admiring the view and letting the wind blow our hair in every direction.

I asked what made cottages special for our group of nine and got a number of different perspectives. One was that they are a place to take off our masks, to relax the more formal roles we have in the city, to wear those old shorts every day. It is a kind of permission to be who we are, carefree and relaxed, to put our feet up on the furniture and leave the sand on the floor. Another view was that cottages are places for generations of family, where you in a sense carry your grandmother, your parents, your people, with you in memory as you revisit all the places they have been. Yet another was the timelessness of the way days are spent, without worrying so much about schedule, just letting the days flow as they will.

We swam and built a fire so we could roast s'mores, the consummate cottage treat. I realize there emerges a depth of communication in these relaxed settings that is difficult to find in more organized or structured environments. There seems to be more laughter, softer eyes, gentler points of view. We waved goodbye to our friends, feeling fulfilled and fatigued from a day of doing nothing more than being.

Home Days – August 15, 2011

You know those days when you just cocoon at home, maybe take a nap or do those odd jobs you've been avoiding? I've had one of those days and I love it. I am at a home away from home, a cottage on a river where the trees whisper and the birds get you up in the morning. It has been a mostly rainy day and I am grateful for the chance to sink into this setting with no outside distractions. I have done puzzles, played solitaire, read a little, hung up my clothes packed in a suitcase for 10 days, and just sat watching the river go by.

I did get out for a walk this morning to smell the atmosphere, remind myself of the territory, peek in a few shops and generally to feel at home here again. I also had a long nap and a long shower. What a gift this kind of day is! It is wonderful to be alone, even though I have loved being with family and friends and will again tomorrow. It is wonderful to be silent with my thoughts and memories, to have no need of conversation or excitement, to just be. And it is wonderful to be peaceful here in contrast to the last time which was full of movement, of chaos, of doing, deadlines and obligations.

This is home as well. The quiet retreat, the place to renew, where the jangled pieces of the puzzle are put back together, where things take their proper places in the self, where spirit is allowed to emerge unfettered by the external world. Here sunsets matter as do the shape of the trees against the sky, the quality of the silence, the lightness of the heart, the embrace of all.

Life on the River – August 17, 2011

Life on the river has a rhythm of its own. In the early morning at this time of year, there is a fog that drifts over the water as the sun comes up and slowly dissipates revealing the hills and trees and water. It is a magical time of day, a time to reflect on the coming day with a cup of coffee, to take it slow, to allow my self to emerge from the fog of sleep in whatever way it will.

It is an active lifestyle though from early logging days. The large federal park close by is a wonderful biking and hiking area. The river was made for swimming, canoeing, kayaking and other water sports. In the early days when the river was still used for logging, my father told stories of riding the booms to get across the river, walking along the edges of the log restraints, a dangerous but exciting game. Nowadays, the river is quiet, cool and clear, used for recreation.

The evenings bring a calm to the river, its glassy surface reflecting the setting sun as the hills change colour and slowly disappear into the nighttime dark. It is blacker than it is in the city and cooler, great for sleeping. Slowly the sounds decrease as animal, insect and human take to their beds for the night. Another day...

I suspect others in my family have been participating in this daily rhythm for about a hundred years. My Scottish granny bought a little cottage about 1915 on Station Road where the train from the city stopped here on its way up the river. She had inherited some money from her family's liquor business in Scotland and insisted it be spent not on necessities but on a place in the country. My father, her youngest, loved the place, along with cousins and friends who would pile off the train after work and on weekends, climb the hill to granny's and crowd together in the little cottage.

That home has long since been sold but a few of the generations of cousins remain in the area. I have been visiting here since I was a toddler when my father would bring his mother back to spend the summers. She came here well into her 80s, hosting all who arrived in her little nest. This heritage is another part of home, the return to previous times where I can feel the presence of my forebears in my bones. Although I carry them with me wherever I go, their energy is strongest when I am in the place they felt most at home.

Homelessness – August 18, 2011

We have been gone for two weeks today. It has been a wonderful social connecting time with family and friends, a feast of love, conversation, food and wine. I am feeling full and happy. Along with all that, though, I am feeling a sense of homelessness, even in these homes away from home.

I guess I am homesick, another aspect of being away from home. I miss my family, my activities, my own space and knowing where things are. I have learned 3 kitchens in the past 2 weeks – where the dishes are, where the food is kept, how the garbage is done, and so on. I am already sick of the clothes I have brought and will be wearing them

another 3 weeks. Several times, I have thought I'll get a book or something and then remembered I don't have it here. As I look out on the river, this beautiful setting, I wonder what could be better than this. Nothing except my own home, my grandson's laugh, my own bed.

I have travelled the world for the past 15 years, been on the road for work and pleasure, often combining the two, and I have seen many of the wonders of 5 of the 6 continents. It has been excitement, adventure, discovery, understanding, delight with just enough scrapes to keep things interesting. I have loved every minute of it. But there is something happening now, some transition taking place I can't really put my finger on yet. It has something to do with home, with being home, being settled, staying put. One of the books I wish I had with me is Lewis Mumford's *The City in History*, in which he describes the unfolding of civilization in terms of movement and settlement. I feel as if I have been in a long period of movement and now am transitioning to settlement.

This is a new feeling, wanting to be at home in a place. In order to travel as I have done, I have had to feel at home in myself, at home wherever I am living. I have carried home with me and felt at home wherever I happened to be. A lot of my travelling has been with my partner so I have been at home in the sense of a 'we' relationship as well, having someone to explore with and share the joys of new experiences with. So my home base as a place has been less important, more a space to come back to in order to refresh, regroup and get ready for the next adventure rather than a place to sink into or want to settle in.

I realize as this trip unfolds that I am changing. I am missing home and feeling the loss of place as a part of my whole sense of home. A little bit of me has been left behind in the place itself and in those who are there and not with me.

Home as Refuge – August 21, 2011

Today for our walk, we decided to visit the Mackenzie King home in the Gatineau hills north of Ottawa. The large estate called Kingsmere was the summer residence of Canada's longest serving Prime Minister in the first half of the 20th century. He added to it over the years, beginning with a small cottage and expanding to two larger homes and then a farm. Today it is a 600 acre museum and grounds open to the public.

For the enigmatic King, Kingsmere was a refuge from the vagaries of political life and he retreated there whenever he could to write, reflect and renew. It is a quiet setting on a small lake where King created rock walls, gardens, lawns and set reclaimed architectural ruins among the trees. There is a boathouse with a single canoe. It is wonderfully relaxing to wander around the grounds and imagine life in the 20s or 30s there with King entertaining friends and political colleagues around the property.

The various homes are classic cottages of the era, simplicity and comfort being key ingredients. They are filled with games, cards, books, papers and photographs all

scattered amongst the cushioned chairs and narrow beds of the era. The tongue and groove boards on the walls and ceilings surround the inhabitants in a warm, somewhat dark enclosure designed to keep out the summer afternoon sun and invite evening candles and conversation.

Here is home as refuge, a private haven to withdraw to when public life threatens to overwhelm. Most of us can identify a place that has this sense of refuge, whether a whole house, a room all our own or even a corner where our personal possessions mark our territory. It is a cocoon in which to lick our wounds and prepare for our next foray, or a place to celebrate an achievement only we can appreciate. King called his estate his spiritual home. It is clear that it served a deep purpose in his life over the years and it is likely that each of us needs such a place as well, a nest that is safe and comfy to retire from the chaos and feel completely at home.

No Home – August 26, 2011

What would it be like not to have a home? How would it feel to have no sense of place in the world, no loving connection with others? It is overwhelming for me to imagine, even for a moment, the horror of that kind of loneliness and isolation, especially for children.

I have come across two incredible women in the past couple of days, women who have stepped in to provide a home for children who are living in fear and alienation rather than love and connection. Each of these women has decided to take the lead where no other help is available. One is Anny from Uganda (<http://sawaworld.org/sawa-has-new-method-document-leaders>) who began a feeding program in a desolate slum and has expanded it into a home and school for abandoned children. The other is Betina from Canada (<http://betinacradleskenya.blogspot.com/>) who visited Kenya and has since through sheer determination provided desperately needed foster and permanent care for orphaned and vulnerable children.

Both women describe the transformation in the children when given basic necessities and the love and care they need. The children blossom. They settle, they begin to trust, to connect, feel safe. In this country, we mostly take our homes for granted, not that they are perfect but they are there and they usually provide the essentials for our growth. We know who we are, where we come from, who our caregivers and loved ones are. We have this sense of place in the world.

In the orphanages established by Anny and Betina, the children and their caregivers are a family, allowing self-esteem to flourish and healthy relationships to develop. Simply having food, clothing and a safe shelter is miraculous. I realize how fortunate I am – I don't have to think about whether I have a home or how safe I feel there.

These women and their compassion and dedication humble me. They have lifted the lives of these young people and changed their futures. And although they are dramatic examples from the poorest communities of the world, we are not immune here. There

are young people on our streets too and those who are lost, alone and homeless in our wealthy society as well. What is their place?

Spiritual Home - August 27, 2011



Today at dusk, I visited the 13th century cathedral here in Barcelona. Built in high Gothic style in this area of the old city named after it, the church's luminous grey stones seem a magnet for tourists and locals alike. At this time of day, it is crowded with people both inside and out on the steps and in the square.

There was a mass being conducted in one of the 28 side chapels of this massive building and we could hear the incantations of the priest as we wandered under its mammoth columns and arches. People sat on the benches, prayed at various chapels, spoke in whispers, walked slowly gazing upwards, and just stood quietly taking it all in.

I love going into churches, especially old ones. They represent to me the best expression of love in architecture of their time. The skill and care of the planners and craftspeople as they brought to life their visions of faith in something bigger than themselves is an incredible gift to the ages. People went without many necessities to build these spiritual homes, even in the smallest and poorest of villages. When life was lived in anticipation of what comes after, this place of preview and preparation was worth almost anything.

We might say, though, that as we have gained materially, many of us have lost our innocence, our faith in what we can't prove or see. As a result, we live in a spiritually bereft society. For some of us, it is enough to be enspirited in ourselves in 1st person 'I' terms, to feel whole and at home in who we are. For others, spirit is found in natural elements, in 3rd person 'It' connection to the earth, water, wind, etc. But what seems difficult is the 2nd person 'We' faith in something or someone, in spiritual relationship. Perhaps that is why so many of us are drawn to these homes of the spirit where others have placed their conviction over the centuries.

Our First Home? – August 28, 2011

When I think of my first home, the one I remember is where my early childhood memories are – an upstairs flat in NDG in Montreal on Belgrave Ave. It's sometimes hard to tell whether these early memories – hearing about the king dying on the radio, yelling into my granny's ear to come to supper, watching out the window for the milk wagon – are my own or ones I've been told about but they all have in common that first place I knew as home.

But there was an earlier home we often forget we inhabited for nine months – the womb. In many ways, the perfect home. It met all of our hunger needs, gave us the ideal cocoon in which to grow and develop, provided the important relationship to the other that established our connection to the world. I wish I could remember more about the kind of home this was... Was I happy there? Did I even know I was there there? What does it feel like to float in liquid, to be curled up most of the time, constantly getting fed through a tube into the stomach? Sounds more like a hospital stay than the perfect home!

And yet, this wonderful container gives us everything we need to enter the world, all the necessary ingredients for life. Quite amazing! Some say we spend all of our days trying desperately to find a way back to that first home, to that ultimate feeling of belonging, safety and nurturance.

In a way, we return to a kind of womb when we sleep at night. We let go of the waking world to enter a different state of dreaming and deep sleep, often curled up just as we are in the womb. Is this a home too? Perhaps a home for our subconscious, where the magical and mysterious live and thrive in all their crazy wonder, where we live out in scrambled confusion whatever has been ignored throughout the day. Maybe this isn't too far from what we do in our first home, a sublime conglomeration of images without any sense at all.

The Castle – August 29, 2011



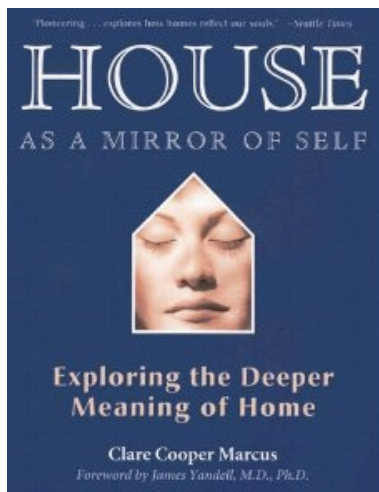
Wandering around this lovely city, I have been noticing the architecture. Barcelona is a city of wonderful architecture, from ancient to modern. Passing several castles of one sort and another, I am reminded that one of the iconic archetypes of the self is the castle. The castle figures in many myths and fairy tales as the expression of the many layers or architectures of the self – the tower for strength and power, the dungeon for the dark shadow, the moat for protection and so on. The castle is home to all of these aspects of the self, or some would say the soul or essence of the human being.

The castle can represent any one or a number of these aspects of the psychology of the person in story and mythology. Rapunzel is trapped in the tower, unable to free herself until with time and guided by love she lets her hair down, or lets her inner guard down, and is freed. Many times the castle has a monster hiding within, as in Jack and the Beanstalk, a shadow that must be faced head on despite fear in order to free ourselves from their power. As a result, we are given rich gifts of growth and transformation. Castles can be both a protection, with its thick stones and turrets, and a trap like Rapunzel's tower.

Home is such a central concept in our lives and wellbeing that the castle, the palace, the fort, the monastery, the cathedral, all these homes of the body and the spirit take on great importance. They are physical expressions of who we are in our deepest selves and stories about them tell us something about ourselves. The castle is an important archetype because it is a secular expression, a personal home or individual self, rather than a religious expression or collective home like a church or temple. It therefore metaphorically represents us as individuals, both our tangible and intangible forms, rather than society or culture itself, although the two are often intertwined.

It's fun to think about your own castle. What would it look like? What would appear to visitors or to intruders? How would the interior rooms be arranged? How would your castle express who you are? If your home IS your castle, what kind of home is it as an expression of your deepest self?

House as a Mirror of Self – August 31, 2011



I have been thinking about Claire Cooper Marcus' wonderful book *House as a Mirror of Self: Exploring the Deeper Meaning of Home*. It is a lovely inquiry into how our homes reflect our selves, our personalities, our inner stories.

Marcus interviews dozens of people asking them about their feelings toward their homes, how they express themselves through their sense of place. Some of the stories are joyful – family rituals, treasures and memories. Others are sad – people who don't go home unless it's to sleep, who don't spend time there, who have no connection to place. She reflects that it doesn't matter how large or small, how beautiful or ugly, as long as the place represents meaning for the individual or family who live there.

This is home in the first person – home as a mirror of the self, as an expression of who we are, bringing our deeper meaning of home out into open space for all to see. So we have colour, form, assemblage, use, and so on, all working together to tell our story in a tangible way. When we do this, whether in a hotel room or a mansion, we feel at home, comfortable, connected, in place. When we don't, we can feel just the opposite, out of sorts and out of place.

I laugh to myself, for example, as I reflect on the way the offices my husband and I use in our home are different. One is neat, orderly, everything in its place. The other is full of boxes, piles, papers scattered everywhere. The funny thing is that both serve their purposes very well for us. They feel comfortable, useful, appropriate to the task.

At the moment, we are living in a small apartment in Barcelona on a narrow street in the old city. We have moved in, in the sense that we are set up for our own comfort – we can work, eat, sleep, store our stuff, etc. While nothing here is ours and won't travel with us, we have still covered the tables and counters with our belongings. I notice it is a microcosm of how we are at home, one side of the bed neat and orderly while the other is piled high. It's a mirror of who we are, just as Marcus says.

Choosing a Home City – September 1, 2011.



This is my last day in Barcelona, leading me to ponder on why I enjoy it so much and keep choosing to spend time here. What makes this a great city? Why do I return time and again to make it a temporary home? Could I live here?

I find it a very livable city with interesting neighbourhoods, lots of shops and restaurants, parks and squares in the city center. There is terrific public transit and lots of history, art and architecture to explore. There is a distinct Catalan culture and language, making being here an adventure, and yet most people have some English to mix with my poor Spanish. The airport is accessible and there are direct flights from all over North America.

Beyond those tangibles, though, there is more. There is the feel of the place, the spirit that imbues the atmosphere and fills the cracks between things. It is vibrant, alive, and buzzing with activity. There are lots of tourists here this time of year and the weather is perfect for going to the beach or strolling through the narrow lanes and along the broad avenues. The young and restless seem to mix quite easily with the locals and older population. I am clearly not alone in feeling this place is safe, fun and exciting. I do love cities so that is part of the charm, not everyone's choice I imagine, but certainly one of mine.

Of course, if I was to actually live here for longer than a month or so, there would be other considerations, like healthcare and housing costs, not to mention employment. But for a visit, it is a wonderful home base. I feel I belong here and I am amazed at how that can be. It's not my country, my language, my city, my culture or my house and yet I am part of it. I am in some way home.

So, here is my list. You have seen others like it in surveys of why you should choose a certain city or town as your home. What would you add that is important for you? How would you describe 'the feel of the place' when you are most at home?

Transportation – Traffic, Airport, Public Transit
 Neighbourhoods – Children, Safety, Shops, Schools
 Economics – Employment, Housing, Livability
 Green Space – Parks, Recreation, Density
 History – Arts, Architecture, Family Legacy
 Geography – Weather, Culture, Language
 Services – Healthcare, Public Services, University

Home Afloat – September 3, 2011

We are in our final home of this holiday, a 55 foot canal boat in the Canal de Garonne in the Gascony area of southern France where we are spending time with dear friends. The village, Moissac, is a picturesque old abbey town enjoying the benefits of the tourists who pass through. As with other little-known subcultures, there are dozens of canal boats tied up in the village on their way up and down the canal. For many, this is a home away from home for several months of the year, a relatively easy way to be comfortable aboard and see the countryside, moving slowly through the pastoral villages along these century-old canals.

For me, it is a continuation of the process of miniaturization that has taken place over the weeks I've been away, culminating on the barge which is half again as small as the small apartment I've come from in Barcelona. However, there is a lovely aft deck with a delightful breeze where we are spending our time on the boat, eating wonderful French food bought at the local market, drinking very inexpensive good French wine, and watching the sun set and the lights of the village come on.

Having just arrived, this is not yet feeling like a home away from home. Perhaps it never will – boats are not a familiar setting for me, more of a place to be a visitor than to sink into as a home. I am struck, though, by how this is not the case for others. Home is where the boat is. I have friends who spent seven years on a 40 foot sailboat going half way round the world, a lifelong dream. They felt completely at home on the boat, had spent time on boats all their lives, and had made it a dream home.

The lesson here I guess is that our felt sense of home can be virtually anywhere – on a sailboat or a barge, in a city or the country, in a garden or a wood, a small apartment or a castle. It is where we sink into, where we feel part of, where body relaxes, mind calms and spirit rises., where the tangible and intangible perform an integral ballet.

The Abbey – September 4, 2011

Today I visited the 12th century Abbey of St. Pierre here in Moissac. What remains of the original seven acre site are the church and the cloisters sustained through wars, invasions, epidemics, fires, neglect and all the other changes of nine centuries. The abbey has attracted pilgrims and visitors since these early days, being a beautiful example of Romanesque architecture and carving. Here a community of monks encouraged the faithful both spiritually and physically until well into the 17th century when the monastery was secularized. Services were being held this morning during our visit in this ancient space with haunting organ music and the echo of a full congregation of voices.

I have been reflecting on the abbey as a home to the generations of monks who made it their life. Living here in material simplicity, in harmony with nature, and in spiritual containment, they devoted their lives to service, study and contemplation. As with most

of these abbeys, the town grew up around it and flourished to the extent the monastery was supported by the powerful royalty and merchants in the area. What would it be like to live in these circumstances I wonder?

From the 'I, We and It' integral perspectives, it would certainly have the 'I' covered. A disciplined life of individualized internal focus, discipline and divine consciousness, these spiritual communities for many are the path to an enlightened life and immortality. Collectively, the 'We' of the communities provide longstanding relationships where newer members are apprenticed to seasoned mentors and where compassion and service to others is a core value and meaning in life. And the 'It' of it, the external tangible connection to the objective world, well, this may be the piece that is somewhat missing.

Not only do these collectives tend to deny the body in favour of the spirit but in order to maintain their focus on the divine, they separate themselves from the day to day material world, from the complexities and vagaries of the ordinary. They serve the poor and the sick but they are not of them. They minister to the souls of their flocks but do not live like them. So as a home, it seems to provide a cloistered spiritual experience that sounds appealing in turbulent times but is partial and unreal. Isn't it the essential challenge of spiritual growth that it be in and of the world as we see and know it? Doesn't our spiritual life have to be an integral part of our home in ourselves as well as out in the world?

Home, Home on the Barge – September 7, 2011

We have settled into a rhythm of days here on the barge. We begin with breakfast, usually including fresh baked bread and croissants from the patisserie in the village where we are moored. We gather on the aft deck in the warming sun to plan the day's activities. These are made up of a combination of walking, eating, exploring the villages, and guiding the barge through the canal.

Floating down the sinewy waterway is a delight, moving at about 5 miles per hour, with lots of relaxed time to take in the scenery. Often we are traveling through avenues of plane trees forming a shaded canopy over us, a picture that is consummately French. We see fading sunflower fields on one side of the grassy banks and bikers, the odd fisherman, people walking or sitting on benches on the other. We hear the train speed by every so often – it runs alongside the canal.

There are numerous locks to allow us to change elevation as we move down toward the sea. Most are automatic, in the sense that you operate them independently. First you twist a long dangle hung over the canal to signal your approach. This activates the gates to ensure the lock is at your water level. As you move in, there are maneuvers to tie the barge to the edge where you get off to push a button that releases the water and floats the barge down to the lower elevation. It takes significant skill with ropes and thrusters to guide the boat into its place and keep it there while the water level changes. We have

tried a number of different techniques, experimenting to find the best combination of moves. I am mostly an observer, a witness to the ritual.

By late afternoon, we are secured for the night and settle in again on the barge for drinks before dinner on board or out in the village. There are several quiet times through the day, sometimes a nap, and we are fairly early to bed, usually quite tired although it doesn't seem we have overtaxed ourselves through the day.

There are many boats and barges following much the same rhythm, moving some days, staying put others. We see some of the same people when we stop or follow them through the locks. They hail from different countries, so far England, Canada, New Zealand, Switzerland and of course France, all living in these floating homes, some for a few weeks and others for many months at a time or even permanently. Together, we form a temporary community based on this common interest and experience. It's not deep but at least at a superficial level, we have entered their space and place, and they ours.

The Return: Setting Out – September 9, 2011

I set out on my journey home today, leaving the canal boat by train and plane to Barcelona where I will overnight and fly overseas tomorrow. Such a lot of whirling feelings as I begin the return – sadness, anticipation, fatigue, excitement, and so on.

In the integral lexicon, these are phenomenal states of consciousness, emotions *in us* that we may or may not be aware of. I'm not trying to feel sad; I'm just noticing I am. States are one of the five elements in the integral framework and they are playing with me today. As I sit on the train, I realize I am in some ways refreshed from the five weeks away and in other ways exhausted by it. I long to be home and yet I am joyous as I think about the adventure I've been on. These are temporary states, fleeting in and out of my consciousness, as I reflect on this amazing journey away from and now returning home. The feelings and sensations I experience exist within larger states of consciousness known as ordinary states. These are waking, dreaming and deep sleep, the daily rhythms we are all familiar with that occur in our internal consciousness and in our external body energies. These are states we *are in*, less fleeting and less controllable. Ordinary states are less complicated patterns but no less important to our sense of home. They are simple in that I cannot be awake and asleep at the same time. They are relatively independent of each other, unlike the phenomenal states where I might feel joy and sadness at the same time. They are important to our feeling of being home because these daily rhythms create our felt sense of safety, belonging, affiliation, and so on. Living in a place gives it a sense of home. Perhaps one definition of home is where we lay our heads down to rest.

I am feeling this rhythm of place acutely having spent the last five weeks in about ten beds in eight dwellings in four countries. I have lived through about 37 of the 24-hour ordinary state cycles since leaving Vancouver. I have felt quite at home – not like my own home but relaxed, connected, present, open to the discovery, a wide variety of

phenomenal states throughout the trip. I am aware that all of this time away has been spent with close friends and relatives, people who care for me and whom I care deeply about. The state of deep caring surely does more than anything else to create and sustain a sense of home.

The Return: Goodbye Hello – September 10, 2011

Have you noticed that all transitions have this dual nature, saying goodbye to a place, a person or a way of being, and saying hello to another? Sometimes what we leave behind is precious, a favourite place, a special person, a treasure of some kind, a home. Then it is hard to say goodbye. And when it has a different quality, like leaving behind something we are glad to be rid of, it still holds the power to be a loss, a little death, especially if it is some shadow part of ourselves we have always dragged along with us.

Today as I make the transition from Europe back to North America, from vacation to the ordinary world, I am reflecting on this transition and what I am feeling about saying goodbye and saying hello. What immediately comes to mind is that this whole trip has been an extended goodbye to a former life. Having lived in Toronto for so long, it seemed right to spend time there this summer doing all the regular things I do every year. But this year my home is Vancouver and the regular things are not regular any more, not a part of my ordinary world. My sadness at the end of this journey has a lot to do with saying goodbye to people and places, and to the person I have been all these years, all of them left behind to begin a new life.

So along with saying goodbye I am saying hello, to the beginnings unfolding in a new place with new people and a new me. I feel reborn in this place. Just as leaving Toronto is a little death, this is a little birth. It is exciting and different. It requires new skills, new perspectives. It includes new friends, family and colleagues, and it invites me to be a different person. But not entirely... I bring with me all of my experience, my memories, my connections to loved ones. These are what make me who I am. And being who I am now, as the Beatles did, I say hello-o-o.

The Return: Settling In – September 12, 2011

This is my second day back and I am beginning to be reacquainted with home, with friends and family, with the feel of being here. I'm still a bit dazed with jet lag – nine hours' time change isn't easily absorbed. And I find it takes a few days to settle in, to remind myself of the patterns of my days when I am home. It feels good to be here.

In the classic story, the hero returns to the same place she started from, only now she sees it with new eyes, having grown through the journey to transcend her former self and include new perspectives, new learning, new maturity. I have been ruminating on how that story fits my journey this summer. What have I learned? How have I changed?

The biggest realization is the importance of endings. I needed this trip to Toronto to get closure on my home there, to say goodbye to it in a more formal way, to have an ending.

I tend to like beginnings, the new and different, and don't bother much with endings but this is a major transition in life and work and home. I need to acknowledge the little death inherent in it in order to let it go and fully experience rebirth in this new place.

I am also aware of life moving on while I am away. It's easy to imagine everything is just as I left it in a freeze frame and I can step back into the same picture without missing a beat. However, the picture is in fact different and I have missed an interval that cannot be recovered. And I too have changed. Somehow this new now and the new me have to reinvent and realign themselves, to create a new story. In leadership development workshops, we call it being in the other person's movie, putting yourself in the shoes of the person how has not traveled but been at home tending the fires. And for all the grand adventure, when I return I wonder what ever drew me away in the first place.

Next summer I shall stay home.

My Home and Native Land – September 17, 2011

I am amazed at the many different levels of home and their power to evoke our emotions. I am a Canadian. I have lived in Canada, except for short periods, all my life. Canada is home, as much as my house, my neighbourhood, my city. It is part of my identity. When I travel, I have little Canadian flags to identify my luggage. In fact, it is when I travel that I sometimes feel most Canadian, something about going *to* somewhere in order to look back and appreciate where I'm *from*. But travel also opens my eyes to the incredible disparities around the world and invites me to embrace a wider perspective, to share my good fortune and loosen the ties that bind me to this one part of the planet rather than the whole.

Most Canadians have come from somewhere else in the world in the last few generations. My grandparents came from Scotland and Ireland. I have toured the places I know about where they lived, anchoring myself in their history and what it might have been like to be home there. For them and for first generation Canadians, there must be a similar attachment to their home country, their roots and memories in another part of the world. Where is home then, and what does it take to establish home in a new country, to leave everything and everyone behind and begin a new life in a foreign land? Does it broaden one's perspective, tolerance and empathy to make this change in place?

I also wonder what it feels like to be without a country. Throughout history, people have fought over their homes, their territories, and have been willing to lay down their lives to preserve them. Homeland has been used to create an emotional fervor against others. Peoples around the world have been expelled from their homes for economic and political reasons, forcing migration and/or confinement, losing their way of life. More and more, environment and development have displaced populations because of climate change and government energy or transportation projects. These are very different situations from choosing to live in another country; these are forced migrations, often involving hostilities on one or both sides.

Wouldn't it be wonderful to think we are perhaps entering an age where these artificial boundaries could begin to soften? The EU is a wonderful beginning. After all, we are one world; there are no real boundaries between us, just those we create. New technologies mean we are continuously and globally connected to each other. What if we saw the world as our home? James A. Michener titled his memoir [The World is My Home](#). This world-centric perspective is surely worth cultivating.

Make Yourself at Home – October 1, 2011

My friend Carol T. used this wonderful phrase in a comment on one of my blog posts recently – make yourself at home. I've been thinking about it ever since. What does it mean to make yourself at home? What are the qualities of being at home you are inviting your visitor or in my case returning traveler to feel?

As I thought about it, I got an answer in my inbox. Every day I get an eletter from Jean Vanier, the founder of [L'Arche](#) communities. At L'Arche, people with developmental disabilities and those who assist them share their lives together in family-like settings integrated into local neighbourhoods. Vanier's eletters are reflections on his experiences in L'Arche communities and his philosophy of life as a result. In this note he says, "Real rest involves relaxing the heart with friends and family through celebration, laughing, singing, joy, humour. It means feeling well and happy in our body, house, family and community." When I read it, it struck me as a lovely definition of making myself at home.

Sometimes, solitude can be necessary for making myself at home. I have recently spent a couple of weeks on my own, not entirely of course, but essentially alone. I found after a long journey it renewed me, relaxed me, to have this space in which to simply be. It rebalanced my energy somehow. I know for many, these periods of solitude are hard to come by, stress is constant and there are many obligations and responsibilities. I wonder about making yourself at home in these circumstances. How does one 'relax the heart' when there are continuous pressures?

I have made a commitment to myself lately to be more playful, to celebrate something every day, to laugh and see the comedy that life often presents. It has made me lighter already, this new perspective, and I like it. As adults, we often feel we need to leave play behind. It is for children and not mature. But play relaxes the heart; it is joyful and free of judgement. Tonight, I'm being treated by a friend to an African benefit to donate a well to a village that includes singing and dancing, dinner and fun. I can't wait to make myself at home.

Eco = Home – April 18, 2012

It has been several months since I have written and it's good to be back. I have collected several topics about home I am excited about and want to share. This first one concerns the word 'eco' and its Greek origin, οἶκος, meaning house or home. I was at an integral gathering a few weeks back about ecology and the speaker mentioned in passing that eco

as in eco-logy is home. I was astounded I had never heard this before. I have been a student of ecology and environmental studies for thirty odd years and never made this connection.

As soon as she said it, I realized it made sense. Our ecology, however we define it, is our home. The planet is our home, just as our communities and organizations and families are our home. And we ourselves are ecologies, systems of many parts working together in relation to our environment. So ecology is the study of home as an integral system in all its parts and wholes – how cool is that!

An ‘aha’ moment for me - one of those times in life when the pieces all seem to come together and fall into place - my interest in systems, parts and wholes; my returning to school in environmental studies; my working with organizational and social ecologies over the years. All these are parts of my own ecology, my many connections to home as a scholar-practitioner. But in that moment in that gathering, it wasn’t so much about what I have done, how I have engaged home in the world, as it was about home within me, the feeling that I made sense, my life made sense as a whole, whether I had known it or not. Amazing feeling of integration.

Perhaps this is what happens when one reaches a certain age. Things start to come together naturally. Or maybe it’s my need for sense-making – maybe I’m putting frames around things for my own satisfaction rather than because they are necessarily linked. I don’t know. But I do know in that moment, I was at home.

Home is Where the Story Begins – My 23, 2012

My dear friend Carol found a fridge magnet for me with the saying, “Home is where the story begins.” With my interest in story and in home, it was an instant hit – what a perfect gift! I’ve had the phrase in my mind since she gave it to me a few days ago and I smile every time I make a connection to some aspect of my life.

For example, yesterday and today have been organizing days for the week ahead. I have a number of friends arriving over the next few days for a retreat we are holding over the weekend. So I’ve been preparing for their arrival, cleaning and tidying, buying food and drink, and getting excited about their presence in my home. I have a sense of anticipation about the story that is about to unfold, the conversation and adventure we will share, the meaning and memories we will create. And here at home is where the story will begin.

Of course in some ways, the story has already begun with me reflecting on these connections to home and anticipating how things may unfold. I have been thinking about my own stories, the ones I will tell when my friends ask, “How are you?” and “What’s up for you?” These stories will emerge from my inner home, my feelings about myself in my life journey. Because our workshop is about the power of play, I have been dwelling in the role play has in my life, how play is a mirror of my wellbeing, revealing

how light and joyful I am in the world, the kind of story I am in when I am most at home.

And finally, I have been imagining the group of participants at our weekend retreat and the kind of community we will create together as we get to know each other and work to tell and possibly change our current stories. In many ways, my role as a co-facilitator is to create a sense of home, a crucible for stories to emerge, a safe haven for courageous conversation and commitment to develop. So with great anticipation, I am at home where this story is just getting underway.

The House of Belonging – May 22, 2012

The is the bright home in which I live
 This is where I ask my friends to come
 This is where I want to love all of the things
 it has taken me so long to learn to love.
 This is the temple of my adult aloneness
 and I belong to that aloneness as I belong to my life
 There is no house, no house like the house of belonging.

This beautiful passage from the poem by David Whyte on his *Sometimes* (2011) CD has a wonderful multi-dimensional quality. I have listened to him read it many times and each time, I am drawn into its depths and find myself there.

First, it refers to a place of belonging, a tangible spaciousness in which we are able to relax into living our best life. This place is bright, it feels good, it has a lightness of being about it. I can almost see the light and shadows dancing across the planes of the space he describes.

Then, he goes on to talk about home as a place we share with others, where friends gather and are welcomed, where they also belong. It is a place where love is experienced, not only love for others but for the things discarded or avoided in the stream of life which in this place can be remembered and reclaimed. Perhaps he includes the love of self that appears in this space of belonging.

The phrase I like best is “the temple of my adult aloneness” – what a wonderfully evocative portrayal of home! At some point in our adulthood, we realize we are essentially alone. We can be ‘at home’ with our aloneness, make it a temple to our unique individualism, or we can work against being alone, attaching ourselves to people and things which provide a proxy for our home within ourselves. I believe when we give away our aloneness, when we attach it to something other than our own essence, we never quite feel at home.

As David Whyte says, we belong to our aloneness as we belong to our own lives – it is who we are when we are most nakedly ourselves. It is who we are when we are home.

Home Grown – May 27, 2012

Last year about this time, I was amazed to find as I walked along the creek in my neighbourhood this series of small paper cones filled with plants attached to the fence with the word 'HOME' placed into the tops. How did this particular word come to be here, at eye level in bright red letters, reaching out to me as I strolled by?

It turned out to be part of an urban agriculture project called GROW by local artist Holly Schmidt. The idea was to inform and educate the community about the challenges and possibilities of urban agriculture in this rapidly growing part of the city, demonstrating how even in densely populated urban spaces, ecologically and socially sustainable 'homes' can be created.

As I took the picture, I thought about this perspective on home as a community, a social and ecological place that must be sustained to grow. It occurred to me that we are not only challenged with sustaining our agricultural base in today's cities but also with maintaining our sense of our immediate family and friends as well as our connections with our local community. These connections are so easily lost in our day-to-day activities, in the bustle and business of life.

I really admired this project for bringing the community together to play with these issues, to experiment and explore the social as well as ecological sides of home. They are all part of the same system, from the smallest plant growing in an urban garden to the children attending the daycare at the local community centre to the seniors learning to row dragon boats on the creek on Saturdays. This urban amalgam is my home and I smile at the wonder of it all.

The Cosy Pig – June 9, 2012

I recently came across a reference to Winston Churchill's country house, called the Cosy Pig. One might think given this name of a little rural cottage, but with typical English self-deprecating humour, Churchill's estate was 80 acres of lakes and spacious landscaped lawns on a hillside with a commanding view of the slopes and forests of Kent. Looking through the pictures of his favoured sanctuary, I wondered what the genesis of naming houses was, and why we don't usually do it any more. It seems odd to me that marketers spend so much time naming cars and corporations to distinguish them, to give them a meaningful edge, yet our houses are mostly a series of numbers. I might live at 2035 First Street. If it's an apartment, it might even be 1012 – 2035 First Street. How impersonal for the most personal of spaces!

The naming of houses began in medieval times when an emerging middle class, the bourgeois, began to live in houses of their own as personalized places of importance and meaning. We still use this practice today although much less frequently and it has a somewhat quaint and old-fashioned sensibility. Sometimes rural properties, like a scaled-down version of Churchill's Cosy Pig, have names. Or we give an historic reference to a place where the address is irrelevant – at our cottage on the bay, one home was referred to

as “the young people’s” even though they were no longer young and hadn’t owned it for years.

For the most part though we have given it up to efficiency, density and reason rather than emotion. Of course we need numbers in cities where millions of people must be located, tracked and especially invoiced for services. In our world, economics rule the day. The farm at the end of the road no longer does the trick.

I do wonder if there isn’t a hunger for a more personal connection to place. Perhaps that’s why we often name streets or apartment buildings – they are the new unit of personalization. But naming our own place may also fulfill the need to express who we are aside from being an occupant of one of many identical boxes.

I think I’ll call my condo “Creekside”. What would you name your home?

Being Human is a Guest House – June 15, 2012

This being human is a guest
house. Every morning
a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and attend them all:
Even if they’re a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture, still,
treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

This poem by Rumi, one of my favourites, uses the metaphor of our house to invite us to welcome not only the bright and positive but also the shadow and negative aspects of ourselves. It is particularly resonant for me today because I’ve been speaking to a coach about my own growth in consciousness. His invitation was surprisingly like Rumi’s, to continue to welcome and in fact embody the negative emotions along with my natural optimism, to treat them as a guest in my house, as they carry the seeds of my future.

Much of our North American society today is focused on the positive – being upbeat, outgoing, energetic, confident – whether we actually feel that way or not. Over time, we mostly convince ourselves it is true, but at what cost? Our disregard for the “crowd of sorrows” who sweep in may mean we miss out on some of the delights of feeling whole, authentic in being and expressing who we are. At a personal level, I ask what “unexpected visitor” have I perhaps not welcomed into my inner house?

Taking Rumi's metaphor to the level of relationships, I wonder what difference it would make if we treated each morning as a "new arrival" in our connection with others. What if we were to welcome others into our embrace even if, or maybe especially if, they bring negativity, or we feel they reject and demean us? What if we made them a guest in our house and invited them to share their stories with us, to clear them out for some new delight. What if our relationships were a guest house too?

And finally, what about home itself? As I look around my living space, I wonder how it reflects the joys and sorrows of my life. Is it a house in which the many guests of my experience are allowed to visit? I feel immense gratitude for the many artifacts of my history, each having a story to tell – my son growing up, my mother the artist, my travel adventures, my brothers and I looking much younger. And I also feel sorrow, although not violently today. Loved ones long gone whose photographs smile at me, friends far away whose gifts fill the shelves. I realize with the kind of momentary awareness Rumi refers to that this is a guest house where memories of many kinds feel very much at home.

On the Road Again... - September 6, 2012

I have left home after a lovely lazy summer mostly spent in and around Vancouver. I spent a few days in Toronto connecting with family and friends in a birthday reunion for my 90 year old mother in law that was a joyous occasion. And picked up my friend Sue who is my traveling companion for the next two weeks visiting Africa.

We arrived uneventfully in Amsterdam yesterday for a stopover, another home away from home for me as I have been here several times and always stay in the 'centrum' close to the canals. Last night we had dinner with Sue's friends, a couple of former Torontonians who have been working here for two years. I had been to the restaurant before under a different owner and it was nice to recognize it, a sense of connection.

We asked about what it was like to live here and both friends said it was easy, comfortable and fun, a great place to live in Europe and call home. However, they added they were looking for what's next, where they might like to go to explore, live and extend their discovery. Each of them began life in a different European country and emigrated to Canada when they were young. They are Canadians but also Europeans, feeling at home in both places with family connections, memories of places and events. They are not interested in settling in one place yet... or maybe ever.

I have been wondering about the sense of home when the roots in one place are perhaps less deep. I have lived in many places but always in Canada – I am Canadian. How does it feel to belong to two countries? Is it the same, or is there a different feel to belonging in more than one culture and country? Is it easier to say what's next and move to a new home in another country, to take up residence and call that home? Or is it much the same as moving around from city to city in the same country, noticing the cultural differences, the geographic distinctions, the variations of language and lifestyle?

I am also noticing the levels of calling a place home. I can call Amsterdam home in the sense of enjoying the anticipation of being here, knowing I will recognize certain landmarks, feel a certain connection to the place, the architecture, the canals, the bicycles, the cafes. It is a different sense of home to live in a place for a couple of years as these young friends have done, to make it yours, find an apartment in a square, learn where to shop and eat and work, to make new friends and discover new tastes and touchstones. And then again, to feel rooted in a place the way I do in Canada, a part of it and it a part of me, a lifelong attachment even though I've lived right across the country in many different towns and cities over the years. All are part of the many ways we are at home.

Tomorrow we are off to a place I expect I will not feel at home and I am interested in exploring those feelings as well.

Our African Home – September 9, 2012

Sue and I arrived in Kampala after a very long flying day, groggy but excited to finally be here. We were met by Daphne and a member of the Sawa World team (sawaworld.org), welcoming us with big hugs and a very full agenda.

Our first day in Kampala was wonderful. We are staying at a lovely, quirky African hotel with the usual hiccups but everyone is very friendly. The Sawa World team all came sat in the garden under a big tent where we celebrated the two new Youth Reporter trainees who graduated yesterday, including stories and speeches and lunch.

Then we all crowded into a little van and went to a Lake Victoria resort, a beautiful garden estate that has been host to the queen. We passed through several road blocks because, we were told, government ministers were on site. While we were having our tea, a huge wedding was assembling, the women in incredibly colourful gowns with astounding high heels. We asked if we could watch the tribal dancing and they let us into the ballroom - huge numbers of people all dressed to the nines, with regional dancers in flamboyant costumes performing a high energy courtship rhythm to celebrate the wedding couple. A wonderful introduction to the customs and culture...

The traffic in Kampala is pure chaos. It takes time and patience to get anywhere. Luckily the unflappable James, our driver, was able to negotiate a path avoiding the hundreds of 'bodas', motorbikes that buzz around like wasps at a picnic. Much of the population NOT in ball gowns takes to the streets in the evening so people were selling and buying or just strolling along watching the scene. One could get the impression there are lots of goods for sale, everything from furniture to shoes and dozens of street vendors crowding the roadsides. However, there were many items missing from the menu at dinner and I know we didn't travel through parts of the city where even the most basic needs are missing.

As first impressions, therefore, I am having trouble making the pieces fit. We are here to support efforts to eradicate extreme poverty in this country yet as tourists we don't see it clearly. Certainly this is a city emerging from a difficult period in its history. The infrastructure has not kept up with growth. There are high levels of unemployment. And

devastating poverty. Yet there are local leaders creating their own solutions, hordes of young people with a hopeful outlook, and many dedicated Ugandans devoting themselves to making a difference for the future. What is it like to call this place home? What is it like to be part of the elegant elite? Or a hungry child sleeping in a cardboard house in shifts? Or one of the youth who see a brighter tomorrow for their country? And who am I to enter this home and have any perspective on it at all? I am an outsider, far from my own home and struggling to make sense of it all.

Africa! – September 15, 2012

There is something about the East African savannah... Some say it's the light, others the animals, the people, the disappearing way of life. I agree with all these highlights *and* there is something more. It feels primeval, vast, mysterious, exotic, and somehow like home.

I am sitting on the small balcony of our room at the **Manyara** Lodge on the edge of the great Rift Valley in Tanzania. I am looking over the broad sand and water plains stretching into the mist of the mountains on the other side. Close by is a forested area, a national park where we have spent the afternoon with the baboons, elephants, zebras and impala. We left Arusha this morning, traveling into the arid flatlands and encountering the Masai in their billowing red '**shukas**' leading their herds and flocks. As we came further into the veld, I have been sinking into a relaxation much deeper than I normally experience in nature. Why this feeling of coming home?

I have been here before, about 15 years ago, in Kenya on a safari. I had the feeling then too. It is difficult to explain – a sense of peace, a welcoming embrace, an unexpected familiarity. The locals say "karibu", a Swahili greeting to welcome someone into your space. Have you ever had that experience? When you enter a new place and feel immediately at home without any basis in history or experience? It is not *déjà vu*, as in reliving a particular moment in time; it is more an encompassing presence, a timeless remembrance.

Whatever the source of the connection I have with this place, it is wonderful to be here, to see the acacia silhouetted against the pale sky, to watch the setting sun turn the hills to crimson, and to feel so gently held by this ancient land.

Ngorongoro: Home to the Masai – September 17, 2012

We have arrived at last on the lip of the Ngorongoro crater, a massive caldera in southern Tanzania 300 square kilometers in area. The crater is populated with thousands of animals – lions, elephants, zebra, hippos, many species of deer, buffalo and wildebeest as well as lesser lights like warthogs and hyenas. It is also home to a number of Masai villages dotted around the top and slopes.

On our way back from a safari, we stopped at a Masai 'boma', a family compound, for a tour. We were greeted by a young Masai man who spoke good English and escorted us into the circular enclosure, surrounded by an acacia 'fence', a wide mass of thorny dry shrubbery, to keep the wildlife out. He led us into an inner fenced circle that holds the cattle, sheep and

goats at night, and acts as a community meeting place. Here we were treated to a ceremonial dance by about twenty men and women, the men in their red shukas and the women in swaying beaded neck collars. We were invited to join in as they chanted, jumped into the air, and danced a kind of rhythmic shuffle.

We were then shown into one of the individual huts. Each wife (in this case there were thirteen) belonging to the single male chief of the boma has her own hut where she and her children sleep and eat. These huts are fashioned from thin woven sticks covered in cow dung so they are warm and dry. There are two bed areas made of wood and covered in smooth cowhide, one for females and one for males. There is also a small fire pit and cooking area. There are four or five very small circular holes in the walls to let in light and let out smoke.

We learned there are usually about 80 people in the bomas, and about 250 bomas make up a village. There are approximately 42,000 Masai around Ngorongoro. The young men descend into the crater to tend their flocks during the day. The Masai are not allowed to farm so their diet is almost entirely milk and meat. They buy grain at markets when they sell an animal. Both males and females are circumcised at puberty. Children between 3 and 6 attend a school hut in the boma where they are taught rudimentary lessons. The ones who show promise are sent to local elementary schools, walking several kilometers there and back each day. There is no water, plumbing or electricity. Donkeys are used to transport heavy materials. A very primitive life, easily romanticized by visitors. There is little visible joy and very few older adults.

The Masai are pastoralists who have learned to live in harmony with nature. They don't hunt or eat wildlife. They have lived in balance with the natural environment here for several hundred years. They are the most recent in a series of tribes who have occupied this area for 3½ million years, dating back to the earliest hominids. In the last century, they are also adapting to tourism and the pull of western civilization on their traditional lifestyle. They now charge US\$50 to visit the boma and strongly encourage buying handicrafts and supporting the school. The money supports the village collective, provides secondary education for some, creates a more varied diet and better health. One wonders, though, how home will change for the Masai over the next century? Will they be able to sustain their pastoral lifestyle in the face of increasing pressure to change? What will they gain and what will they give up in exchange for the advantages of more modern living?

Stages of Development of Home – September 23, 2012

While in Africa, I was struck by the evolutionary stages of home as place. I have known this at a conceptual level – our sense of home and its manifestations develop through stages just as we do. But I hadn't seen it so clearly or so starkly until now.

The best example was a visit to John, a Sawa Leader in a rural area outside Kampala. John began Agricstock Uganda a short time ago to support local women in food security by offering them some initial supplies and minimum training to get them started growing their own food. These women and their families live in extreme poverty, often without even the basic necessities of life for themselves and their families.

At the most primitive level, we visited a family with about 7 children, 2 of them infected with HIV/Aids along with the parents, with no hope for medical treatment. They live in the most basic shelter without water, plumbing or electricity. Food is scarce. The children don't attend school because there is no money for school fees. This circumstance is repeated thousands of times in rural areas and slums all over the world. This is the starting point for John's intervention with garden seeds and a chicken or pig.

A rung up on the ladder of development was our next stop at a small cement block house in a neighbourhood. Here, based on the start from John, Florence had been able to not only grow enough food for her family but to sell the balance to generate some income, enough to pay for her HIV/Aids treatment so she had recently been able to have a healthy child. She was part of a community group John supports in continuing to learn about household management and income generation. She told us her story of lifting herself out of despair and now having a vision of a brighter future.

Our final visit was to Cissy, one of John's Chief Change Agents, a title given to those women who have not only overcome extreme poverty in their own families but who have enrolled other women in the community in doing the same, supporting them and teaching them best practices. Cissy began as the others but you wouldn't know it today. There are several buildings on her property including the house, a couple of outbuildings, a small barn for storage and her cow, and an enclosure for the pigs. Chickens wander the yard along with her grandchildren who are all in school. Her original home, a derelict tin shack, remains as a reminder. Cissy has expanded her large garden so she can sell produce and support other women in the community. Although still primitive by North American standards, this home is dramatically different not only in its physical aspects but in the sense of pride and hope it represents.

All three of the women we met that day are powerful beyond our understanding. They have the will, the courage and capacity to envision a radically different future and make it happen out of the overwhelming burden of hopelessness. They each quietly, shyly, told us their transformative stories. I left wondering if I could do what they have done, to reach beyond the despair on behalf of others to achieve the impossible. One thing is certain: home for these women happens in community not in isolation. And it takes a selfless leader like John to, as he says, "get started from where you are with what you've got".

There are of course many further stages of development in home as place but perhaps none so vivid as these first three in demonstrating how a sense of place can transform our self-identity and relationships. The 'it' of home as objective place has a profound impact of the 'I' and 'we' of our experience.

Keeping the Home Fires Burning – November 15, 2012

I learned this Remembrance Day week about the reason for the two minutes of silence at the eleventh hour on the eleventh day of the eleventh month. My friend Carol sent me the explanation her sister, a minister, gave as part of her sermon at the cenotaph.

She wrote, "evidently in the first minute, we are to remember all those who served in active service, and particularly remember those who died or were injured. Then in the second

minute of silence, we are invited to shift our focus to remember all those who stayed behind to support the war effort in their own way - the teachers, the mothers, the knitters of socks, the mechanics – who helped keep the place going.”

In the email exchange that followed we began recounting the stories of those we knew who had stayed behind, especially the men who all seemed to suffer from their lack of active duty. Sue’s father was a teacher and she says he always felt unacknowledged by his country. He was barred from active service and so taught navigation to flyers after his regular teaching day and all through the summer. Carol’s father-in-law was another of these unsung heroes who, with a steel plate in his leg, worked in a factory full of women undoubtedly feeling like he was in the wrong movie. Or my own father, a railroader too old for active duty, who made it his life mission to keep the trains on the tracks and on time. Or Uncle Leo, too old to fight in WWII, (he had been a cavalry officer in WWI !) who spent his time traveling around the US buying up trains and locomotives for the British government, and arranging for them to be shipped to Britain.

Women, of course, played a pivotal role in the war, keeping the home fires burning. They took charge, raised the children, went to work in the factories, cared for the wounded and dying, consoled the grieving, and did without. As important as what they did was what they represented – the values, culture and social systems, the way of life that made the fighting and dying worthwhile. Women were the home beacon that gave men courage in fear, purpose in giving their lives. As Carol said, “YES, it was the ultimate sacrifice to put your life at risk in fighting AND there were so many more, so many different ways people were supporting making it all happen... these are not the heroes of the newspapers, but the heroes of daily life, keeping the “home fires burning”...

Karibu kwenu! Welcome home! – December 5, 2012

A friend sent me Swahili phrases during the time I was in Africa and I enjoyed trying them out in conversation. For example, I surprised the young Masai guide who showed us through his boma; when he said his name was Baraka, I said, “Oh, your name means Blessing.” He was pleased I knew his name in his own language.

I heard ‘karibu’, welcome, everywhere we went and I’m very glad to know the Swahili word for home – ‘kwenu’. I’ve been thinking about home in rural Uganda ever since I got back, lately in relation to men’s and women’s roles. I have found it difficult to know how to reflect on the context there without judgement. It is too easy as outsiders to take sides rather than seeing the whole perspective on home and it’s impact on men and women alike. Here is some of that context:

Less than 20% of adults have steady income from employment. Many exist on small farms often less than an acre where they grow food for their own use and for income. Most plots don’t raise enough food for both sale and use so families have to supplement at markets. Most women sell in front of their houses or at local stalls. Men travel further and often control the income from produce, which can be spent on themselves rather than returning it to the family.

About one-third of households are polygamous. There are more women than men in rural areas because men 'outmigrate' to cities in hopes of work. Women care for the children and grandchildren, tend the land and livestock if they are lucky enough to have any. Animals are rarely slaughtered; they are used for milk, eggs and manure. Unfortunately, the continual intense land use erodes production and crops decline over time, worsening the hope of a better life.

There are many ways to look at this situation. It can be seen as a perpetual cycle of scarcity and hopelessness, or it can point to a necessary breakdown in order to break through to a different stage of social development in rural areas. For example, it seems the traditional roles of men as heads of households, providers and caretakers of the family, have broken down. They are no longer hunters or shepherds, they haven't the land for agriculture, and few have hopes of employment. Although the belief system remains, the reality is much different. I often saw groups of men standing or sitting with seemingly nothing to do. They looked dispirited. How are they to generate self-esteem from providing social value? Many resort to family desertion, alcoholism and aggression.

Women, on the other hand, seem to have much increased roles and responsibilities at this stage. They seem constantly busy with childcare, gardening, income generation and homemaking. I rarely saw a woman who wasn't working and looking after young ones. Women also come together in groups but they tend to be learning something new, helping each other in small ways, sharing their burdens. They weren't necessarily happier but they were obviously proud of keeping the family afloat as best they could.

Is there any good news in this picture? Perhaps it is that all societies go through these stages. In Africa now, these examples are a demonstration of the huge transition underway that will hopefully over time lead to the growth of a new middle class with employment income, solving some of these role issues and of course, creating others. For now, I am impressed with the Sawa Leaders who are such positive male role models for this emerging social stage, and with the amazing women we met who are taking on broader social roles in their communities. Karibu kwenu – welcome to the first signs of a new sense of home.

Homeland Earth - February 8, 2013

I have been reading a wonderful book by Edgar Morin by this title, calling for "a manifesto for the new millennium". What Morin is essentially asking us to do is think of our home as the planet rather than simply our house, our neighbourhood, our city or nation. We need to enlarge our perspective to take in all of who we are as humans on the earth in order to survive.

Morin makes the case that we are in the 5th century of the Planetary Era beginning when we first realized the nature of the earth as a whole and were able to travel and communicate across the far reaches of the globe. In the last couple of centuries of modernism, this planetary age has accelerated due to imperialism and the westernization of the world. In the early 1900s for example, Britain controlled one fifth of the world's surface and about one quarter of its population. Since then, of course, we have witnessed the emergence of our global economy, global technology, global politics, and the global

spread of the nation state.

The problem is, despite globalization being self-evident, many of us are still operating from a national consciousness – we don't see ourselves as an interdependent Homeland Earth. Although Morin sees some signs of a planetary consciousness, he concludes, "The intersolidary unity of the planet has not become a social unity (a society of nations), and although there is henceforth a community of destiny, there is not yet a common consciousness of this *Schicksalgemeinschaft*." (p.25)

So what do we need? Not surprisingly, Morin calls for a planetary citizenship, a planetary public opinion, a cultivation of unity within diversity, essentially the birth of a new humanity in a planetary home. "Yes, we are lost, but we have a roof, a house, a country, namely, the small planet where life has created its garden, where humans have constructed their home, in which humankind must henceforth recognize its common abode." (p.136)

Home as a Mirror of Self – June 2, 2013

For me, the concept of home has had an enduring appeal. One of my fondest childhood memories is spending rainy afternoons cutting out furniture from the Sears catalogue and creating a home, complete with the paper family who lived in it, their conversations and activities. The memory is not only of crafting the rooms but the feeling and expression of home lived through the experience of creating it – feelings of familiarity, comfort and belonging expressed in the container of a safe place. What childhood memories do you have? What are your most enduring remembrances of your early homes?

I have lived in many homes through my life, rural and urban, large and small, remote communities and downtown condos, some 23 so far. As a child I watched my mother create inviting homes wherever we lived with a familiar style that included well-worn pieces, some treasures, and a few new elements to suit the space. As an artist, her sense of harmony and design made each home emerge out of the chaos as a comfortable place, a refuge from all the novelty in our new worlds. As I have set up my own households, I have recreated this pattern over and over again. I want my home to be an expression of who I am, the lasting aspects of my character as well as the changing elements of my own evolution as a person.

So ever since playing with those cutouts from the Sears catalogue, I have been interested in home, a student of home in all its various forms and perspectives. The topic of home for me is something like that slightly shabby chair in the corner one keeps coming back to and feels very much at home in, the one that welcomes us back with all its previous moments and provides a comfortable place to have a conversation about the future. And I realize in writing about my own experience that it is not true for everyone. For some, the experience of home is an ideal, a dream, a media concept while the reality is very different. For many children, for example, home is fraught with terror, disruption, abuse or simple neglect – realities that have a lifelong influence on their being at home in the world.

Each of us creates meaning about home, our own truth, emerging out of our past and shaping our current view and future aspirations. While embracing the fragility of humankind and our capacity for violence and harm to each other and to the planet, I would

like to examine the possibilities of home as a positive force for change and development. I would like to bring the potential of home to the forefront, expanding the view to the planetary level and beyond, applying our understanding to build a global capacity to see the world as our home, to realize our common destiny and act on it for our collective survival.

I would appreciate your views on home. How does your sense of home express who you are? What has influenced that view? How do you define home? Is it your physical space, your neighbourhood, your country, or the planet as a whole?

Summer Homes – July 1, 2013

This time of year, I think of the summer homes I've had through my life. Most of us have fond childhood memories of a cottage, cabin or camp where summers stretched lazily out with family and friends, picnics and swimming, campfires and bunkbeds, or maybe tents and sleeping bags.

I grew up in a collection of family cottages in the Eastern Townships of Quebec where my grandfather gathered his clan every summer. I played with about 20 cousins in the sandpile, the lake, the woods and brooks. We put on plays, went berry picking, had tennis tournaments and huge potluck suppers. The usual large family dynamics were background sound but we didn't pay much attention – it was all childhood at its best.

When my son was of cottage age, we spent many more summers north of Toronto in a little bay with a few cottages, each with its own dock and a boat or two. The people and scenery were different but the sense of the place was very much the same, time elongated and nothing to do but be. There were summer books to read, hikes through the woods, sundown boat rides and trips to the local village when the spirit moved. Friends came to add novelty and purpose to our long days, and there were always summer projects that needed doing or at least that's how it seemed.

Looking back, I realize how fortunate I was to have these homes away from home, places designed for play, for enjoying the wonders of summer. Because I moved a lot as a child, and kept up this pattern of relocating every few years as an adult, these summer homes were the anchor in my life, the stable base of family and friends to which I returned time and again to rest and relax and refresh from the pace of city life.

Where have you spent your summers? Were you lucky enough to have a summer home as a child? Or maybe you went camping to a favourite spot... What role did these homes away from home play in your young life? And how have those experiences been reflected in your adulthood? I'd be interested in your reflections if you're willing to share them.

Questionnaire on the Meaning of Home – July 17, 2013

Home has many meanings for us related to our childhood experience, our cultural heritage, our place of birth and residence. I am interested in the various perspectives people hold about Home, how it is an expression of who we are, where we've been and what we are becoming. Please help me with my research on the Meaning of Home by

completing the following brief survey. Your responses are confidential unless you agree to identify yourself for a follow up interview with me.

Please [click here](#) to participate in our questionnaire on the meaning of home. A summary of the results will be published periodically as data are collected. Thank you for your reflections and insights.

Homegoing – December 4, 2013

I heard this word, Homegoing, not long ago and it has stuck with me. I see it as a lovely expression of directional intent. It was used in the black community in relation to a person's spirit going home to their essential self in death. The homegoing spirit traveling to wherever she chooses to believe she is headed. Each of us is a homegoing spirit – in this moment, in this day, in this chapter of our lives, in this lifetime, across many lifetimes. In Teilhard de Chardin's terms, we are 'spirits having a human experience' rather than 'humans have a spiritual experience'.

We are all homegoing, if home is the evolutionary impulse that pulls and nags and cajoles us to 'continue to proceed', as my grandfather used to say. Proceed to what I'm not too sure but whatever it is has a subtle appeal, an intimation, a wondering about it that keeps me homegoing, despite the fear or dread that may accompany the attraction. Our spirits are called forth in what Ken Wilber calls the 'Eros tilt', that yearning for a deeper, more intimate connection with the whole universe.

This pull has been a focus of mine for the last while, although I have just recently made the connection to home. I have been preoccupied with the idea of preparing for death, getting ready now for what is to inevitably come, not only to me but to others, those I love and those I have never even met. I'm anxious to know how to be with others' suffering or fear, and how to deal with my own pain. I have lost a number of very significant people in my life lately and it has brought the whole idea of death and what happens after it to the forefront. What does this homegoing look like?

I have read a number of books, looking for the themes and patterns in them that might provide some clues to the mystery. So far, I have learned about near-death experiences where people have literally died and decided to come back, bringing their tales of wonder with them. There is a hypnotist who works with people to uncover what happens to them between lives. There is a whole Buddhist history of practice for dying and rebirth. It seems across the ages and traditions, there is a sustaining belief in something more, something larger than our fragile selves, a homegoing beyond this life and the possibility that our hero's journey is much larger and somehow part of an exquisite unfolding across time and space that we are only beginning to discover.

Of course, this may also be wishful thinking, creating a comforting story to protect our delicate egos from the fact of annihilation. And yet, there is the wondering... I am more and more convinced that we have choice. Just as we can choose to live our lives as precious gifts or tremendous burdens, regardless of our resources, I believe we can also choose how to die our deaths. After all, we die a little every day, beginning the day we are born. We die to

each day when we sleep. We die to who we are each time we have a realization that the world, and we ourselves, are not as we thought. And we eventually die to this home and go on to what's next. Dying is part of living. Perhaps it is the realization of this impermanence that brings into stark focus the treasure of being human.

Death as a Return – December 15, 2013

I came across this lovely question posed by Brian Swimme and Mary Evelyn Tucker in *Journey to the Universe*, where they are speaking of our human species emerging out of the incredible flux and change since the big bang: "If we have come out of this immense journey is it not possible that our transition is a return? Can it be that our small self dies into the large self of the universe? Are our passions and dreams, as well as our anguish and loss, woven into the fabric of the universe itself?"

I love this provocation, the possibility that we are not going away but returning home, that we are part of something much bigger that draws us, encourages us forward while we are alive in the service of a larger purpose we may be unaware of. John O'Donohue explores this point in *Eternal Echoes* when he says, "When you truly listen to the voice of your soul, you awaken your kinship with the eternal urgency that longs to lead you home."

This strikes a chord for me that has surprised me and given me cause for pause. I have long been a believer that this brief life is what we have and anything following it lives in the memories of those we have left behind, for better or worse. We each leave a faint footprint on the earth and its evolution. Our purpose is to be the best we can be given the capacities and opportunities we have to work with, to be moral and just not because we desire an endless heaven but because it's who we essentially are as human beings.

If there is a universal tapestry into which we are woven in all our individuality and complexity, not in a corporeal sense but in our essence, as the invisible soul or spirit that was born into this body and will perhaps return home after our death, what difference would that make to how we live our lives here on earth? If our longing for home is not something we can ever satisfy here but in fact comes from elsewhere much deeper within us, an 'eternal urgency' that is the heart of the universe calling us back where we belong, would that change anything?

As I think about the possibility, I feel a spaciousness that wasn't there before, a sense of being a traveller on a long series of journeys, making different stops to visit places I have dreamed about, knowing that I will return home after each journey to share my experience, to integrate what I have learned, and then probably to leave again. My home awaits when I am done. I am a visitor here in this lifetime, being given the gift of the earth's hospitality for my explorations. I want to be a good guest, treading lightly on the ground, discovering what I can about others who are here with me, growing myself in the light of their presence, contributing as I am able without interfering, knowing that I am a temporary inhabitant of this dreamscape.

What might this death as return idea provoke in you?

Away from Home – February 28, 2014

As I write this, I feel as though I've been away from home for a while, attending to matters out in the world and ignoring this special place I keep coming back to. I guess that's not entirely true. I have been searching for and finding home in new ways for the past couple of months yet this feels like that proverbial return to the comfort of the familiar.

Yi-Fu Tuan in *Space and Place: The perspective of experience*, says we humans require a sense of place – the familiar, the safe and secure, the stable pause of belonging to a home base. He contrasts this sense of place with space – the open, free, less known, more risky feeling of movement. The ideas 'space' and 'place' require each other for definition, and for fulfilling our needs for both intimacy and curiosity, permanence and change, shelter and venture, attachment and freedom.

Returning home in this sense, from a less familiar space, is a bit of a paradox. We feel the return journey is stepping back in time, although it is in the future tense, ahead of us. As I return to Phoenix today, writing on a plane for example, I have a distinct feeling of stepping back into the familiar environment of home, although it is a couple of hours from now that I will actually be there. Tuan sees home, therefore, as a center of one's life. It is where we begin, where we venture from, and where we return.

For me, though, the recent venturing has been less a tangible external geography and more an amorphous internal exploration. The space I have been inhabiting feels new, unknown, a strange inner landscape I have arrived in but don't really belong in yet, a whole new world. I know from human development research that we move through stages in our travels in life, each successive stage bringing more breadth and depth, more perspectives on reality. I feel as if a diaphanous veil has lifted and I can now see a new territory stretching ahead of me. Strangely, it has many of the same elements of home I am familiar with but they have been reframed, shown in a new light and clarity.

So my writing now about home feels like a return, perhaps like the hero who having completed her journey with all the tests and trials and transformation, then returns to the same place with new eyes. For me, these new eyes see many new challenges and potentials for home that I'll expand on as I explore this new domain.

Death as the New Big Thing – March 28, 2014

Have you noticed? Death is the new big thing, spurred on by baby boomers who are, as one friend said, "facing the exits" and beginning to think about dying as they enter their mid to late sixties. Over the past couple of years, thousands of death salons, death cafes and death dinners have been held, complete with [websites](#) offering to support the host with invitations, conversation starters and pre-work resources. These are all intended to foster dialogue about death, bringing it out of the closet and into open conversation. On [campuses](#) across the country, thousands of classes on death and dying are full to brimming, many with wait lists. Students are interested in the subject of dying, often

because they have been exposed to it with families and friends who have experienced death, and many times they have had no opportunity to discuss their feelings. Boomers taking care of their parents are creating the kind of [innovative care](#) they themselves would like as they age and die – staying put with care provided, or building environments of the kind they would want, anticipating what is to come. The idea of dying in your own bed, the norm in earlier days, is being resurrected as hospice workers and other caregivers support loved ones in the comfort of familiar places. So what does this have to do with home? Well, everything I would suggest. From where we die to who supports our dying to how we make the inner transition from life to whatever is next. Consider these questions:

- A Center for Disease Control survey says 70% of people prefer to die at home, while 70% in fact die in a hospital, nursing home, or long-term-care facility. How can we make home the place we need it to be for our last days, or at least make the place we spend our last days more like home?
- Nearly half of the population of the western world will be over 55 by 2050. Yet we know so little about the process of dying or how to create a supportive ‘holding environment’ for the transition. Most people fear abandonment, the unknown, letting go, losing dignity. How do we support those we love in relaxing and releasing this home for another?
- The pace of our lives is unrelenting, stressful, goal-oriented. We tend to avoid our inner life, our *being*, in favour of getting on with *doing*. But preparing for death begins with how we live our life, with how we know ourselves from the inside out and are at home with who we are. What aspects of our own transformation do we need to undertake in order to navigate death confidently?

These are just a few of the questions I find myself ruminating on these days, as one of the aforementioned baby boomers. What about you?

The Evolution of Work as Home – June 23, 2014

I wrote this piece for The Coaching Project newsletter awhile back. Because it deals with home and the relationship between work and home, I thought it might be interesting to include it here. See what you think of this perspective on the evolution of work as home.

Evolutionary perspectives are all the rage at the moment. Carter Phipps in [The Evolutionaries](#) says “we are moving” – we can connect the dots from our prehistory through to our present and know that every certainty is about to change. I have been thinking about this evolutionary perspective in relation to work and home. I have a renewed interest in home these days, as I work at home more and combine work life with home life. I have been wondering how work and home have evolved over the past century or two. I see three themes: globalization, miniaturization and isolation.

Looking back several hundred years, communities were smaller and work and home life were interconnected. The store was at the front of the house, the blacksmith’s shop was adjacent, and the barn was in the yard. As industrialization grew, company towns

became a feature of mines, mills and [factories](#), separating men from their families during long workdays. The company provided the homes, schools, stores and recreation for their employees, using a portion of the men's wages to pay off their expenses and frequently creating an indebtedness that bound them to the work and to the local community.

Fast forward to the last century where we see the rapid growth of urban centres and service industries. Employees now become harder to attract and organizations must create effective supports for both men and women in the workforce. Large corporations create [campuses](#), often designed with multiple buildings to simulate collegial settings where services such as a cafeteria, drugstore, gym, cleaners, sundry shop and day care centre encourage commuters to leave the suburbs early and return home late. Many workers now have computers on their desks and many organizations now have a multi-national presence. Homes, however, have become isolated from work as a place to relax on weekends.

The next stage of evolution comes from the hi-tech sector where young innovative techies are enticed to bring their home to work, to team up in creative incubators for novel designs. Tech savvy companies foster a family environment at work, providing home cooked meals, [gathering places](#), basketball courts and even cots or tents for sleeping between idea sessions. The workplace is now home – this is where your friends are, where you spend your time, where you get to create games and programs for fun. Often, these organizations are catering to a global audience of software users looking for games, puzzles and simulations. It is a young innovative playground, isolated from many of the realities of the adult world outside.

While we marveled at these evolutionary advances a few years ago, we now find ourselves carrying our work with us wherever we go. Work is [the person](#), not the place. We are in constant communication with others through text and email and with the world through satellite programs, internet calling and online access to anything anywhere. Fewer of us are working inside organizations and many more are independent consultants, advisors and coaches. We are not geographically bound – we work around the world in global teams across borders and cultures. However, we may feel isolated from the physical community of colleagues of yesteryear as we sit in our homes and hotels alone.

And because we are moving, we know not long from now we will have our communications technology embedded in us, tiny and powerful – we will be the technology, allowing us access to continuous information, advice and direction for our lives. The challenge will not be hardware or software but the capacity to interpret it to our advantage – the work of the future. As [Jason de Silva](#) says, “We are already cyborgs.” Of course, these are just examples, all of which still exist in some parts of the globe and none of this forecasting is certain. The benefit of evolution is that we get to participate in setting our future course with our every thought and action. It's a grave responsibility and a lofty freedom.

Evolutionary Phase	Globalization	Miniaturization	Isolation
Home as Company Town	Localized	Big machinery	From outside the boundary
Home as Urban Campus	Multi-national	Personal Computers	From home in the suburbs
Home as Hi-tech Incubator	Global audience	Online software & interaction	From the adult world
Home as Workplace	Global travel	Handheld communications technology	From work colleagues
Home as Self	Global and beyond	Embedded technology	From true self and others

So it seems we have come full circle – home and work becoming one again. This time, though, they center within the person. We are becoming globalized, miniaturized and isolated. We are developing a planetary consciousness rather than a local geographic one. We will soon have embedded technology that we carry everywhere rather than having to live and work where the technology is housed. And we will no longer need each other to create products and services; we will be able to do it on our own but may find we have lost something of our true selves as a result.

I would be very interested in how you see home and work as connected – you can leave your comments on our blog at www.integralathome.com. If you're interested in contributing to my research, I would appreciate you completing the brief 10-question survey to participate in understanding this complex relationship better in the future.

Mindfulness: At Home with the Mind at Work – June 24, 2014

Here is the latest [Coaching Project](#) newsletter article, a companion to [The Evolution of Work as Home](#). This essay focuses on how mindful we are of our inner home and its wellbeing.

Mindfulness seems to have emerged out of nowhere to become the latest buzzword in organizational and leadership development. What is going on? Why has this idea gained so much power so quickly? Companies like Google, Twitter, PayPal, LinkedIn, Cisco,

and Ford are training managers and executives in mindfulness and meditation techniques. Wisdom 2.0, a gathering where the technology and contemplative communities hash out the best ways to integrate these tools into our lives, had 1700 people attend last year's conference, many from executive levels of well-known corporations. Cover articles have appeared in Time, Newsweek, Wired and HBR over the past year, all extolling the virtues of mindfulness.

Is this just an extension of the emotional intelligence fad or is something fundamentally new happening here? Well to begin, mindfulness is certainly not new, although perhaps new to modern corporate life. It's at least 2500 years old and has been practiced in most traditions and cultures throughout history. The growth in our scientific worldview has diminished the value of contemplation – if you're not doing something, you're not efficient. This has begun to change over the past few years as we recognize that efficiency in the short term is not always effective over the long haul.

More recently, researchers have pointed to the increasing levels of stress in the workplace and the health costs of employees suffering from depression, anxiety, anger and other stress-related emotional responses related to the pace of change and the expectations of more with less. Along with these findings, brain research now shows us what is happening inside our heads and how we can enhance our brain functioning through turning down the volume on our monkey minds. It turns out that mindfulness produces buoyancy, optimism, and confidence. It creates a stronger immune system, more focused attention to tasks, better working relationships and faster learning.

This quote appeared in the March edition of Harvard Business Review: “At the very highest levels of any field – Fortune 50 CEOs, the most impressive artists and musicians, the top athletes, the best teachers and mechanics – you'll find mindful people, because that's the only way to get there.”

So it seems we must come back home to ourselves in this latest evolutionary phase, to know ourselves, to spend time with ourselves, to be at home with ourselves. We are required to develop a new level of consciousness, a new sense of being at home, to adapt to the turbulence and chaos of the world around us.

Evolutionary Phase	Consciousness
Home as Company Town Work as Drudgery	Mindlessness
Home as Urban Campus Work as Problem-solving	Reactive mind
Home as Hi-tech Incubator Work as Play	Innovative mind

Home as Workplace Work as Life	Anxious mind
Home and Work as Self	Mindfulness

If we look back at this evolutionary development, we can easily see that when work is machine-driven, humans are expected to be mindless automatons on the assembly line. As service industries grow and become more interconnected, employees need to be service-oriented, reacting to the demands of customers. In the high-tech sector, where innovation is the key to success, young minds create new toys. And in the global workplace where the pace of change and its impact shape our lives, many of us find we are stretched (and stressed) to adapt.

When work and home become intermeshed with our very selves, we must increase our awareness of the present moment and dwell in that, lest we be swept up in the whirlwind of constant change. Mindfulness provides this opportunity for present-moment awareness. And although the discipline can be challenging, the process is quite simple. Being aware of breath, repeating a phrase or counting, listening to guided meditations, emptying the mind of its chatter, these are all easy techniques for entering stillness, calm and quiet.

There are many supports for mindfulness. Books by Richard Moss, Peter Senge and Michael Brown are examples. If you're more into the science, many books now detail brain functioning and plasticity, such as Rita Carter and Norman Dodge. John Kabat-Zin and Eckhart Tolle offer CD series of guided meditations. Just 15 minutes a couple of times a day will bring you home to yourself with new strength and resilience. I highly recommend it.

Ingenious Homes in Unusual Places - October 20, 2014

The need for a sense of place, of home, is consistent through all cultures and societies, from the oldest and richest to the newest and poorest. Photographer Iwan Baan does a terrific job of making this point with regard to disadvantaged groups of people around the world who have used what resources they had available to adapt their environments to create homes.

In this wonderful [Ted Talk](#), he takes us on a tour through the family apartments of Torre David, a slum city on the water in Nigeria. He introduces us to the 45-story abandoned skyscraper called the Tower of David in the center of Caracas, Venezuela and shows us how 3000 people have made it their home. He also takes us to an underground village in China carved out of the soil where families have lived for generations. These moving images celebrate humanity's ability to survive and make a home — anywhere. Take a look...

Leaving Home.. Again – December 31, 2014

I am about to leave home. I am moving from my home in Vancouver to my home in Phoenix where I will spend the next four months of winter. Each time I move back and forth, it's a transition, a marker that signals not only a change of place but a change of who I am.

When I am here, I fully belong to my home, my family, my life. I am dug into my place here. When I am in Phoenix, I am a foreigner, a 'snowbird', living outside my natural habitat and awaiting friends from other places to visit and provide me company. It would be easy to say one is better than the other but that wouldn't be true. It is good to feel at home, to be attached and belong. It is also good to detach, to feel less comfortable, uprooted, more alert to differences.

These differences are subtle – it's not like I'm moving halfway around the world, or speaking a foreign language. I'm going to a home away from home. But still, the change is there and it feels important to notice my own sense of self and how it is shaped by these two places.

I feel more alone, quieter, when I am in my home away from home. I am healthier, more fit because I am outside a lot of the time. Although I am familiar with the house and the neighbourhood, I am an outsider. I feel like something of a recluse. And there is also something about that I find exciting. As I anticipate the next several months, I feel a buzz of enthusiasm for what is to come.

I am reminded of the hero's journey and the necessity of answering the call to adventure before the journey can begin. In my case, responding to the call, noticing the changes, actually creates the sense of adventure – it's not going to be more of the same... anything could happen. In choosing to look at it in this way, I am committing to seeing it as an adventure. It challenges me to pay attention. To be someone on the move, even in this small way, to be more alive.

Home as Silence – January 18, 2015

I am reading Kathleen Dowling Singh's *Grace in Aging: Awakening as you grow older*. I'm finding it a wonderful way of sinking into the practice of growing older, seeing it as a way of being in the world, being at home, well suited to this present stage of life.

She begins with a quote from Ken Wilber:

With healing the hallmark
Of each and every step,
And grace the tender reward.

She then continues to gently encourage elders to awaken through practice both because we are not so bound up with doing any more and because as we age we are drawn quite

naturally inside ourselves. We find there a lifetime worth of habits of mind we can observe and slowly liberate ourselves from, healing at last our childhood wounds, as we take on the characteristics of grace.

One of the special conditions for awakening to grace is silence. Holding ourselves still and silent, releasing our minds from the 24/7 monologues of the ego, we find restful insight and perhaps even wisdom. I have been growing increasingly silent for the past couple of years after a lifetime as an extravert who thinks with her mouth open and words flowing out. It has been a sobering and enlightening journey into an inner world beyond or beneath the constant interaction with the outside world.

The silence has allowed me, just as Kathleen Singh says, to explore, discover and release many of the hooks that held me fast to my story of my self. She calls this ego-inspired story and its maintenance 'selfing', an appropriate term for being focused on the self, the self's thoughts and beliefs and judgements, all necessary to prop up the illusion of control. I have only begun this journey myself, and hopefully made some progress, but find myself returning to selfing more often than I would like. It takes time and attention, and intention, to awaken.

And when we finally realize this inner path is the way to wholeness, to grace, we find ourselves in the final third of our lives where the end is in sight and looming larger. Our attachments to material things begin to fall away, not nearly so important as before. Our call to love and joy in every day grows stronger. As our highest potential, we become love and joy, and silence. And with it comes a new definition of the 'old-age home', as Kathleen Singh suggests:

Just as we enter love by being love,
We enter silence by being silence.
A warm, embracing, very present silence.
A refuge.
The ultimate old-age home.

At Home on the Move – May 18, 2016

I love trains. I grew up on them and I feel quite at home on them. There is something familiar about their swaying movement, the rhythm of the soft rumble of wheels on tracks, and the similar backyard-ness of the views from them, all of which make me feel at home.

Today, we are travelling from Budapest to Belgrade. We began at noon – the trip takes about 8 hours, stopping every few minutes at a village, a farm crossing, or for no apparent reason at all. We have had our passports and tickets reviewed four times by friendly staff on both sides of the border. We are in a car with compartments, the ones you see on old films with seats facing each other and a door to the corridor. Although our car has six such compartments with a potential 36 passengers, there are only five of us in three compartments, two couples and a single man who has slept most of the trip so far. Although I wonder how long the trip would take if we didn't have to stop

frequently and could pick up some speed, I am quite relaxed and enjoying the day reading, doing puzzles and just staring out the big window at the bright red poppies along the edges.

This is our second train trip of eight over a five-week period. We have a Eurail pass that will take us in a loop from Vienna where we began to Hungary which we just left, on through Serbia to Montenegro and Croatia. There we will rent a car and slowly drive up the Dalmatian coast taking in the villages, islands and beaches to Zagreb where we will leave the car and finish the trip by train through Slovenia back to Vienna.

I am happy to be on the move again, especially by train, exploring new territories, meeting new people, experiencing new languages, and taking in the culture and history of these places I had no idea I would ever visit. And I am happy to be travelling in a new relationship, exploring this new territory as well, developing our own culture and history as we go, making a home for ourselves wherever we are.

Home as a Reflection of Cultural Development – May 21, 2016

We have now spent a couple of days exploring Belgrade on foot. It's an interesting city with some lovely little neighbourhoods and big parks. We are beginning to see a pattern to our travels from Vienna to Budapest and now Belgrade reflecting the level of cultural and economic development in the countries. For example, Vienna was the cleanest, tidiest, most prosperous of the cities so far. Budapest was a little less so with some degradation in the buildings outside the palace centre and the people a little less stylish.

Here in Belgrade we have again taken a step back, noticing decaying Soviet style buildings, much less consistency in the maintenance of the classical architecture than in Vienna or Budapest, children begging in the streets, and sidewalks narrow and broken in many places. However, in all of the cities the people we've met have been friendly, spoken good English, and been eager to talk and help. There is music everywhere, some Western, some local, and outdoor cafes are numerous and charming.

Yesterday we visited the Ethnographic Museum where we toured the development of the homes, tools and costumes of the Serbian people. One of the descriptions had this to say: "The home reflects the cultural, historical and socio-economic circumstances and technical achievements of any period." This sentiment reflected not only what we saw in the history but what we had been noticing as we travel. It was interesting to follow the development of the Serbian people through their various epochs and regions to modern times. The devastation of war is so clear today as the people here slowly rebuild from a century of conflict. On the plus side, there is a palpable energy in the large population of young men and women that bodes well for the future of these eastern European countries.

The Long Road Home – May 22, 2016

Today we will spend 10 hours on the train south from Belgrade, Serbia to Podgorica in Montenegro. That's if it's on time. Even with my love of trains, this is a stretch. We arrived at the station a couple of hours early so we could have breakfast. When we checked, we were informed that although we have first class tickets, there is no first class on this train so we are back in our compartment with the door closed, fortunately on our own for the moment at least. The quality of the trains is reflective of socio-economic progress too.

The train is full of people – young men travelling in packs, multi-generational families and lots of children. There is a smoky haze everywhere – Serbia is a smoking country, cigarettes everywhere. It is raining. This is described as one of the most scenic train routes in the world. We are passing through miles-long tunnels under the mountains, bucolic scenes of farms and red-roofed hamlets up the hillsides. We glide along beside beautiful streams flowing over rocks. And we stop, and stop, and stop...

It will be a long day. We've decided not to eat on the train as we don't trust the food, and we're rationing our water because the facilities are highly suspect. We've brought a bit of leftover bread from dinner last night we hope will tide us over. We've now been joined by a lovely young couple, luckily non smokers, who boarded with a large number of people at the last stop. They are very interested in where we're from and love Vancouver. This has been our experience: people know about Canada, often have relatives living there, and talk about its beauty and about visiting one day.

I'm musing about how this journey, both this long train ride and this long time away, is a metaphor for my long journey home, a heroine's journey outside of my usual comfort zone, stepping into a new adventure. There are always challenges to overcome, both inner attitudes and outer conditions, so when we finally arrive we have discovered something new about ourselves, some new way of being at home in the world based on our experience.

It's Tough to Leave Home – May 28, 2016

We are leaving Dubrovnik after several days of exploring its large squares, narrow passageways, steep stairs and thick city walls. We have made our way up and down each of its small alleyways, competing with busloads of tourist groups and the café tables intruding into every available space. We have admired the beautifully maintained ancient buildings and the shiny stone streets. We know our way around and are feeling at home, our signal it is time to move on.

We have negotiated a car rental to take us up the coast to Split. We drag our suitcases through several city gates, across the wooden moat and finally outside the walls where we pick up the car. All goes well with the exception that there isn't much gas in the tank. We decide we'll stop on our way out of town rather than waiting for someone from the rental agency to fill it up. We have been given a GPS that takes us up the steep mountainside out of town.

There are several choice points for Split and we follow the GPS until we realize we are heading the wrong way, probably because it is set for the highway rather than the coast road we want. We turn around and go back to the city and on toward Split along the coast. We pass the cruiseship port and a couple of small villages, eventually stopping at a grocery to ask where we might find gas. We are directed back toward Dubrovnik, about 15 minutes we are told, confirming what the GPS has given us, yet we haven't passed any fuel stops. We reset our destination for the closest one and turn around yet again for Dubrovnik. We are getting a bit nervous about how much gas we have left.

Following a maze of narrow streets into the city we arrive at the Ina gas station. It is closed. We set our destination for the next one on the GPS and again negotiate a series of one-way streets, finally pulling into a small service station. We are told they are out of gas and given instructions for following the harbor 'three hundred meters' further on. A couple of kilometers later and now traveling on fumes, we arrive at a line-up of cars waiting for the single gas pump. With a huge sigh of relief, we fill the tank and stop at a café for a drink before leaving town.

As we pull onto the now familiar coast road, we laugh about how difficult it has been to leave Dubrovnik, how we have been pulled back and discouraged from departing as if by some unseen hand beckoning us to stay a bit longer. But the road also beckons and we are wanderers on this trip so we drive on into the next adventure, our next temporary home.

The Patterns of Home – June 2, 2016

I wonder what patterns visitors to Canada see as they travel around the country. What are the themes they observe that are common to their Canadian experience? Who are we as a people? How do we provide a temporary home for those from other places?

I have been ruminating about these questions as we have traveled along the Dalmatian coast stopping at towns and villages and visiting the many islands that dot the shoreline. We've been here a couple of weeks and are beginning to notice distinct patterns in our experience of the people and places we're visiting.

The old towns are architecturally similar, their whitewashed stone buildings in classical style topped with red tile roofs and jumbled together around a harbor in a series of narrow cobblestoned streets always including steps up the hillsides. There is inevitably a fortress, a cathedral, a town hall, a bell or clock tower, centered around a main square or two. There are flowers everywhere.

The countryside we have explored has a similar rhythm. Croatia is mountainous, covered with low-growing greenery, including huge rosemary bushes, with grey rocks protruding everywhere. Where there is agriculture, the rocks have been piled in long sinuous walls, rock mounds, roadside barricades, and used for small huts and farm buildings. Vineyards and olive groves are common. We have been especially impressed

with the road system, new and well maintained, and particularly the many long tunnels, some as much as 4 or 5 kilometers in length, that cut through the hilly landscape.

The people are invariably friendly, speak good English, are consistently helpful with information and support. We met two women traveling from the UK who couldn't find their hotel. When they asked a local man, he promptly asked his son to drive ahead of their car to lead them to their destination. There are many of these stories as we make our way up the coast and talk to people. At our last hotel, the family who owned it gave us a bottle of their homegrown wine as we left because we had enjoyed it over dinner. At the place before, they had treated us to grappa when we arrived home from our evening.

We have been made to feel very much at home here. I wonder if we create the same kind of experience for our tourists. I for one intend to be more generous in my interactions with the many tourists in my city so they feel as much at home as possible.

A City in History – June 7, 2016

We are in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia Herzegovina, the seventh country of our trip and the fifth Balkan state we have visited. Sarajevo is different from the rest. Although like the other capitals it is full of history, it has a distinctly Ottoman flavour we haven't encountered anywhere else. The old town bazaars serve Turkish coffee and sweets. Many women wear hijab. The diversity of this multi-ethnic culture is palpable. Yesterday, we walked within minutes to two large mosque complexes, three churches, one an eastern orthodox, and a large synagogue. They seem to co-exist harmoniously amid the shops and cafes that line the complex labyrinth of tiny streets and stalls.

However, everywhere there is evidence of the most recent war to ravage the city. The history museum has dedicated a wing to the three-year siege of Sarajevo showing photographs, posters and newspapers as well as objects donated by citizens, all telling the horror story of the hardships and death of that era, and the courage and determination of the people desperately clinging to the remnants of their homes. Beyond the formal displays, many buildings along the streets retain the bullet holes, often still unpatched and unpainted, from the shells that rained on the city.

Yet extensive restorations have rebuilt the old town's monuments and historic places. And new buildings are going up around the city, often with innovative architecture and colour. Our hotel is an example of this integration of old and new. It is a beautiful old town classical building renovated with high-tech modern fittings and security. Strangely, the hall outside our room is 20 feet tall and just over two feet wide, the deep purple colour creating a perpetually dark fissure with a blood red floor.

So the city is moving into the 21st century in its own highly unique way. Although there is more poverty, more begging, and less Western style progress, its history is a backdrop for a young vibrancy. Everyone speaks English, usually with a handful of other

languages. Students abound, smoking, drinking, having animated discussions. The air is full of energy and possibility.

Heading Home – June 16, 2016

We've been calling our trip 'Around the Balkans in 37 Days' after the classic Jules Verne story of Phileas Fogg and his valet Passpartout. We've visited seven or eight countries depending on who is counting and had ten or eleven stops, again depending on how we count, and have used planes, trains, ferries, hired cars, rental cars, buses, taxis and our tired feet to cover well over three thousand kilometers in the Balkans and an additional fifteen thousand getting there and back. Phew!!

We are glad to be returning home, anxious to see what awaits us that we have missed. We would be excited but we lack the energy for that. We have been winding down for the past several days, finding more fault with everything and everyone than we ever would have in the majority of our trip, perhaps as a way of separating from the adventure in order to accomplish the return. We are also creating a readiness to separate from each other as we have been these last five weeks. We are on the cusp as we wait in the airport for our long flight home.

It has been a classic hero's journey, setting out from our ordinary world to explore and discover new places and people, learning as we go, meeting the challenges set before us, and returning home different than we left. We had only a very loose plan so we have had to craft our way along. We have been lost many times, surprised many times, and awed and delighted by what we have seen. We have learned about the history of this part of the world, the long interconnected road that has led to this portrait of the area. We have been humbled by the strength and courage of the people, and enjoyed their consistently friendly helpful natures.

We return with the gifts of knowledge and experience of the diversity, the beauty of the Balkans, and with a renewed appreciation for the riches of home. It is all zelo dobro!

A Family Wedding – September 25, 2017

Cue the scene: A large English garden surrounding an original old stone farmhouse in the Eastern Townships of Quebec, southeast of Montreal. In among the broad expanses of lawn separated by mature perennial beds, there is a large white tent set up for dinner, another open space filled with white chairs in neat rows, an aisle up the middle, and a treed area at the front festooned with white drapery and flowers. There is also a wide area of grass dotted with trees and shrubs where, near the house, a buffet has been set up and a huge roast is cooking on a spit over coals, while in front of the tent, a bar has been set up and is doing a brisk business. Central to the array is a round table displaying about ten different single malt scotches, still in their boxes and cases, a not too subtle hint of things to come.

We are here for the wedding of my nephew, along with family and friends numbering about eighty. The women are in a colourful array of dresses, some long, some short, mostly

sleeveless on this very warm day for late September. Several have heeded the warning to wear flat shoes on the uneven lawns but many of the young women are in high platform heels and a few even tiptoe in stilettos. The men are mostly in suits, or at least started out that way, their jackets abandoned due to the heat. They are mostly of a piece – large, beefy, fit, broad-chested, almost square – reflecting the groom’s rugby passion. He is bustling about in full Scots attire, a handsome tribute to his clan roots, attending to last minute details. Running among the waiting guests scattered about the garden are four young children, two boys in twin kilts and two girls in matching lace dresses with garlands circling their braided hair.

I am especially charmed by this scene because I have dreamed of a wedding in this beautiful garden for a long time. It is everything I imagined and more. The wedding is the culmination of a quick trip back to my home, or at least one of the places I think of as home. I spent summers in this part of the world from the time I was two and although I rarely visit anymore, it still arouses nostalgic memories of my childhood. My partner and I have toured around all the old haunts over the past couple of days, I have shed a tear or two of joy or grief or both, I have smelled the pungent earth here, heard the birches’ familiar rustling, and here we stand amidst this gathering of loved ones. I am grateful to be home. Now, there is a murmuring in the crowd... the bride has just arrived...

Living in Uncertainty – October 9, 2017

I am reflecting as we travel to Narita Airport, an hour outside of Tokyo, that this is probably the last time I will be in Japan in this lifetime. This is a strange thought and it makes me especially aware of the people and places I have been seeing the past couple of days.

I don’t really like Tokyo although I had hoped to change my mind on this second visit. The city has some lovely parks and an amazingly complex transportation system. The people are beautiful, slim and fashionable. It is a very modern city, a shopper’s paradise, with lots of skyscrapers in futuristic shapes, even a glitzy copy of the Eiffel Tower we could see from our hotel that lights up in neon orange at night.

But for western tourists, it is a humbling frustration in interpretation. Without being able to read the characters or understand the spoken language, and without much English on most signs, we moved between maps and texts in both languages trying to discern where we were and where we were headed. We were routinely lost and quite excited when we achieved our destination. We visited two parks, took a boat ride on the river, negotiated the subway several times, and had a wonderfully unexpected dinner high above the city because we couldn’t find the restaurant we were looking for.

It was a perfect example of living in uncertainty, the familiar signposts of culture and language removed, forcing us to search for different ways of being in the world. Maybe that’s why I haven’t fallen in love with Tokyo as I have with other world-class cities – it’s too much work! And in this case, not enough reward for the effort. There aren’t the squares of Rome or the cafes of Paris or the Bund of Shanghai. But it’s good preparation for

our next five weeks of touring India and Nepal. I feel as though the adventure has begun. For that I am very grateful.

Chandni Chowk, Delhi – October 11, 2017

Last night my dreams were full of bicycles. They were no doubt a reflection of our first day in Delhi, touring the forts, tombs and towers of the city. We began in Chandni Chowk, the market in old Delhi. After visiting the ancient mosque that towers over this neighbourhood – as many as 25 thousand kneel in neat rows here at prayer – we took a bicycle rickshaw ride through the narrow lanes lined with overflowing market stalls selling everything from books and calendars to saris and mangoes. It was oppressively hot and constricting.

Our rickshaw driver couldn't have weighed more than 90 pounds but negotiated his way expertly among the crowds of walkers and shoppers, the carts loading and unloading merchandise, the motorcycles, scooters, tuktuks, the other rickshaws and bicycles, all vying for the slender passageway through the chaos. We jerked to a stop several times while tangles were sorted. It was clearly a surreal game we were in. Our driver turned around a couple of times with a smile on his face to see if I had noticed as he bested another rickshaw for the thin gap that allowed us to move forward.

We gripped the rusted bars at our sides and pushed on the crosspiece at our feet as we broke into an opening and picked up speed with the scooters, tuktuks and motorcycles whizzing past us. Soon enough, though, we were slowed again by the sheer number of conveyances in the constricted space, where we waited for our next chance to break free. After just a few minutes we had had enough of this dance but we continued on, nothing else to be done, for about twenty minutes, up and down the colourful lanes, the noise and heat and congestion almost overwhelming.

It would be easy to see this whole bizarre canvas as a Disney-esque film set laid on for the tourists if it weren't for the real people buying and selling, picking up and delivering, piling, folding, yelling, moving, honking, sweating, in short, living right here in this pandemonium. It is incredibly alive. What a perfect introduction to India! This microcosm that is an imprint of the whole teeming pulsing more-than-a-billion-strong country. And what a privilege it is to experience it.

The Jewel in the Crown – October 14, 2017

It's just as magnificent as last time, the Taj Mahal, despite the addition of so many fences to guide the large crowds around the site and through the mausoleum itself. There are also more fences to bar entry to areas previously open, the upper levels, the mosque. Our guide says the numbers of people visiting haven't changed that much but now the vast majority are of Indian origin rather than foreign tourists, the exact opposite of what used to be the case.

We hear that Mumtaz, the wife of Shah Jahan who built the palace or 'mahal' to express his love for her, was buried with a large heart-shaped diamond in the centre of her forehead,

the jewel in her crown chakra. Her diamond was later stolen and, in another act of love, given to Elizabeth Taylor on her 40th birthday by Richard Burton. And poor Shah Jahan was jailed by his youngest son in a nearby fort where he gazed on the monument until his death. A poignant love story to match the beauty of the place.

It glows with a magical light, it arrests the observer entering through the perfectly positioned gate. It is all symmetry, an octagon with four pillars surrounded by gardens with a watercourse leading to and reflecting from the elegant white marble building. Up close there are at least half a dozen different designs repeated on each of the eight sides creating a rhythm that feels like a dance. We are told that although the four pillars on the corners of the platform look straight, they are actually angled outward so that if one should fall, it would not fall toward the building.

This exquisite architectural expression of love is also the jewel in the crown of India itself, located in the northern centre of the country. For many, it is also the jewel in the crown of international travel, one of the seven wonders of the world, a pilgrimage to the ultimate manifestation of splendour and grace.

Rajasthan Road Trip – October 17, 2017

I have so many pictures in my head of the sights we've encountered on our week-long car trip from Agra to Jaipur, Pushkar and Udaipur – the tiny twin temples in vivid pink and purple in the middle of nowhere, the intense rainbow of saris as women work in the fields, the huge multi-coloured flags we assume are for Diwali, the Hindu festival of light. In the palaces and forts we visit, there are curious young boys and shy school girls wanting a photo with me. The countryside is a feast for the senses with an endless variety of roadside shops in small villages, herds of goats, camels, donkeys and cows, incredible numbers of motorbikes and trucks, as well as the low greenery that covers this desert landscape, and of course the sound of horns.

In Delhi there is a law prohibiting cows to roam free but here in Rajasthan we find them eating in the median on the highways or sleeping in one lane of traffic or sauntering across as vehicles honk and brake to avoid them. They also wander the markets in villages leaving generous piles of excrement for people to avoid. Some are so thin their bones protrude dangerously and we wonder who feeds them and whether they are actually able to produce milk.

We have discovered truck art! Most trucks are beautifully decorated with colourful graphics, leaves and flowers, fretwork and sanskrit. There must be a huge business for truck painters! Added to this is the riot of bright pompoms and shiny tinsel tassels sold all along the highway in eye-catching arrays that look like Christmas trees run amok. Then, to top it off, many have vases with plastic bouquets attached to their driver-side windows. I especially liked the one with a single red plastic rose.

We had a bump from one of them in a tollbooth. Our driver, Mr Makesh, got out but the driver of the truck refused to come down. When he finally did, he accused our driver of backing up! Yelling ensued, a crowd gathered and gave opinions and finally the police were

called. They arrived quite promptly, heard both arguments given in loud competing voices, and asked us too what we had witnessed. At last, Mr. Makesh got back in the car with a smile, saying he had been paid 1000 rupees for the damage. Justice was done.

This is a desert so there is sand and dust everywhere, the garbage piles up in dumps with nowhere to go, litter abounds, and women are constantly sweeping, sweeping, with their long horsetail brooms, trying for some measure of cleanliness. It is poor but very alive with commerce and community. The people we meet are friendly, eager to help, proud of their heritage. It has been a wonderful way to experience this ancient part of the country.

The Mumbai Laundry - October 15, 2017

The only indication this is a laundry are the several dozen pairs of jeans laying on tarps on top of the cars along the narrow road. We are in one of the better slum areas of Mumbai scattered throughout the city and home to over half the population of the rich financial centre of India. This laundry is small and community owned, workers of several generations carrying on the family business.

As we enter, we see perhaps half an acre of raised concrete 'tubs' with walking paths between them where the clothes and linens are scrubbed by hand in very little water. The water is purchased from the city at a discount but is still the major expense. We walk along the wet concrete slab path past maybe twenty male washers to a hut where we are proudly shown a couple of antique looking automatic machines, new to the laundry and a sign of its prosperity.

Above the washing as far as the eye can see are drying rails for sheets, towels, clothing and sundries, stretched out in the sun. It is very hot and humid here, hard to imagine how these tightly packed lines of wet laundry will ever dry. But they do, and are pressed and folded, again mostly by hand, and delivered to the hotels in the area by late afternoon. It is incredible to hear they virtually never make a mistake in what goes where or to whom, the different bundles of laundry being handled by different families and labeled with small symbols accordingly.

Behind the laundry area we are given a tour of the housing for the families who live and work here. It is a warren of tiny lanes with small slightly raised concrete block rooms on either side, most with a piece of cloth for a door, a few with a tile floor. There are water taps here and there but no sign of toilets or bathing facilities. The single rooms have cooking facilities on the far wall and several rolled up mattresses. One has a television so we know there is electricity. We are told that the city has ceded this very expensive city-centre land to these families and they are free to sell to developers any time. However, they prefer to stay and carry on their traditions even though a move to Navi Mumbai, a suburb across the river, would mean better living conditions.

I am reminded of the importance of home once again, the safety and intimacy of the known, of family and neighbourhood, of purpose and employment. And yet...

Nagarkot Nepal – November 4, 2017

As I write, the rain is pounding on the tin roof of the patio outside our hotel room so loudly we can hardly hear each other speak. We have just returned from a thirteen kilometer walk up and down the hills and terraces of this beautiful valley overlooking the Himalayas just east of Kathmandu. Our timing is perfect – we have spent the last four hours in the sunshine and only in the last few minutes did we experience a few drops. Now the sky has opened and the clamor is incredible.

We have spent a couple of days in Kathmandu and arrived here in Nagarkot at what one hotel calls “the end of the universe” to experience the sunsets and sunrises over the mountains and to walk the valley. Last evening the setting sun transformed the sky and mountains an intense pink at the same time a pale moon rose behind the peaks on the opposite side of the sky. We stood on the roof terrace with a dozen other guests snapping pictures and exchanging words of amazement at the spectacle.

We awoke about half past five this morning just as the darkness was beginning to fade. We watched from our patio as dozens of peaks emerged in silhouette on the other side of the valley while down below a heavy cloudbank covered the land and the hills poked through like little floating islands. As the light continued to appear, the birds began to sing, all at once, a symphony of calls to the dawn. Slowly slowly the sky began to glow, a rosy veil bouncing off the far off summits and bringing the valley into detailed focus below us. And as the sun peeked through and began to rise, the whole landscape came alive. What a miracle of nature.

We joined another couple for our walk through the villages nearby, following a rough map provided by the hotel. For the first hour or more we walked downhill overlooking the terraced farms where barley, rapeseed and marigolds painted an abstract of layered curves and colours. In the villages, we were greeted with “Namaste” by young and old alike. Then we began to climb, a slow ascent tracing our way around the outcroppings, a dense rainforest foliage on the shadow sides and tall trees and sun-baked vegetation on the other. We had a lunch of fried rice and beer at a new resort near our hotel, a welcome stop after our morning walk. And now, the rain has stopped, the sky is brightening and I am hoping for another breathtaking sunset tonight.

Mystifying Varanasi – November 8, 2017

It is now two weeks since we were in Varanasi and I’m just feeling able to write about it. I don’t know what I expected. A spiritual revelation? A mystical experience of an ancient ritual? We joined the host of pilgrims setting out just before dawn walking barefoot to the ghat to bathe. There was little conversation, some couples holding hands, groups of women walking together, only a few non-Indian. The Man Mandir Ghat, a series of broad steps leading down to the Ganges, is one of 88 here, most for bathing, a few for cremating. As the sun rose across the river, people begin slipping into the water, women in their saris, men in underwear or a towel. I stepped into the murky brown water up to my ankles and felt the

sandy bottom, amid the decomposing flowers, a piece of old clothing, and other unidentifiable flotsam.

Nothing happened; I felt disconnected. Even our boat ride up and down the Ganges, which I had greatly looked forward to, didn't change my detachment. We passed meditators on the steps, the crowds in the water, the cremation ghat with a low smoking fire and giant piles of wood ready for burning the forty bodies that will be delivered here today. Still I felt no connection to the place or the process.

Mother Ganga plays multiple roles. For Hindus, immersing in the river washes away sins and restores health. Dying here can relieve the faithful from the cycle of rebirth. The Buddha often used the Ganges in his teachings and delivered his first sermon here, establishing Buddhism. The river is also a place for bathing, swimming, boating, doing the hotel laundry, and dumping tons of sewage and vats of ashy remains. The interplay of spiritual belief and practical use was baffling.

When our boat docked a little further up the river, we began a walking tour through the old city lanes. Here my growing dissonance intensified. We picked our way carefully through the filth and debris, garbage strewn everywhere, piles of cow dung, our guide repeatedly saying, "Watch out!" We were there to see the numerous small temples built into the walls of the houses in this original residential area but even they looked unkempt and decaying. We marveled later at how this squalor merited a tour and how, in this holiest city in India, this could not only be acceptable but a point of pride. I have seen signs of poverty all over the world but have never seen anything like this. I am still mystified.

As we departed Varanasi, I was left with deep questions. Perhaps this is the revelation I have been given. That suffering not only exists but is accepted and welcomed as the path to enlightenment. That my reactions are based on my Western values and may not be relevant here. That this most spiritually blessed city is also the most materially challenged. Darkness and light...

The Five Imperatives – November 10, 2017

As we began our road trip from Delhi to Agra a month ago, our guide told us drivers in India need five things: good eyes, good brakes, a good horn, good luck, and lots of patience. Now, as I reflect on our time in India, after roughly 100 hours on the road, in city traffic, to and from airports and hotels, I have a deep understanding and appreciation of this adage. We have seen the skillfulness necessary to navigate in this country and it strikes me it applies not only to road travel but to successfully navigating as tourists too.

Good Eyes: India is a feast for all of the senses. For the eyes, it can be almost overwhelming to take it all in and yet you can't not look - it's mesmerizing! Whether driving through a city or along the highways, there is a constant bombardment of signage, graphics, billboards, goods of all kinds competing for attention. Add to this backdrop the beautifully pure hues of the women's saris, the many children and animals populating the roads, the gaudily painted trucks, the swarms of motorbikes attacking like gnats from every direction, and the piles of refuse that signal the poverty that is part of life here. When you

come to a green field or stand of trees, it is like a spring rain, a welcome relief from the onslaught.

Good Brakes: It takes tremendous energy to be fully present in India. I found myself becoming exhausted by our pace of travel and learning about the incredibly diverse history and people of this country. I was forced to slow down by a bad cold that allowed me to stop and recoup my strength. Luckily we had built in extra days in several cities. These were a boon where we did laundry, had naps, and refueled for the upcoming adventures. We remarked in several places that we wished we had a few more days to relax, to sink into the culture and atmosphere rather than packing up to move on. It is easy to see why meditation is an important part of life here. It puts the brakes on the chaos.

A Good Horn: Horns in India serve a number of purposes. They let others know you are coming, they encourage others to move along, and they provide a vent for traffic frustrations. Managing on foot in crowds takes some of the same kind of vocals. I have learned how to say a very firm “No thank you” to the street hawkers who accost you around all the monuments. I have learned to use my elbows and a definite “Excuse me” as a way to protect myself from the lack of personal space. And once or twice in my frustration, I have almost shouted “I’m in line here!” as people simply shoved their way past me. India is not for sissies!

Good Luck: We have also been tremendously lucky throughout our trip. We’ve had only one little fender scratch for all the time on the roads. We’ve had six internal flights, all on time, and haven’t lost any luggage. We’ve stayed in beautiful hotels and been pampered by unendingly friendly helpful staff. We’ve tasted the cuisines of all four corners of this varied landscape. We’ve had guides and drivers who not only shared their knowledge and expertise with us but also something of their lives and dreams. We are among the lucky few who have been privileged with this opportunity to explore a vast and ancient land.

Patience: India has served up many gifts on this trip, not least among them some life lessons I’m bringing home. One of these lessons is certainly patience but there is also tolerance, acceptance, humility, appreciation. These values have impressed me numerous times on our journey. It is easy as North American tourists to apply our values to another culture, to see us as further ahead because of our material wealth. I have been reminded how important these basic values are and how much I can learn from them. Thank you India for all the treasures you have shared with us.

Bookends – November 14, 2017

We are on our way home, tired and full of the wonders of Asia: Japan, India, Nepal and now South Korea, it has been a grand tour and adventure. It did not occur to us when we were making our plans that we were bookending our tour of historical India and Nepal with these two very modern cities. The contrast has been remarkable.

Like Tokyo, Seoul is a huge capital metropolis full of modern skyscraper architecture, an incredible transportation system of subways and trains, and some beautifully preserved history. We are staying in Meongdong, the fashion district, a tightly packed neighbourhood

with hundreds of shops, restaurants and department stores, many multi-storied. Seoul is a city of young beautifully turned out people, obviously very interested in the latest fashion and willing to pay for it.

And it seems also interested in tradition, at least the young women. While visiting the Joseon period palace, a huge complex of intricately decorated and designed 18th and 19th century courtyards, temples and rooms, we saw hundreds of young women in colourful traditional Korean dress, each with a small matching purse. There were also a few young men in period garb. At first we thought they were docents but the cameras and Adidas gave them away. We were told they rented the costumes called hanbok to be photographed by their friends with the palaces as a backdrop. The women's handbags were the perfect size for cell phone cameras!

We were helped by several people who went out of their way to give us directions. One man in a business suit approached us and asked where we were going. We had thought we would walk but he said we must follow him and led us into the subway where he waited while we fumbled with buying a ticket. He then came with us to the transfer point, again assisted us with the tickets and saw us onto our train. He seemed very concerned that we get safely where we were going. We were very appreciative and a little surprised at his interest and generosity.

We also met several people from Vancouver who were returning that day, making us long for home even more. We will soon be back to our routines but with many wonderful memories of our Asian explorations. Some say you travel in order to appreciate home and that is certainly true for me!

The Whister and the Echo – August 10, 2018

Here is an offering that comes from [Nic Askew](#), an extraordinary filmmaker, poet, philosopher and observer of life. It struck a chord with me, especially Nic's reference to our yearning for something already here.

A man looked for meaning. For his very place in life. He searched high and low. He'd often hear a whisper, calling his name from the other side of what seemed like a door. A door that remained hidden from his ability to see. Frustrated, he'd knock on everything that resembled a door. Turning here, and there. Turning just about anywhere. Then one day, unannounced, it opened. And he realised that he'd been knocking from the inside. And that the whisper had been an echo. The echo of his own soul reminding him that he was already home.

I have opened just such a door, a door to a much expanded sense of my place in the larger scheme of things, and I do mean larger, as in the cosmos... I have been hearing an whisper over the past few months, or maybe it's been years, from a place that is much bigger than I have ever imagined, far beyond our little blue dot of a world, even beyond our milky way galaxy, one of about 200 billion in our little universe, which scientists believe is only one of many. Suddenly, I am beginning to feel at home in this expansive space, hearing the echo of life connecting me to the vast unknown. That's the macroscopic view. How amazing! And

the microscopic is essentially the inside of that outside - as the [song](#) says, "We are a miracle made up of particles." When I look within, this same view greets me in miniature as particles and atoms and cells, acting in harmony in the universe of my body.

The same is true of the expanded door of time. I have been focused on ancestors lately too, dating back far beyond memory. I was asked recently to choose an ancestral time period, where the top of the page was 'Now'; at the bottom of the page I wrote 'The Big Bang'. This seemed about the right space of time to be inclusive of the evolution of our humanity from where we began, our original home. We carry those ancestors with us, mineral and vegetable as well as animal. After all, the trees and rocks have ancestors too. Sitting at the bottom of the Grand Canyon with an anthropologist several years ago, he pointed to a narrow band of black schist. "That is the first Grand Canyon." And who knows how many other Grand Canyons there have been, or how many other big bangs for that matter.

Wow! I have to start including much more of what is already here, much more of who and where I am, my ancestry in time and space. It both gives me a sense of my smallness in the big picture and also creates an urgency to protect this extraordinary experiment in life that I am and we are. Welcome to this home!

La Orotava – October 25, 2019

It's been more than a year since my last post, partly because of the kind of travel I've been doing but mostly because other writing has occupied my time. I've had a number of short trips around North America and one major three-month adventure in the Canary Islands.

As I reflect on that experience, the longest uninterrupted time away from home I've ever had, I'm flooded with fond memories. Femi and I rented a house outside of La Orotava on the island of Tenerife, a beautiful sixteenth century Spanish town on the slopes of Mount Teide, an active volcano and the highest peak of Spain. The house was relatively comfortable with a few idiosyncrasies and enough room for short-term guests. Although we spent most of our time alone, we had friends and family join us to relieve any homesickness and add to our enjoyment.

After an initial period of settling in, we returned our car and relied on walking or taking the local buses to get around. We developed a routine. We would walk down to the main road in the morning past the local men chatting at the bus stop and up again, very steeply, past the church into the town centre. At first, we had to stop along the way to catch our breath but after a couple of weeks, we were making the precipitous climb without difficulty. After some experimentation, we chose a coffee shop on the corner opposite City Hall where we had our café con leche and a croissant. We wandered and did our daily shopping, taking in the many festivals and parades along the main drag. We felt quite superior to the hordes of tourists who arrived every day with their guides and crowded us locals off the narrow sidewalks.

We got to know many of the old buildings around town. We loved the wood-panelled library with its old smells and the reading room where people browsed the newspapers from abroad. I listened enthralled several times to the resounding organ recitals in the cathedral that almost lifted you off your feet in their crescendo. We learned about volcanoes at the local museum and then walked among the different green, black and brown lavas up at the peak, although we hesitated to climb as our host suggested to see the spectacular sunset and descend in the dark. We also saw how the original Guanches had been wiped out after the Spanish conquest by disease and removal from the lush agricultural land.

I had great intentions of painting, learning Spanish, and taking guitar lessons but the days and weeks went by so quickly that, with our travel around the island and spending time with guests, none of it materialized and I didn't miss it. We slowly relaxed, taking each day as it came, deciding in the moment whether to take the bus somewhere, what restaurant we hadn't yet tried, what street we hadn't been down that was worth exploring. We did a couple of junkets to the other islands to take advantage of being there and enjoyed the variety of geological and architectural structures.

The aspect of our time there that has been the biggest treasure though, is that Femi and I became really good friends. We had no one but ourselves for fairly long stretches, requiring a different kind of intimacy than we normally needed in the city with our friends and family around. I wasn't aware of this growing friendship at the time – we just worked things out as they arose – but in retrospect it added a new dimension that has deepened our relationship.

One of the discoveries that fuelled this change was a small hotel on a tiny side street I noticed one day as we walked by. It had an interesting doorway and as I peeped in, the porter came and invited us in to see it. The Alhambra, as it was called, faithfully reproduced many of the Spanish features of the original, enhanced with huge paintings by Spanish artist Antonio Ortazzo. We spent Femi's birthday weekend there, sitting in the various pubic rooms, enjoying the wonderful breakfasts, and revelling in the huge mosaic tiled bathroom. We were delighted with ourselves for having found it and experienced being away from home for a couple of days as a special treat.

It is highly unlikely we will be back in the Canary Islands but I am grateful for having the opportunity to experience life there and to carry with me such lovely memories of our adventure.

Guinnessburg, Ireland – October 27, 2019

You probably wouldn't count Dublin in your top ten cities in Europe. It has some lovely old architecture, particularly around 16th century Trinity College with its beautiful Long Room library. But it has made an international name for itself largely due to the efforts of Arthur Guinness and his large extended family. So on this, my third visit to Dublin, I finally visited the Guinness Storehouse in St. James Gate along with hundreds of other tourists.

The complex is huge, covering several city blocks. It began as a fermentation plant but over the years has been converted and extended to house visitors. There are now seven floors surrounding a glass atrium shaped in the form of a pint of Guinness. Touring the building includes the history and production of beer, the marketing of Guinness and of course various opportunities for drinking it while overlooking the city.

Whether you're a beer drinker or not – and I'm not – you have to be impressed with the business savvy of this family. Guinness is not only THE beer in Ireland but known and heralded all over the world. The family interests encompass banking, real estate, and politics. It was one of the Guinness researchers who had the idea of the now famous Guinness Book of World Records. And for Vancouverites, it is interesting to note that the Lion's Gate Bridge, known originally as the First Narrows bridge, was financed by the Guinness family after they purchased almost five thousand acres of land in West Vancouver. To recoup the cost, the bridge had a toll for the twenty years before the family sold it to the province. Not a bad investment!

It is difficult to say whether Guinness beer is responsible for the proliferation of Irish pubs or it was the pubs themselves that inspired Arthur, but either way the country is awash in charming old establishments, many with comfort foods like Irish stew and fish and chips, together with lots of friendly good cheer. We haven't heard any music yet but I'm looking forward to that lively aspect of Irish pub culture.

A People Divided

We took the train up from Dublin to Belfast, a two-hour trip through the countryside although most of the fields of sheep and cattle were hidden by the berms on both sides of the tracks. My first impression of Belfast was a modern, vibrant walking city with beautiful architecture and friendly helpful people. There were lots of cranes in and around the town centre, trendy shops and restaurants, bustling pedestrian streets. We had dinner at McHugh's, an old Irish pub, one of several that claimed to be the oldest in the city.

The next morning we took a two-hour walking tour, dramatically called "A History of Terror", about what are euphemistically known as The Troubles, a thirty year period of conflict (1968-1998) in Northern Ireland between nationalists (Irish, Catholic) and unionists (British, Protestant). It was an interesting tour of some of the actual sites where bombings and killings occurred in the town centre, along with an even-sided history of how the struggle unfolded. A couple of things stood out for me. One was the complexity of the issues and responses, augmented by the role of the police and military. The other was the impact on the civilians – almost two thousand died. Those who survived had their daily lives and freedoms radically altered.

The impact on us was powerful. We spent the following day walking the neighbourhoods outside of the main tourist areas, trying to get a firsthand picture of what we had learned. We noticed several examples of the residue of the sectarian war. There remain, twenty years later, most of the one hundred "peace walls" erected to

segregate warring neighbours. In some areas, gates have been opened to allow access and integration but the border structures are still there. We toured the Falls Road peace wall, a kilometer-long concrete and wire barrier covered with one of the many murals we saw in the city dedicated to the implications of the conflict. We also visited memorial gardens on both sides listing names of the fallen among the trees and shrubs. I thought about how the sanctity of home had been violated for everyone involved.

I came away somewhat disturbed by the dissonance. The modern redevelopment of the city core creates a fresh and forward-looking image. Behind the façade, though, signs of the lingering emotional effects are everywhere.

Can You Tell the Difference? – October 30, 2019

I think it's interesting that I can feel the difference between something really good and something really great. Case in point: we attended a concert on Sunday night – we had gone down to Cork for the Jazz Festival over the long holiday weekend here. It was a double bill, the first a quintet with trumpet and sax, the second a trio with piano.

The first group was loud, enthusiastic and full of good humour and friendship. The packed house loved them and there were hoots and shouts of approval when the brass did their solos. They were very talented, of course, but not being a true jazz fan, it struck me they were trying too hard, intent on strutting their stuff for the admiring crowd. All good but not my taste.

The second group was much more subdued, no brass, just a wonderful pianist with what I experienced as a much more sophisticated, more integrated base and drums. They each had their solos expressing their virtuosity but it was always in support of the music and the piano, not a competing but an interdependent sound. I loved it! Regardless of genre, this was brilliant entertainment. Their encore was “Wichita Lineman” by Glen Campbell, an old favourite of mine, which I thought was a fascinating choice for a theatre full of jazz fans. It brought a tear to my eye.

We had a conversation afterward over dinner. Femi felt it was impossible to qualify one as better than the other because they were so different in style, size, instruments and approach. I felt the first group was really good but the second was really great, a qualitative difference regardless of their distinctions. I'm reminded of Mozart and Salieri. Salieri was a really good composer. Unfortunately for him, Mozart was a great one, brilliant and inventive by comparison. Or maybe it is simply that I love the piano. It reminds me of my youth and my piano that moved along with me as we changed homes.

Faery Hammocks – November 6, 2019

I am emerging slowly from a nine-day deep dive into what has been called “breathing in Ireland”. It has felt like coming home. I'm with a group of seventeen women, two of them our soul guides. We have been exploring what we need for renewal that we might touch

here in this ancient soulful land. We've done it by breathing, writing, walking, sitting, talking, touching old stones, drinking hot whiskey, and by taking in the silence.

I thought I might share a few of my reflections and some of my poetry. I am feeling somewhat shy because it has been mostly an internal experience. But that is what Ireland summons in us, something deep within that bubbles up to disturb our complacency and haunt our thoughts. We are nudged by the ghosts of the ages to make the most of ourselves, to dig deep into our wells of remembrance for what we may have discarded that is important to us now.

We began with Yeats, of course, as Ireland's treasured poet. We read his work, heard stories of his life and his muses, visited his grave and places he wrote about. I had never studied Yeats so it was all new to me, and I love the way he captures the deep soul of the land, the natural world and the silence. I have had "I shall arise and go now..." in my head all week. And perhaps not surprisingly, in our group's writing over the week, we have turned to poetry, inspired by Yeats and his flowing verse.

Here's one of mine about the mystery and surprise that await us if we are open to it. It is written about the short walk from the main building of Ard Nahoo, where we stayed for almost a week, to the little cabin where six of us shared very close quarters. "Faery hammocks" is the name we gave the intricate delicate spider webs that hung from the tightly packed ferns and ivy along the path. We thought they would make the most perfect little faery beds.

Faery Hammocks

Out among the faery hammocks
When the day is come and gone
I walk the narrow pathway
That takes me to my home.

I have my little flashlight
To show the way ahead
And just by chance I shine it
On the ferns instead.

And there, what wonder, what delight!
A host of emeralds glimmer bright,
I see the faeries, smiling lurk
Ivy leaf gems their playful work.

The Waiting Time is Over – November 7, 2019

One of our days at the retreat centre was spent on Holotropic Breathwork, a way of inducing altered states by working with the breath. I wanted to focus on my body. My intention was to explore how to live in and love my body to the end of my days, how to

cherish it and take care of it as the gift it is. My question was what fresh energy might be arising, creating something new for me to be or do.

My first experience was supreme joy in being in my body. I moved, danced, sang, felt a young girl again, exuberant at being alive, without thought or care. My body expressed my joy effortlessly. Then, the emotion left me. I felt dead, without affect, still and silent, not moving, hardly breathing, a kind of death. I thought perhaps this was the psychic polarity revealing itself, fullness and emptiness.

But there was more. Suddenly, out of this stupor a tremendous rage arose in me. I couldn't contain it. I beat the floor, I screeched and screamed, I growled and snarled, I pounded my chest. The noises I heard coming through me couldn't be me... and yet they were. What had come over me?

I wrote later, "I have descended into madness. I am mad as hell. My body is expressing rage, anger, torment, despair." This, then, is the polarity my body holds: joyful exuberance and fiery madness. I am familiar with the joyful side of me but the wild anger is new and strange. Is this rage the dark feminine I have been evoking, rising in me? There is certainly a fire in my belly. A new energy, an uprising of the dark psyche, and she is furious. Is this what I need to pull me out of my complacency, my niceness? What would that mean? Or am I expressing the larger dark feminine, the earth in its fury at our neglect? Or maybe it's the same energy, at different scales.

As I worked with the initial emotions, I realized this level of vehemence isn't useful as it is. The fire has to be checked, red hot coals better than an uncontrolled blaze. These lines tumbled out of me ...

The Fire Coming

So may it secretly begin
The banking of the fire within,
The glistening egg a hearty shell
Where the transformative fire can dwell.

Not so hot that it will burn
The tender threads as they return
But yet enough to hold the passion
In the most engaging fashion.

So the work can then begin
To show me where it wants to lead
And I, surrendered, open heart
Will follow, word and deed.

Last Ireland Days – November 8, 2019

I prepare to leave Ireland with the usual mix of sadness that it's over and eagerness to be home. We've spent two luxurious nights with the ghosts at Markree castle, we've climbed Knocknarea to visit Queen Maeve and celebrated with hot whiskeys at "our" local pub in Strandhill. We've been entertained with stories and chants by Noirin Ni Riain, one of Ireland's best-known musicians. It has been a feast of the senses.

We have been here over Samhain here in Ireland, like the Dias de los Muertos in Spanish speaking countries, and All Saints and All Souls days in the Christian tradition. It is said that the veil between the realms is thin at these times and it has certainly felt that way, the ancestors very close, reaching out, wanting to be remembered and for us to re-member them, take them into our bodies and hearts.

The ancient grey rocks, the bright green pastures, the mossy ivy-covered bent and tortured trees, all speak to us of the spirit in everything, close by whether we recognize it or not, never more than a breath away.

I am at home here in a way I don't understand. It is in my body, my soul, that I feel it like nowhere else. It has happened each of the three times I've been here. I am captured by some magic in the place, especially on this rugged wild west coast. I leave a different person, more grounded, centered, connected than before. I am full.

Imprints

I leave my prints on the Irish trees
 As they leave their prints on me.
 I leave my soul on the Wild West Way
 Where the faery hammocks lay,
 Their beautiful mandalas in the ferns,
 Their gossamer magic on display.

What a land this is, this ancient soil
 To summon forth our deepest wells
 From times long gone and with us still
 Calling, calling from the verdant hills,
 Calling to we whose turn it is
 To love and weep and dance and rhyme
 Awake, awake, while there is time.

