

When it feels like home

Bill Tammeus | Jul. 27, 2011 A small catholic

ABIQUIU, N.M. -- A feral wind, boisterous and insistently impolite, bullied its way through the center of [Ghost Ranch](#) [1] here late this afternoon, and caused me to think about home.

The raucous air either galloped eastward toward Taos or simply collapsed, exhausted on the red rock hills that [Georgia O'Keeffe](#) [2] made famous in her paintings.

And I was left to wonder why, of all the places on the planet, this is one that feels like home to me.

It's no surprise that home is at the center of my attention today. I'm spending the week teaching a writing class at this national Presbyterian conference center. I've called it "Restless Hearts: Writing Our Way Toward Home." And the 10 of us spending day after day together have been pondering almost every possible meaning of home.

It's a physical place. It's a spiritual goal. It's a place of peace, a place of separation but ultimately reunion. It's not a place at all but a feeling, a sense, a yearning fulfilled. And more.

I asked class members to list every permanent address they've had since they reached adulthood. I have had eight of them, counting the home in which I grew up and to which I returned briefly after graduating from college before I moved to Rochester, N.Y., and my first newspaper job.

Not all of those places, however, felt like home. Some have been simply temporary roosts built by other birds.

But I've come to believe that home is where we are free to be our whole selves. That is, we find home in those places where we are liberated to be authentically who, at our essence, we are, with as few masks -- or as little armor -- as possible.

I almost never felt that sense of wholeness in the house in which I grew up in Woodstock, Ill. For many reasons, my mother seemed unwilling to release control of my three sisters and me so we could discover and live out our destinies. Each of us had to do that in different ways and without Mom's help or permission, and do it away from the home in which we spent most of our childhoods.

That may explain why my sisters and I have lived most of our adult lives in diaspora, almost literally scattered from coast to coast -- from California to North Carolina -- with just one of us within 50 miles of that house, the sister who felt most comfortable in the Woodstock home.

And yet there's something about that house that feels like home to me. I think it's because I now understand that it was there that I first came to terms with the reality that I was not free, and it was there that I purposed to be free some day. So I am drawn to that place because it remains the site of my liberating decision to find home somewhere.

Home, then, is not always a place free of pain or anxiety. Rather, it's where distress has been confronted and, in

some way, resolved -- or at least understood.

That also may be why, for me, the building in which [my congregation](#) [3] meets is another home for me. I'm free there to confront the eternal questions, to be in community with my sisters and brothers in Christ, to know that I am forgiven and am deputized to tell others about the availability of divine forgiveness.

The book of I Peter says we are "sojourners and pilgrims." The New American Bible [translation](#) [4] has it "aliens and sojourners." Either way, it's a clue that we are not yet dwelling in our eternal home -- whatever and wherever that may be.

Today's undomesticated wind stirred me to consciousness and blew away some old, battered and not terribly useful images of home. When the swift air had passed, I was left to remember that sometimes, like hermit crabs, we carry home with us.

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[1] <http://www.ghostranch.org>

[2] <http://www.okeeffemuseum.org/biography.html>

[3] <http://www.secondpres.org>

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