Along the track

House for Sale

The house I grew up in is for sale. Not the first house which was next door. That has long gone. Some of my older brothers and sisters were born in the front room of the old one and I lived there until I went to boarding school at age eleven. The one my father built in the late sixties when farming was very profitable is now up for grabs. I lived there off and on over the next fourteen years. I went back to that house a couple of years ago and the current owners were kind enough to show me through. It wasn't the home I remember – it had been changed, renovated, redecorated and somehow, it looked much smaller than I remembered. But something was missing. It wasn't home any more. I wonder why. What makes home 'home'?

Home isn't just a house. Some of the happiest people I have known lived in bark huts in the highlands of Papua. In Bosnia, some of the most hospitable people were those who invited us into homes still half destroyed by war. On the other hand, it is very, very sad to see so many people wandering the streets to find a place to call home, families fleeing violence not just from war but violent and abusive relationships. So many people sleep on our streets. We call them 'homeless'. The shape of families is much more complex than during the years of my childhood, but even so, to find a place of shelter and safety, a place where we are cared for and loved seems to be wired into our DNA.

Home is a place in the heart and of the heart. Home is where your heart doesn't feel out of place. And neither do you. Home is a place where you don't have to be anybody but yourself. You are accepted for who you are. So home is where you can be at ease, even if sometimes you are not. Home is where you are comfortable, where you are not pushed aside, even if you may sometimes be taken for granted, a place to re-energise, a place, in poet Robert Frost's words, where they have to take you, it's not a place you have to earn or deserve. You somehow just belong. Home is where you feel safe. It is a place to return to, sometimes if not in person but at least in mind and heart.

But it is more than that. It is a place where we learn what is important in life, where our basic values and beliefs are introduced and nurtured. It is a place where we learn our family story and our place in it.

I found this prayer recently:

Let no sadness come through this gate.
Let no trouble come to this dwelling.
Let no fear come through this door.
Let no conflict be in this place.
Let this home be filled with the blessing of joy
and peace.

But sadness will come. That is part of life. Try as we may, we will never be happy all the time. We grow in both good times and bad. Sadness can be a great teacher. It can also help us to value and treasure what we have, what is truly important. Trouble and conflict will come – no home is 'strife free.' Quarrels and disagreements are inevitable. It is how we handle it that matters or do we let it define us? In so many ways sadness and trouble can show us where true happiness lies and where we might seek and find real contentment and peace. All of us want such things but it is how and where we seek to find them that matters. The kind of home we create, wherever it may be can be a place of generosity of spirit and openness, a place of love and acceptance, a place that nurtures hope.

Perhaps this prayer might reflect our hopes and aspirations:

May God's presence find a home within these walls.
May those who live here (or used to live here) be protected by God's loving care.
May prayer, joy and laughter never be strangers here.
May the spirit of pardon and forgiveness reside within us and in our home that, with God's help, we may work to create together,
a home where creativity is nurtured as well as hope, courage and resilience.
May all who come here find a place of respect and kindness and a warm and generous welcome.

And may God bless all of us, those without homes and those who are blessed to have the challenge and the joy of creating one.

Regards
Jim Quillinan

Email: jquillinan@dcsi.net.au