

WHERE IS HOME?

My friend Paula, whom I had not seen in a long time, came to visit me this afternoon. In the course of conversation she asked me which I liked better, Drum Hill or Sky View? The question puzzled me. The places are different – Drum Hill fine for my prior stage of life and Sky View fine for now. There is no way to really compare them. But Paula's question did serve a good purpose: it stimulated me to begin an essay that has been floating around in my mind for weeks, one that would explore the meaning of "home."

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During my life I have lived in so many, varied locations. For the first time, I would like to list them as a basis for my thoughts.

- I was born in a house my parents rented on N. Lancaster Street, Annville, Pennsylvania in 1933.
- During my preschool years, we lived for at least a year in another rented house on Maple Street in Annville.
- Around 1938 we moved into one side of a double house my parents bought on S. Lancaster Street, Annville. I lived in that house until 1952, with these interesting exceptions:
 - From March, 1942 - February, 1943, lived on a farm in Hamlin, PA.
 - From February, 1943 through most of that year, lived in a house on Church Street, Annville.
 - From August, 1947 - April, 1948, lived in a cottage in Sebring, Florida.
- From September, 1951 - June, 1957 I had two homes: the one in Annville with my family, which in 1952 involved moving next door into a house Dad built in what had been our side yard, and these in addition:
 - For four years, beginning in September, 1951, a dormitory room at Millersville State Teacher's College in Millersville, PA was home.
 - From August, 1955 through May, 1956 I boarded with two different families while I taught school in Willow Grove, PA.
 - From August, 1956 through May, 1957 I boarded with three families while I taught school in Tucson, Arizona.
- In June, 1957, Leo and I married. Our home from then until February, 1960, was in Huntsville, Alabama, first in an apartment and then in a rented house, both on McCullough Avenue.
- From March, 1960 - October, 1965 home was in a rented house on Baldwin Road in Yorktown Heights, New York.
- From October, 1965 - January, 2004 we lived in a house we bought on Mead Street in Yorktown Heights.
- From January, 2004 - December 29, 2005 I lived with Leo in an apartment in Drum Hill Senior Living Community, Peekskill, NY.
- Since December 29, 2005 I have lived in a room in the nursing home section at Sky View Health Care Center in Croton-on-Hudson, NY.

Can a room in a nursing facility be considered home? Of course it can! My room is like an efficiency apartment. It contains my bedroom (bed, bureaus, closet); kitchen (the pole from which my tube feedings and water bags hang); my office; a living room (where I entertain my guests and watch television); and a bathroom. Some people do go to nursing homes only for a period of time until they recover from their illnesses or accidents and then return home, but such is not the case with most of us, including me. I recall a sign in the lobby of a facility we were visiting in Pennsylvania that said, in effect: "You are about to enter the home of our residents." I liked that thought.

Just before Easter an aide asked me if I would be going home for the holiday. I was puzzled at first, but then, realizing what she meant, said no. Last week another aide asked me the same thing about Mother's Day and I had the same reaction. I was so glad for clear proof that I really did consider Sky View to be my home. How can I go home when I am home? Then I understood that some people may have two homes, such as I did at various times in my life. Indeed they might be able to stay at their former residence for a few days and then return here. I cannot do that. When I moved out of Drum Hill, my hospital bed, the feeding tube apparatus and the special equipment I used in the bathroom were all removed. I have no clothing there and most of my possessions were either moved with me, stored, or given away. I can visit my husband Leo and my friends at Drum Hill via Paratransit, but then I must return home to Sky View. That is fine with me.

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Today is Saturday, April 29, 2006, exactly four months since I moved to Sky View and perhaps a week after I wrote the above paragraphs. My daughter Marty made arrangements with Paratransit for us to spend a few hours at Drum Hill this afternoon. What a wonderful time I had there! So many friends were as glad to see me as I was to see them! There were several bonuses: visitors who had wanted to see me and found me at Drum Hill rather than Sky View. God surely deserves credit for arranging those meetings. They didn't just "happen" to be at Drum hill at the same time I was there! We took a supply of two recent essays with us: "A Room With a View" and "Welcome!" People seemed so eager to have them, all glory to God!

I drove my Powerchair into the apartment where I had formerly lived and where Leo still resides. It was good to see him. Leo is undergoing treatment that, for a few weeks, makes it impossible for him to be outdoors during daylight hours, a big stimulus for our trip. I recognized the furnishings and other things in the apartment, but felt strangely detached from them. I took several books that I want to give to certain people, but drove away from the rest with a sense of relief.

When the Paratransit bus arrived, I was ready to leave, physically tired and emotionally satisfied. As we drove onto the Sky View property the driver said, "It's good to be home, isn't it?" Yes, I thought. It's good to be home.

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As I wrote the list of my residences, the thoughts that came to me were more confirming than new. I believe God was shaping my outlook by giving me varied experiences, including that of packing and moving. It's valuable for some people as well as some plants to be transplanted at times; others (people and plants) thrive by staying in the same spot. I needed transplanting. How else could I have known that people are basically the same everywhere and that I felt "at home" wherever I was?

God was surely behind the curious story of our living on Church Street for part of a year. When we moved to the farm, we rented our house in Annville to a family from our church. Dad continued to work in the factory in Annville, while much of the farming fell on Mom. I remember her plowing the fields with the tractor, for example. The winter of 1942-43 was extremely severe in our part of Pennsylvania. For a few days after a huge snowstorm, my brother and I got to ride to the school bus stop in the milkman's two-horse open sleigh! Mom, meanwhile, was having trouble supplying water to the chickens. For one thing, the farmhouse had no indoor plumbing at all. She had to go outside to

the pump to get the water and then warm it on the coal stove. She would leave the house with the warm water, walk through shoulder-high piles of snow on both sides of the path to the chicken house (on the far side of the barn) and pour it, now cool, into the watering pans – where it soon froze. I am not sure why we left the farm after being there less than a year, but certainly Mom's unhappiness had something to do with it.

When Dad sold the farm and we were ready to move back to Annville, our tenants were not yet able to leave; so Dad bought a house on Church Street to be our interim abode. As soon as the S. Lancaster Street house was vacant, we moved back there and Dad sold our temporary home. The interlude on Church Street was so important because it was there that we got our piano! The daughter of the previous owners played both the piano and the marimba. The house to which they were moving was smaller, and the girl, having to make a choice, decided to keep the marimba. "Would you like to buy the piano?" they asked my parents, who in turn asked me if I would like to take piano lessons. "Yes indeed I would!" I exclaimed. And so, for \$25, music entered my life – undoubtedly God's plan! My children and grandchildren have benefitted from that transaction and so has the kingdom of God. The ripples could go on for generations to come!

My family went to Florida to see if my health would improve in a warmer climate. Doctors had been advising that we move either to Arizona or Florida. After I had mastoid surgery early in both 1946 and 1947, my parents decided to give Florida a try, both because it was closer and because Dad knew people in our county from whom he could rent a furnished cottage in Sebring. Again we found tenants for our house in Annville, furnished this time, and drove into the unknown.

Living in Florida in 1947 gave me a taste of being an outsider: a Northerner in the South. I stood out because of my accent and vocabulary. I tried hard to use the terms "sir" and "ma'am" when addressing teachers, but sometimes got them mixed up or forgot. Once a teacher asked us how many of our families were Republican. I knew very little about politics, but I did know my father was favoring Dewey for president, so I raised my hand – the only one to do so. I still don't know if the teacher was being sarcastic or if he really wanted an answer.

It was in Florida that I first mingled with people of another race, if you can call shopping in the same stores "mingling." Schools, churches and living quarters were strictly segregated. What I couldn't understand is why the dark skinned people had a curfew. It didn't seem fair to me that "they" had to be in "their" part of town early in the evening, but what could I, a 14-year-old outsider, do about it? I decided I would say hello to every black person I met on the city sidewalks. And that is what I did.

I did not need ear surgery the winter we were in Florida; my health was indeed better there. But Dad could not find steady work in the area and Mom was tired of the daily battle with sand and bugs, so we soon found ourselves in the car again on our way back to Annville.

I was happy in each place that I lived. The sense of "home" was there whether my quarters consisted of a room, an apartment or a house; whether rented or owned; whether in the Northeast, the South or the Southwest; whether in a town, a city or on a farm; whether I knew people there or was a complete stranger. When I went to Tucson, Arizona, for example, I did not know anybody in the entire state. As I said, doctors had been advising me to go to Arizona for years, thinking the dry climate would be good for my chronic illnesses. One day early in 1956 when I was sick again, I suddenly thought, "Maybe I should go to Arizona." Immediately such a feeling of adventure overcame me that I wondered if the idea came from God. "If I can find a job and a place to live, I will go," I told Leo, my fiancé.

A church directory gave me a contact person and before long I had both requirements in place. What a wonderful time I had in Tucson! Some of the friendships formed there are ongoing to this day. After six months of living under the desert sun, my health did indeed improve, only to revert to my "normal"

when I left. At the end of the school term I came back East, got married and moved to Alabama, where the only person I knew in the state was Leo, my new husband.

Even in the same families, people can have very different personalities. In one of the last conversations I was able to have with my mother, I mentioned various places where she had lived and asked if she had been happy there. Sometimes she said yes and sometimes no. When I asked why, the answer was always the same. When she liked a place, it was because "I knew people there." When she didn't like a place, her reason was "I didn't know anybody." Once Mom told me she would have been content to stay on the farm in Maryland with her parents had not economic necessity forced her out of the nest. Along with her older sister Sarah, Mom went to work in Reading, Pennsylvania where a cousin of theirs was already settled. I'm glad she went, for that led to her meeting my father and to their marriage in 1930, establishing a home of their own.

In the early years of my life, Mom had her brother Allen and sister Mildred come up from the farm and live with us until they were able to be on their own. I have vague recollections of sharing the house on Maple Street with them. Then when Dad bought a double house on S. Lancaster Street, the farm in Maryland was sold and Mom's parents and youngest sibling, Pete, moved in next door to us. Pete soon left and Mildred, her husband and daughter took his place. Grandpa died in 1943. Then in 1947 everything changed. Grandma remarried and moved away. Dad sold the other half of our house, and Mildred and family relocated to N. Lancaster Street. When her second husband died in 1954, Grandma came back to live with my parents until her own death in 1960. Mom needed family around her to be comfortable and we benefitted by getting to know them as well.

In contrast, I needed to leave my family and my town in order to be true to my adventurous self. Being a dormitory student in college was perfect for me, yet I chose a college only thirty miles from home. Obviously I didn't want to completely cut the ties. I seemed to carry the sense of "home" with me wherever I went, no matter what the environment. Still do! A turtle seems a good illustration of my point, if you consider the shell its home. Later, as I mused on the Bible verse that says "*In God we live and move and have our being*," I came to see God as my environment, my home, as if I moved about in a bubble or shell called God. That being true, wherever I am is home, for God is everywhere, outside and inside of those of us who believe. Wherever I will be in the future will be home, all the way until I arrive in my permanent home: Heaven! What a concept!

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Recently I heard a story that resonated with me. It was about a missionary who was returning to the United States to retire, after many years of serving the Lord in Africa. On the same ship, returning from a safari, was President Theodore Roosevelt. As the ship approached the dock, the missionary noticed a huge crowd gathered on the shore. Bands were playing, banners waving and people were shouting – all to welcome President Roosevelt home. In contrast, no one was there to meet the missionary when he stepped ashore. He asked the Lord why this should be, and God said, "My son, you're not Home yet!"

What will it be like to leave our last home on earth, wherever it may be, and find ourselves Home? We will certainly not "step ashore" unnoticed! As I type this, a longing is filling my soul. I consider blessed those who are already Home, including my mother, who arrived last month. And I am ready to join them. No, I am not depressed, distressed or discouraged – just willing to move. I know where my true Home is and I know lots of people there. I'm ready to go!