



## **I Have Arrived. I'm Home.**

*Cornelia Feye*

I'm home. I have never been home so much before. Since the beginning of the pandemic my house has been my prison.

Granted, it is a pleasant prison, sitting on top of the hill, shaded by an expansive Jacaranda tree in the back, and a towering liquid amber tree in the front. Morning light streams into the kitchen filtered through an oleander bush. It has a fireplace for cold nights and sea breezes against hot days. Despite its beauty it has been confining.

I think of all the other homes I lived in: two in San Diego, three in New York, five in Germany, and in an assortment of places sprinkled around Asia and the Middle East.

Is home defined by the location, the people, or the things inside?

As a student I lived in a commune in Cologne overlooking the Rhine River. My room was sparsely furnished, with a mattress, a shaggy rug, and a wicker chest for my clothes. My roommates assumed I was a Zen Buddhist nun.

In Goa, India, I stayed for a month in a small house by the river. White columns held up the roof over the porch, where I slept in a hammock. I happily shared that porch with four chickens. To reach this home I had to wade through the river or pay the ferryman a few rupees for a ride to my enchanted other shore, where I could meditate on the flow of life.

My wooden cabin in the woods in upstate New York was so well hidden, I could only find it with a flashlight at night, stumbling down the narrow dirt path. I had to dig a ditch for the telephone cable and use propane gas for cooking. However when the afternoon light streamed in through the glass panels of the A-frame, filtered by the branches of the green beech trees outside, I curled up on the floor with my gray cat and felt happy. I did not even own a key for this little house in the forest; nobody could find it and there wasn't anything of material value inside.

For a while I called a place overlooking the gulf of Aqaba in the Sinai home. The furniture consisted of a pink sleeping bag as my bed and the contents of my leather duffle bag. I had a job at a five-star hotel on the shore of the Red Sea. A hotel shuttle bus picked us up at five in the morning and took us to the hotel's dining room, where I served breakfast and lunch. My workday was over at three o'clock. I walked across the street to the beach and spent the rest of the day diving and snorkeling through the underwater wonders of the coral reef with its hallucinogenic colored fish. Three friendly Colombian waiters at the palm frond bar on the sand supplied me with fruit cocktails whenever I came up for air. I was very happy there, and thought I'd stay, until one

morning I noticed the forty-year-old cashier in the hotel's breakfast lounge. He was English, and his face was gray and sagging. His prominent belly bulged inside the tan polyester pants the hotel had issued. He stayed, and I decided it was time for me to move on. It was easy, because I had nothing to weigh me down.

Is home the place we were born or where we end up living, either by choice or circumstances?

I couldn't wait to get out of the cramped German post-war cinderblock apartment with linoleum floors and low ceilings of my childhood. When I finally did, I ran as far as I could, halfway across the world.

I think of the homes that could have been: Before moving to California we considered moving to France, buying a vineyard and turning it into a bed & breakfast. We already had our plane tickets to look at properties, when an offer we could not refuse brought us to California instead. We put a bid on a house with a tropical jungle garden close to the beach and had it already perfectly furnished in our minds. But then the bid was rejected. Would I have been happier there? Would I be a different person? Does a home shape us, or do we shape the home?

Is home even a physical place?

For seven years I carried my home with me, on my back like a snail, in the form of my pink sleeping bag, the one I unrolled at the gulf of Aqaba. It was my temporary home at the shore of the Dead Sea, where the warm sand was my mattress and the night sky my ceiling. I located the star Vega in the constellation Lyre above me and felt comforted. Vega was always with me, reliably in the same spot in the sky, whether I was in Germany, India, Israel, or California, as long as I stayed on my home planet Earth.

I still carry my home with me wherever I go. When I lie in bed at night I unfold it in my mind like the petals of a pink water lily. I curl up on its yellow center, which is fragrant and soft like a velvet pillow. The petals fold back over me like a translucent tent, where I can dream of emerald ponds and bottomless lakes all night.

Where is my real home? Does it matter where I am?

My home is this present moment. No need to look any further. Right now I see the slate gray sea, the palm trees bending in the wind waving their fronds at me. A tiny hummingbird flashes its red neck for a second in front of my window. The fog hangs in the jacaranda tree and coats the rose bushes with a veil of moisture. I breathe in and smell the faint scent of salty ocean air. I breathe out. I have arrived in the NOW.

