

Home Is Where the Heart Is

Dear Connie,

My husband was asked by his company to transfer from Seattle (where we lived for fifteen years) to Montana. It was a wonderful opportunity for advancement in his technical field and we were both enthusiastic about the move.

*We've been in Bozeman for four months now. Even though Stan's job is going well, we have a nice home, and we're closer to my parents, I am so homesick for Seattle I can hardly stand it! I wake up in the middle of the night with dreams in which, like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, I hear myself crying, "I want to go home!"*

There's nothing wrong here—the kids like their schools, I am starting a new job soon, people are friendly—but it just isn't home. It doesn't make sense, but I don't think it will ever feel like home here. I don't understand the troubling feelings I'm having. Can you help?

Sincerely,
Annie

Dear Annie,

I have a lot of empathy for the feelings you are experiencing. Inevitably there is loss and grief when we have lived somewhere for many years and then move away. Have you grieved for the life in Seattle that you've lost by moving to Montana? Have you allowed yourself to feel ALL of the feelings that usually accompany a major move? Can you allow yourself to be happy

about certain aspects of your new life, and at the same time, feel sad about losing what you left behind?

You probably know the things you can do to make yourself more "at home" here in Montana, such as join a church or volunteer group, a newcomers' group, etc. The more involved you are, the more of a sense of belonging you are likely to develop. Your job will probably help, too. Over time, your feelings are likely to change, and at some point, you will think of Bozeman as your home.

However, it's worth looking at the larger meaning of home as well. Geography plays an important role in whether or not we feel at home in a particular location. For example, some people are happiest living near the ocean, while some can scarcely imagine living anywhere but in the mountains. Life in a big city is the only life to live for many, while a peaceful, pastoral setting is desirable for others.

Memories of childhood homes, not always conscious, affect our response to particular kinds of houses and geographical locations. It might be worthwhile to consider how you felt about your childhood home (or homes) and how that might factor into your relationship to Seattle versus Bozeman. Were you ever uprooted as a child? How did that affect your feelings about



where you lived next? We become attached to places as well as to people, and the rupture of those attachments—think of them as cords—can be quite painful.

Astrologers will say that we are drawn to certain places because of planetary influences. Those who look at past lives teach that we carry a residue of either positive or negative feelings of our relationship to various locations that we have lived in during previous incarnations. Our external home—meaning a house or apartment, geographical location, landscape, etc.—can nourish our spirit, or drag us down into depression. People who have been displaced from their ancestral home by war, famine, natural disaster or political upheaval often have difficulty recovering from their homesickness. It can become an actual physical illness. Even though you made the choice to move, it is natural to long for the home you knew.

If we pay attention to our physical and emotional reaction

to different locales, we can often come to know where we belong, at least externally, and that may change in the course of a lifetime. For example, I have come to understand that growing up on the East Coast was particularly important for the development of my mind, but moving to Montana supported a less conventional, more independent and holistic way of being in the world that more accurately reflected who I had become.

Many wise men and women have written about what it means to be at home internally as well as externally. Jeff Zaleski, in the Fall 2006 issue of *Parabola*, quotes the Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh as saying, "Our true home is the here and now." This is about living fully in our present experience. Anyone on a spiritual search is on the journey toward this inner home. Because the nature of human existence on earth is duality, we need to find a balance between our outer and inner homes. Too much emphasis on the outer diminishes our ability to find and inhabit our inner home—the center of our being. Too much emphasis on going inward and ignoring the outer world distances us from what it means to be human in all its complexity.

Thich Nhat Hanh also says, "Home is where the heart is. You are used to a landscape, a way of life, a certain atmosphere, and when you are away from that, you miss that home... In the beginning, you believe that you will not be happy without that home, but later on, you feel differently. You see that you have the capacity of living in the here and now and making this place into your home, so you don't wait until

you go home to be happy... The here and the now is our true home."*

Your mind, body and feelings are your internal home. All this does not mean you should deny your longing for the external home you left when you moved. Over time, you will either become more at home where you are, or you and your family will decide to return to Seattle, or to move someplace else where you feel more at home than you do here in Montana. If you give it time,

focusing on living in the present where you are now, the answer will reveal itself to you.

In the meantime, in order to make the transition easier, you would probably benefit from traveling back to Seattle, spending time with your friends from there, and doing some of the things that you enjoyed when you lived there. Why not? ■

Good luck, Annie!

—Connie

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Do you have a relationship question? Connie is now offering sessions by phone and Skype from Colorado, and will be in Bozeman periodically to lead groups and workshops. Her phone number is 720-494-3044, and e-mail is mtlionlady@gmail.com. E-mail sent to Connie is read only by Connie Myslik-McFadden, MSS, LCSW, and will be held in strictest confidence. No identities will be published. Disclaimer: The responses to questions in this column are for information

only. Never disregard professional advice or delay seeking it because of anything you read here. Working with a skilled professional is highly recommended.

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Connie Myslik-McFadden, MSS, LCSW, is a psychotherapist with 25 years of experience working with individuals, couples and groups. She leads workshops and retreats, and teaches Dreamwork and Pathwork. Connie devoted 9 years to Jungian analysis, training, and supervision, after graduating from the

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