

Cybercolumn by Berry Simpson: At home again

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CYBER COLUMN: At home again

By Berry Simpson

I just finished reading *The Year of Magical Thinking* by Joan Didion, a powerful book that will haunt me (in a good way) for a long time. In fact, the reason it sat on my too-be-read shelf for over a year was because I'd heard enough about it to know it would have a big impact on me and I didn't want to read it until I was ready. But my friend Carol kept asking if I'd read it yet and I couldn't keep telling her I was waiting to start.

Berry D. Simpson

I can't write about most of what Didion said because I haven't experienced the losses she had—the loss of her spouse and the loss of control to help her family—and I just don't feel qualified. I don't think I'm grown up enough to write about all of that. But I can write about this—something she said about being at home. She wrote: "In California, we heated our houses by building fires. We built fires even on summer evenings, because the fog came in. Fires said we were home, we had drawn the circle, we were safe through the night. I lit the candles."

I like her description of being home. I like drawing the circle. I like it when my wife, Cyndi, has candles burning in the living room or in the kitchen.

Even when the fragrance is too strong for me, it feels like being home.

There is also something about it being dark outside that makes me happy. I'm not really home until it gets dark. I don't know why that is, and in fact I just thought of it for the first time. Maybe because if it's still daylight when I come home, I harbor thoughts of going out and doing chores before it gets dark, and so it feels like I'm still on the job. But if it is dark outside, I know I'm inside to stay. As a result, wintertime always feels homier to me than summertime, since in the winter it's usually dark when I pull up in the driveway. The house feels more like an island, a safe haven, when it's light inside and dark outside. The world shrinks to the size of my house. It's not unlike the feeling I get when running outside in cold weather and my world shrinks down to inside my jacket and hood and gloves. It seems very small and compact and safe and defensible.

So when I go inside, I like to change into casual clothes (the closest thing I have to pajamas), which immediately alters my mood and softens my thoughts. Once I change clothes, I'm at home. Like Joan Didion, I have circled the wagons. I'm settled in. I don't mind leaving to run an errand for Cyndi, but those are the exceptions. Usually I am home to stay.

We used to burn fires in our fireplace, a lot, when Byron was home, and that made me feel at home. Since Byron was an Eagle Scout, we put him in charge of the fireplace. We kept a stack of wood by the back door under the porch so it would stay dry. We didn't have gas jets in our fireplace, so Byron had to use old newspapers and kindling and matches to make the fire, the old-fashioned way, just like home.

Maybe one reason a fireplace seems so homey is because, at least in my life, it's a total luxury. I've never had to maintain a fire to heat the house or cook food. No, the fire in our fireplace was optional. That made it a treat instead of a chore. Maybe that's one reason it seemed homey and cozy.

I also know a fire in the fireplace is purely an emotional appeal. As an engineer I know the fire draws more heat from the room and up the chimney than it gives out to warm the room; the only really warm space is directly in front of the fire. No, it is the sight and sound of the fire that I like.

Unfortunately, nowadays, since our Eagle Scout left home for the big city, we don't build fires. Cyndi and I simply don't go to the trouble, but often I wish we would. It feels more like home to have a fire burning.

It's funny that I'm writing about this, because the idea of home, of feeling at home, is something I think about often. In fact, one of my favorite Bible verses, Ephesians 3:17, says "And I pray that Christ will be more and more at home in your heart."

It's my prayer that Christ feels at home in my heart and in your heart, as if we had a cozy fire going and he was relaxed and comfortable. At home.

Berry Simpson, a Sunday school teacher at First Baptist Church in Midland, is a petroleum engineer, writer, runner and member of the city council in Midland. You can contact him through e-mail at berry@stonefoot.org.

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