

This semester has changed my definition of home from a physical place where the environment and weather matter, to an overall feeling I get with the people I love. My definition of family has changed from solely biological to all the people who make me feel at home. I've realized that home and family don't have to be in the same place; many different people can feel like family and many different places can feel like home.

For my project, I asked eight of my friends to write down either how they define home and family, what they associate with those concepts, or what they consider home, and who they consider family. I was curious to see how their associations and definitions compared to mine.

Using the responses to my prompt, I created eight "journal" pages out of gessoed tar paper. I then took pictures of each person where they feel most at home in Napa, and applied those to the pages. I created a larger-than-life journal to hold them all, with MDF covers and handmade stickers. I wanted to make it look as "raw" and realistic as possible, and so emulating stereotypical aesthetics of a journal was very important.

The people here have become another family for me; this place another home. I wanted to create something that would preserve this feeling of home forever.

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Home (Is Where The Heart Is?)

Emma C.



What constitutes a home? When I think of home I automatically go back to my early childhood, back to when I was 4 or 5 or 6 or 7. I attended preschool, kindergarten and the rest of elementary school in the same (general) area of San Francisco: the middle of the city. San Francisco is known as the city of fog. We even have a name for it: “Karl.” The majority of my happiest memories take place in foggy weather.

When I think of happy memories, I think about foggy hikes on Mount Davidson with my mom. I think about morning soccer practice in preschool, on the dewy grass near Kezar Stadium. I think about recess in first grade, when my friends and I made “perfume” out of lemon geranium and Mexican sage for our “nature sisters” club. It was always foggy at my elementary school. I think of going to Hog Island for oysters (my favorite food) with my family and family friends. It was overcast and I ate more oysters than I had ever eaten before. I think of the time my sister and I went to the pumpkin patch in Half Moon Bay on a foggy day and got lost in the hay maze, screaming and giggling and not fighting, for once. I think of the road trip to Big Sur, in seventh grade with my dad and sister. On the first night we stopped at a beach as the sun was setting and the fog was rolling in. Only a few cars drove past as we stood there in silence for an hour. I think about foggy early morning runs in the Presidio with my cross-country team, the beautiful trees and smell of damp earth making getting up early all worth it. I think about walking on the cold, foggy beach each morning before my summer job, my coffee warming me up as it trickled down my throat and into my stomach. I think about sitting for hours at Rodeo beach with my friends Al and Tipton on the retreat, sifting through the sand and searching for sea glass. Fog makes my heart feel full and heavy. It makes me feel happiest and most at home.

“Home is wherever I’m with you,” Edward Sharpe & The Magnetic Zeros sing in their song “Home.” When I was homesick at the beginning of the semester, I initially thought I was missing my house. I thought I was missing my room. But I realized that it was something else. This past semester, I’ve realized that my concept of “home” is not about a physical place, but more so a feeling of familiarity and comfort. Home is the weather, feelings, people and emotions that make me feel safe and content. Though there isn’t much fog here in Napa, I’ve grown to feel just as at home here as I do in San Francisco. I think it has a lot to do with the second family I have found here. There are many places that feel like home to me. There are many people that feel like my family.

To me, having a home is having a sense of community. As Bachrach and Zautra wrote in their journal article, *Coping with a Community Stressor: The Threat of a Hazardous Waste Facility*, “...this solidarity and sense of community may give them a greater sense of purpose...” The sense of community is a psychological concept developed by McMillan and Chavis in 1986.¹ There are four elements to this concept: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection. McMillan and Chavis claimed that without these elements (shared emotional connection being the most important), there cannot be a sense of community. Shared emotional connection includes contact and high quality interaction, with a good balance of sharedness, humility, and honor.² I believe that having that balance is important in maintaining a good relationship with friends and family.

¹ Stephen Wright, *Exploring Sense of Community in Living-Learning Programs and in the University as a Whole*. PhD dissertation. *Wright House*, www.wright-house.com/psychology/sense-of-community.html. Accessed 29 Apr. 2019.

² Ibid.

The four elements of the sense of community pertain to Oxbow. Most of us were strangers beforehand, who all applied for slightly different reasons (integration and fulfillment of needs). We are connected not only by our common interest in art, but also by the fact that we live in close proximity to each other (membership). We all have different styles and different ways of thinking. We learn from and teach each other (influence). Because we are bound by where we live and our similar interests, because we influence each other, and because we have maintained a balance of sharedness, humility, and honor. Together, we have gone through good and bad times, creating a strong emotional connection. There is emotional equity and reciprocity (it doesn't feel like there is dominance or subordination, we are all just coexisting and doing things for ourselves). These factors help to create a strong sense of community here at Oxbow.

With community comes feelings of identity and purpose. And studies have shown that having a sense of purpose can help you live longer. In 1992, researchers at Flinders University in Adelaide, Australia started ALSA, the Australian Longitudinal Study of Aging.³ ALSA examined how emotional well-being, health, and living conditions affected the lifespan of over 2,000 adults. Each person was questioned on their sense of purpose, their goals, health history, cognitive ability, and mental health. After decades of doing the study, researchers found a direct correlation between those who had a greater sense of purpose and those who lived longer (as well as those who performed better on tests, had better short-term memory, mental speed, and good health).⁴ Those who were part of strong communities and good living conditions had more goals and a greater sense of purpose.

Strong communities (such as this one at Oxbow) decrease the amount of barriers (both mental and physical) and stress. I feel at home in this community, and I feel like I have a greater sense of purpose. My friends here at Oxbow feel like a second family. Because we've been living together for a while now, I feel just as close (if not closer) with the people here than others that I've known for years. I have many different families in many different places. I have my biological family, my friends that I consider family in San Francisco, my friends that I consider family in Connecticut (from going to summer camps there for years), the people I work with at SummerGATE in the summer (a summer camp that I TA at), and many more. I value all of my families for different reasons. They all have different things to offer.

My second family, my friends at Oxbow, have been here for me when my other families could not physically be with me. We've all been forced to come together in times of conflict when we had no one else to talk to. We've been here to support each other, whether it's something lighter (like friendship problems or stress), or something more serious (like death or illness). We've cried together. We've told each other our secrets and hopes and dreams and fears. We've shared a lot of experiences (such as learning how to skate, biking on the river trail, trying to figure out Napa's transit system, dance parties in the breezeway before face check, playing dress up with prom dresses, spending all of our money at Oxbow Market, swimming in the freezing cold ocean on the first day of the retreat, dancing the rain, planting carrots in the colony garden, beekeeping, baking bread for 13 hours (for a math project), and even hosting a Passover Seder at the house across the street). Without conflict or experience, are you really family? I believe that conflict is good because it brings out vulnerability in people, leading to honesty and trust. It brings solidarity, compassion, and empathy. Those things lead to experiences, which furthermore bring people closer together.

³ Romeo Vitelli Ph.D. Weblog post. *Psychology Today*, Sussex Publishers, 6 July 2015, www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/media-spotlight/201507/how-sense-purpose-can-help-you-live-longer. Accessed 5 May 2019.

⁴ Ibid.

Conflict and experience are both essential in creating emotional equity, something that you can't always have in a biological family.

While I'm bound to my biological family by blood, I'm bound to my second family by friendship. I chose my second family, while I was born into and automatically put into my biological family. Don't get me wrong, I love my biological family, and not just because I have to. Though sometimes we bicker and argue and have our disagreements, at the end of the day we love each other. I know that my biological family will always be there for me to count on. I've been through (literally) everything with them. They've seen the best of me and the worst of me. We are connected by blood, something powerful and meaningful. Without them, I (obviously) would not be alive. They've provided me with food, housing, money, support, and most importantly, love. My whole life. I know that my parents will always be there to cook and eat great food with. They will always be there to travel, go on walks, and picnic with me. I know that my sister will always be there to talk to when I get into disagreements with my parents. I know that my biological family will always be there to support me.

I am very grateful for both my biological and second family. There are some things I can't talk about with my biological family, and there are some things I can't talk about with my second family. With my second family, I feel like I can be the best, truest version of myself without getting judged. Because I chose them, my second family is a lot more similar to me, in terms of music taste (indie and rap), people we look up to (such as certain artists on different social medias), passions (photography, art, running, etc.) and ideas of fun (being spontaneous, going to concerts, wandering around the city, to name a few). With both families I have had experience and conflict. With both families I do similar things, such as going to the beach, picnicking, and sleeping in the sun. It's nice to know that I will always have someone to talk to, somewhere to go, and people to love.

Though as aforementioned, there are many groups of people that feel like family all over, I'd never really felt such a strong sense of family (outside of my biological one) until Oxbow. Recently, I've been thinking about why that is. What makes my family in Napa different? What makes this place feel like home? Though I've been thinking about this for months now, I still have not been able to come to a conclusive reason. What makes home "home" and family "family" are both indescribable feelings.

The way I define home does not really match the technical, "official" definition.⁵ And the same goes for how I define family.⁶ Though the saying is that "home is where the heart is," I don't think that home has to be a physical place. I also don't think that family has to be someone you are related to by blood. To me, home is safety, home is comfort, and home often goes with family. Though home and family frequently go hand in hand, they don't always have to. It is possible to feel at home in various places and for there to be multiple groups that feel like family. While family may not always be where home is, wherever there is family there will be home. In other words,

⁵ The Oxford English Dictionary defines the noun "home" as a physical place:

1. "The place where one lives permanently, especially as a member of a family or household"
2. "The family or social unit occupying a permanent residence."
3. "The district or country where one was born or has settled on a long-term basis."

⁶ The Oxford English Dictionary defines the noun "family" as the typical nuclear family, a family of two parents and their children.

1. "A group consisting of two parents and their children living together as a unit."
2. "A group of people related by blood or marriage."
3. "All the descendants of a common ancestor."

family will always give a sense of home. (But you may not have a family where you feel at home. For example, I feel at home when walking alone on a foggy beach. I feel safe, I feel comfortable, but it's just me, no family.)

There are so many types of families. There are nuclear families, which is two parents and their children. There are single-parent families, adoptive parents/siblings, step-parents/siblings, half siblings. Then there are chosen families (for example, the people I call my second family). There are the people who you may or may not be related to but feel connected with on another level. What I believe truly constitutes a family is a group of people who are not only identify with each other, but have gone through experiences and conflict together. Good times and bad times.

I guess where I'm going with all of this is that I value both my biological and second family a lot, but feel more emotionally committed to the latter. After living in Napa for a while, I've come to the conclusion that the environment doesn't matter nearly as much as I'd initially thought— I don't need fog to feel at home. I've had plenty of fog-less memories, plenty of fog-less experiences that have made Napa feel like home, and that have made the people at Oxbow feel like family.

The memories I've made here have less to do with the weather and more to do with the people. Like the time we slingshot lemons across the river with Greg, as the sun was setting and the river looked like liquid gold. Like the Monday in March when we all hung out, then got Three Twins ice cream and Gott's. It was one of the first super hot days in the semester, and one of the first times I felt content and secure with my group of friends. It felt like summer, and my skin had a matte, warm feeling, as if I'd spent the day at the beach. We were all so happy and worry-free. Then there was the time I went on an afternoon walk with Aidan and Emily. We got nachos and sat on the dock near Basalt. It was so nice and warm and peaceful.

There are also other memories I've made with my family here that have more to do with the environment. More like the memories at my other home (San Francisco). Like on the last day of the retreat, when a lot of us woke up early to catch the sunrise from a nearby cliff. Molly and I, who were bunkmates, woke up a little late and ended up going to the cliff by ourselves. It was so quiet as we walked there, past the rest of the rooms and past the Golden Gate Bridge. When we reached the area where the rest of our friends were, the big, yolk-colored sun was softened by the pretty pinky haze of the sky, and they were playing "Yellow" by Coldplay. I will never forget how all of us stood there silently, in awe of the beauty. I wanted to cry. Then there was the time we walked the Golden Gate Bridge, after our visit to the SFMOMA. It felt nice to be back in a familiar setting and once again, it was beautiful. I'll never forget the joy I felt as my friends and I took pictures and ran in the wind.

I will forever love and cherish the memories I've made with different people that feel like family and different places that feel like home. And I'm excited for new families, new homes, and new experiences in the future.

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