(Be)coming home: the complexity of home as revealed in young adult novels of disaster

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(BE)COMING HOME: THE COMPLEXITY OF HOME AS REVEALED
IN YOUNG ADULT NOVELS OF DISASTER

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Curriculum and Instruction

by
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December 2011
Dedication

For my parents, who are my roots, and for all who are my home
Acknowledgements

My deepest thanks go to Dr. Ann Trousdale, whose passion for children’s literature is contagious. Thank you for inspiring me to continue this journey, and for the immeasurable help and support you’ve provided over the years.

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Abstract

Inspired by the researcher’s work with five displaced New Orleans teenagers in the months after Hurricane Katrina, this research examined twelve young adult novels in which characters face a loss of or damage to home in the wake of a natural or humanly-caused disaster. The study sought ways in which home is represented in young adult literature of disaster by analyzing passages in which characters discuss, remember, imagine, and rebuild or reestablish home after its damage or loss. A phenomenological approach was used to examine these fictional experiences of home in order to discern their contribution to an understanding of the concept of home itself.

Findings indicated that the novels represented home as a complex concept brought to light in its absence. Characters’ experiences of home included elements of the social (relationship with others in home places); the personal (identity and ownership); the physical/geographical (locations that are home); the instinctual (an innate drive to seek a place of safety and shelter); the emotional (emotional connections to home and the emotional upheaval of displacement); and the temporal/historical (time spent in home places).

With disaster continuing to strike across the globe—earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, tornados—a deeper understanding of the nature of displacement and the ways in which home is conceptualized and rebuilt is of value for both the teens who read young adult literature and the adults who work with them. By attending to the ways in which characters grapple with notions of home in the face of disaster, teachers, librarians, and researchers can gain insight into the needs of those displaced from home. Readers, both teens and adults, can gain empathy regarding the experience of home’s loss, and those who find themselves struggling with recreating a sense of home can find comfort and insight in characters’ experiences.
Prelude

“Phenomenologically speaking, one cannot talk about the nature of reality without including reference to one’s experience of that reality.”
- Stewart and Mickunas, 1990, p. 38

I am a homebody. Looking back over my life experiences, it is clear to see that my ties to home were cultivated early on. I have always loved the sense of security that came from being in a place I knew as mine, and being in unfamiliar territory filled me with anxiety and left me wishing to be back home. Examples of this come readily to mind. There was the week of summer camp in fifth grade, where the few happy moments I can recall came at mail time, when I received letters from home. There was my first semester of college out-of-state, when I cried daily about being away from my family and friends. There was the day only several years ago when I, as an adult, took my last walk through my childhood home before its new owners gained possession, trying to imprint its look and feel in my mind so I would never forget it.

I am a packrat. Very little of the furniture in my house came from a furniture store; most pieces have a story, from the nightstand that is part of a set from my grandfather’s country house to the door from the nineteenth century house where I grew up that is propped in the corner of my living room. I can’t bear to let things go that belonged to someone else in the family, and I love being surrounded by items that once were theirs. It brings me a sense of closeness to the people I love, a sense of security, of familiarity.

I am a creature of habit. Growing up, my favorite evening of the year was the night “The Wizard of Oz” was broadcast on television. I made sure to be home that evening, often with a friend or my brother, and we never missed an airing of this beloved movie. When we got our first VCR, I rejoiced in my new ability to record and watch whenever I wanted to the tale of
Dorothy’s travels through Munchkin land and her realization that, while other locales may be more exciting and full of adventure, there’s no place like home.

I recall one place I was always happy away from home, though. For more than thirty years now, my extended family has taken an annual vacation to the beach. When I was a child, there were about ten family members crowded into one condominium. More often than not, my place to sleep was either the sofa bed that caved in so badly in the center that it was practically v-shaped, or in a sleeping bag on the dining room floor. As the years have passed, our family has grown, so that now there are over twenty-five of us on the yearly trip, in a three-story beach house, where there is not a moment of peace and quiet to be found. The discomfort, the noise, the rowdiness could not be more unlike my own home life, but for seven days each year, I thrive on it. I remarked to a cousin once that, if I could only have my pets there with me, I think I could stay forever. And each year when my family drops me back in Baton Rouge at the end of the week, I watch them drive off with a sense of melancholy, even shedding a few tears now and then, despite the fact that I am back in my own home.

For all its undeniable importance to me, however, home is a concept that has gone largely unexamined for most of my life. Only recently, after developing an academic interest in the phenomenon of home, have I paused to wonder why I am so content to be away on our family beach trip, when most other times I long to return to my own space. Or what it means that I would rather have the beat-up rocking chair that I was soothed to sleep in as an infant than the newest, most comfortable recliner. Or why it is that I happily drive almost two hundred miles every weekend to attend our ritual Sunday supper at my grandfather’s house, when I complain about having to travel two miles to return a rented DVD. Our family, our traditions, our belongings are so much a part of me that I have rarely given their importance much thought. I suspect that I am not alone in this, for it is easy to take for granted that which we have always
had. When Hurricane Katrina put me in contact with young adults who had lost their homes, personal reflection would bring to light my own perceptions of home as it inspired an intellectual pursuit to examine the experiences and perceptions of others.
Chapter 1 – Introduction

Young People’s Perceptions of Home

“It’s as if I’m not living my own life, and it’s so surreal when I walk down the halls of a school that’s not [my own], or sit in class with a group of strangers…. I really want to go back.”
- 17-year-old female displaced by Hurricane Katrina (personal communication, October 2005)

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina made landfall in southern Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, causing devastation the likes of which our country had not seen before. Homes and property were destroyed, lives were lost, and families, both those who evacuated before the storm and those who were rescued from the floodwaters in the days following Hurricane Katrina, were faced with the daunting task of rebuilding their lives. In October of that year, I undertook a project to examine the experiences of five high school seniors who had evacuated the New Orleans area and come to Baton Rouge, where they became students of mine at University High School (U-High or the Lab School). In interviews and in writing, they shared with me, their librarian, what it was like to be displaced from their homes and separated from their friends, what it was like to start over in a new place. As I listened to them, I began to develop an appreciation for the complexity of the nature of home, and my fascination with the topic took hold. As I learned more about what home meant to them, I reflected on my own life experiences and saw parallels that helped me understand that homebody, packrat, and creature of habit are more than just silly words to describe me; they are in fact an integral part of the essence of my understanding of home.

In looking at the concept of home as understood by the five students who participated in my project, I took note of the things they missed most about the lives they had lost to the storm and of the things that helped them become more comfortable in their new surroundings. I began
to notice that home was a concept that, for these students, was bound not necessarily to a physical building, but to the people with whom, and the very atmosphere in which, they felt most comfortable. They found a sense of home in feelings of belonging, safety, and comfort, feelings that were lost in their displacement to unfamiliar locations, feelings that they strove to rediscover through links to their lost homes and through connections with new people.

For the students with whom I spoke, thoughts of home were intimately tied to relationships with loved others. Finding themselves starting over in a new place after the storm, what they came to value more than anything was the comfort that came from the people who knew them best—friends and family. They noted the difficulty of being apart from a parent or grandparent, as well as the solace they found in having siblings with them to lean on. One 18-year-old male learned through his displacement that, for him, “Home means family” (personal communication, October 2005). Indeed, “when we think of happiness at home, we usually think of warm and loving personal relationships,” as Noddings pointed out (2003, p. 106). The comfort of a parent’s arms, the release of laughing together with friends, the familiarity of those who know us best lend a sense of safety, of belonging, that is central to the feeling of home. This rang true for me, and helped me put words to that sense of contentment I feel at the beach every year. Despite the fact that I am not in my own home, I am surrounded by my parents, brother, nephew, cousins, aunts, uncles, grandfather—my family is there, and regardless of where we are, that provides me with an essential sense of home.

For the most part, their immediate families had traveled together to Baton Rouge, so that their mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters were there to help make this new environment feel more like home for the New Orleans evacuees. Their friends, though, were not. As they spoke about what they missed most, their overwhelmingly common response was similar to one 17-year-old girl’s: “I really miss all of my friends…. We’re all over the country right now…. I
think missing my friends is the hardest part” (personal communication, October 2005). With unreliable phone lines making communication difficult, and high gasoline and airfare prices preventing them from visiting one another, they felt truly apart from the very people with whom they were accustomed to spending the most time. For adolescents, whose days are dedicated in such large part to spending time with and talking to their friends, this separation was difficult to endure. Furman (2004) wrote that losing a friendship is like losing a part of one’s self; away from their friends, these students had indeed lost a large part of the selves they had been at home.

Displaced to Baton Rouge, several students expressed the difficulty of “not knowing anyone” (personal communication, October 2005). With time, most met and became closer to other students at U-High, making their transition easier and lending this new place a more homelike feel. The importance of new friendships was noted by the 18-year-old male student with whom I spoke, who stated, “My new school and city feel like home now mostly because of the new friends I have made. They have helped a lot” (personal communication, October 2005). Two other students had cousins at U-High, and one met someone who had gone to camp with her friends from New Orleans. These connections to the past were a comfort to them, allowing them to bridge the life they missed with their new reality. Similar to what I saw in the experiences of my own students, Hamm and Faircloth (2005) found that friendships were key to gaining “a sense of school belonging” (p. 69) among students who felt alienated or disconnected. And Berndt (1992) indicated that friendships could be a key to helping adolescents cope with situations that are stressful, as indeed displacement in the wake of disaster was for these students.

Some of the strongest bonds of friendship the displaced students formed were with other New Orleans transfer students. They indicated the importance of friends who could identify with their unique experiences of coming to a new school in the wake of a hurricane. In their first days at U-High, they gravitated toward each other:
For the first few weeks, the main people I hung out with were the other New Orleans people. We all just kind of hung out together because we didn’t know anyone else, but we knew who the other new people were. Lots of people were like, ‘Oh my God, your house is ruined, that sucks!’ And then you have someone who’s actually going through the same thing, so it’s not as obnoxious; people aren’t always asking you questions. (17-year-old female, personal communication, October 2005)

Their shared experience of displacement helped them see that they were not alone in what they were going through. According to Furman (2004), “history is a powerful connector [that] provides a meaningful context for sharing” (p. 185). Their shared history, their shared experience of displacement was a bond connecting many of these transfer students and providing opportunities to relate to people who were going through similar loss and rebuilding. Bonds such as these formed among evacuees can “help lessen the sense of alienation and…assist individuals in working through the traumatic experience and their grief for what [has] been lost” (Raphael, 1986, p. 128). Their identity as fellow evacuees provided a sense of solidarity for these students who at first felt so isolated and lost away from home.

The students displaced by Hurricane Katrina reflected too on important belongings they were able to bring with them that provided comfort as they strove to rebuild a sense of home, objects whose presence called to mind precious memories or stirred feelings of reassurance or calm. Rescued items such as photo albums, pictures of friends, music CDs, books, pillows, and blankets were treasured links to the lives from which the storm had torn them. Amidst these familiar trappings, they were able to recapture a bit of home, to find an element of comfort and a feeling of being in a space that was somehow theirs. Such attempts to recapture home are common among people displaced from their homes, as Brook (2003) explained, for those who find themselves “in an environment that—on some level—feels alien…introduce elements of the remembered place where they did feel at home” (p. 227).
The nature of home, while most closely tied for my students to the people in their lives, also included their physical surroundings. One student I interviewed spoke at length about her house, noting that when she returned there after the storm, being in that building “made [her] feel like [she] was home even though nobody was around.” For her, the house “defined [her] youth, when [she] was really small, [and she had] all those memories tied up in that place” (personal communication, October 2005). This student’s words resonated deeply with me, for they captured what I felt upon saying goodbye to the house I grew up in, wandering from room to room, thinking of all the events that happened there. Those abandoned rooms were so much more than blank walls and empty space: Here was my bedroom, with holes in the walls where my posters had been. There was my brother’s room, closet door scuffed from the basketball goal that hung there for years. In the hallway, the wood floors were permanently marked with the footprints of my nephew, who could not wait quite long enough to walk on them when they were refinished. The back door was pocked with holes where a long-gone pet cat hung by his claws to look in the window and cry to be let in. Even the quirky features that we laughed about—the green laminate countertops, the strawberry-print wallpaper—brought tears to my eyes then and make me smile to remember now. The memories that we identify with a house, the multitude of events that happened there, are a central part of what transforms a simple structure into a home.

With at least seven hours of each day spent at school, their courses, classmates, teachers, and extracurricular activities are a tremendous part of teens’ experience of home places. As seniors, the students I worked with had spent years looking forward to perks at their home schools, such as one school’s Senior Patio, that they would now never get to experience. Instead of the familiarity of family-style dining at lunch, they were now met with a cafeteria full of unknown faces. When they had just begun to serve as captains of their football teams or cheerleading squads, they were suddenly newcomers on an unfamiliar field or unable to find
clubs that met their interests in their new school. Those that did find a niche in a sport, such as one student who became the quarterback of U-High’s football team or another who was a swimmer, noted the importance not only of teammates who became new friends, but also of the routine of familiar activity and the comfort of environments like the field or the pool that helped to take their minds off their troubles.

Houses and schools are but a part of the larger environment in which one grows up. Several students I worked with held New Orleans very close to their hearts, and the city itself was an integral part of their concept of home. There was comfort for them in knowing their way around, knowing the people, knowing where to go to have fun or a good meal. This was not the whole of the city’s significance for them, though. There was something more, something elusive, something best described as just the “feel” of it. Life felt different for them in Baton Rouge, a smaller and less busy city with not as much to do as in New Orleans. The sights, sounds, smells, the general feel of a place can be what make it home, and all of those were different and unfamiliar in their new location. One student wrote that “Katrina has really made me just love my home and appreciate every aspect of it. I love the atmosphere, the food, the people, everything” (personal communication, October 2005).

**Home in Young Adult Literature: Purpose of the Study**

As a secondary school librarian, I am surrounded daily by young adult literature¹. Shortly after completing the work I did with these students from New Orleans and beginning the personal introspection about home that it inspired, I read a young adult novel by Marian Hale titled *The Truth about Sparrows* (2004). In this book, the twelve-year-old protagonist and her

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¹ I use the terms “young adult” and “adolescent” interchangeably; when I write of young adult literature or adolescent literature, I include books whose intended audience is students in middle or high school grades, approximately grades six through twelve or ages twelve through eighteen.
family were forced to leave their Missouri home when drought and the Great Depression made it impossible for her father to earn a living there. They made their way to South Texas, setting up a new home in a community of tar-paper shacks with other families experiencing the same difficulties and losses. Away from the only home she’d ever known, this young girl, like Hurricane Katrina’s displaced students, was faced with building a new life and struggling to define who she was in a new and unfamiliar place, without her friends, her belongings, all that she knew and loved about her home.

Upon noting the parallels between this character’s experiences and those of the students I worked with from New Orleans, I was struck by how much her concept of home echoed what I found in their words. I began to think back over novels I had read in the past, looking for connections and ways in which other characters grappled with the notion of home. I recalled some examples—the pre-teen protagonist of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* discovered a sense of belonging for the first time at Hogwarts (Rowling, 1997), and *The Outsiders*’ Greasers were a family who defined the concept of home for one another (Hinton, 1967). But I was eager to find novels where displacement and rebuilding of home was a major theme, to see how the ways in which those characters experienced home compared to the experiences of Katrina’s evacuees. As characters dealt with the loss of their homes through disaster, whether natural or humanly-caused, would the same elements hold such vital importance—family, friends, treasured mementos? Would their schools, houses, and hometowns be sorely missed? Would new ones be able to provide a sense of comfort and security? Would their words reveal the same importance of that vague notion of the “feel” of home? Or would I find entirely new elements central to making a place home for them? Through this research, my aim was to provide insight into the complex nature of the concept of home by attending to such questions, examining the
ways in which characters in young adult novels grappled with the loss and rebuilding of home in the face of natural or humanly-caused disasters.

**Significance of Home**

Weeks after Hurricane Katrina devastated the homes and lives of thousands, South Louisiana was struck again by Hurricane Rita. The next few years brought Hurricanes Ike and Gustav. Tsunamis, earthquakes, volcanoes, tornadoes, floods, droughts, wars—all appear with regularity in news stories, and behind each headline are individuals whose homes have been destroyed, whose lives have been uprooted. The literature about home that will be reviewed in the following chapter indicates human beings’ inherent need for a safe space to call their own, and whether global catastrophes are increasing in frequency or are simply more effectively publicized than they once were, it seems that more and more people are left to struggle with the loss of home to disaster. The concept of home has piqued the interest of scholars and critics in wide-ranging fields—psychiatry, the social sciences, the physical sciences, literary studies—indicating its cross-disciplinary nature and fundamental appeal. In the following chapter, I examine this literature on home, elucidating its contribution to an understanding of the complexity of the concept. Having seen the impact of home’s loss to disaster on my own students, I am led by my interest in young adult novels to wonder what such literature reflects about home, how novels represent adolescents who deal with the loss and rebuilding of home in the wake of disaster; it is that which I examine in the course of this study.

**Research Questions**

In this study, I examine the concept of home in young adult literature by addressing the following questions.
• In what ways is home experienced by literary characters who face its loss or damage due to natural or humanly-caused disaster? What do characters’ words and actions reveal about the nature of home for them?
  o How is home discussed?
  o How is home remembered?
  o How is home imagined?
  o How is home rebuilt or reestablished?

• How do all these experiences of home inform an understanding of the concept of home itself?
Chapter 2 – Literature Review

The literature on home is as varied and multi-faceted as the concept itself. The seemingly universal appeal of the idea of home is evidenced by the range of fields in which it has been studied: literary analysis (Dovey, 1985; Gamble, 2006; Harris, 2002; Marroum, 2008; Seamon, 1985), history (Read, 1996), psychiatry (Dugan, 2007; Fullilove, 2004), ethnography (Kraszewski, 2008), geography (Relph, 1985; Terkenli, 1995), psychology (Korosec-Serfaty, 1985), race and gender studies (hooks, 1990), and sociology (Breytenbach, 1993; Douglas, 1991; Erikson, 1994; Hareven, 1993; Hobsbawn, 1993; Mack, 1993; Rykwert, 1993). Literary critics have examined notions of homelessness (Harris, 2002), exile (Marroum, 2008), and migration (Seamon, 1985); social scientists have delved into the experience of disaster (Erikson, 1994; Read, 1996) and displacement (Fullilove, 2004; Kraszewski, 2008); and geographers have explored issues of attachment to place (Relph, 1985; Terkenli, 1995). Reading the work of such a range of scholars about home, I was struck by the repetition of themes that occurred across the disciplines, themes that at times resonated with the words of Katrina’s displaced students and also added new or altered perspectives. Because of the cross-disciplinary nature of the themes that emerged (See Appendix A.), I have chosen to organize my review of the literature according to these recurring themes, rather than organizing it in the traditional way, by disciplines. By doing so, I seek to discover in an integrated way the literature’s contribution to an understanding of the concept of home.

Home Is a Complex and Multi-faceted Concept

The experiences of students displaced by Hurricane Katrina revealed that home is a complex phenomenon, calling to mind sights, sounds, smells, feelings, memories, and more.
Home is indeed an “intangible and difficult concept” (Dovey, 1985, p. 33) with many facets. Hollander asserted that “there is no word so loaded as ‘home’ in the Romance languages” (1993, p. 38), and Trachtenberg likewise noted the “multiplicity of forms and ideas which have woven themselves into the word” (1993, p. 212). The Oxford English Dictionary (Simpson & Weiner, 1989) devoted five full pages to the word home, with definitions encompassing such elements as dwelling-place, family, seat of domestic life, place of belonging, habitual living, and center of affection, refuge, and satisfaction (p. 322).

Gamble characterized home as a “multi-layered, complicated, and contradictory” concept (2006, p. 282), while Marroum described it as the intersection of “the communal and the individual, the geographical/physical, and the emotional” (2008, p. 505). In Hikayat Zahra, author Hanan al-Shaykh’s protagonist characterized a homeland as being composed of four elements:

First and foremost, a homeland is a geographical location, an actual concrete place that he relates to in a sensory…manner. It is a land that he can touch with his face when he kneels down, taste its sand, and even embrace its trees. Second, the homeland is the sum of the people who live on that land and nowhere else—such as the neighbor, the butcher, the grocer, the bus driver, those one meets daily and occasionally, including those whose names are not known. Third, the homeland is also constituted by the present, the past, the routine that is lived on that land and that is real only on that land. Fourth, the homeland is the sum of small objects that he leaves behind on that land, such as the pots of basil behind his father’s shed in the south, and magazines. (in Marroum, 2008, p. 505, emphasis added)

In this description we see elements of geography, of community, of time and history—a multifaceted understanding of what makes a place a home.

Seamon explored Heidegger’s concept of dwelling as a means of being-at-home, noting that dwelling “involves a lifestyle of regularity, repetition and cyclicity all grounded in an atmosphere of care and concern for places, things, and people” (1985, p. 227)—a concept which involves varied facets of human existence, from the temporal to the geographic, from the social
to the emotional. Read (1996) made note of a number of ways in which individuals conceptualize home:

To some, home is a comfortingly bounded enclosed space, defining an ‘other’ who is outside. Others, more socially attuned to their neighbourhood and friends, see ‘home’ not as a place but an area, formed out of a particular set of social relations which happen to intersect at the particular location known as ‘home’. ‘Home’ can be a focus of memory, a building, a way of mentally enclosing people of great importance, a reference point for widening circles of significant people and places and a means of protecting valued objects. (p. 102)

Home is situational, it is personal, its description can be somewhat elusive and can never be accomplished with finality.

**Home Is Revealed through Its Absence**

In the late 17th century, the term *nostalgia* came into being to identify “an organic disease of lethal consequences among…exiles caused by a separation from their native land” (Marroum, 2008, p. 497). Based on the Greek *nostos* (“return home”) and *algia* (pain, longing, or sickness), nostalgia was more than our current understanding of homesickness. It was indeed an illness that could lead to crisis, dysfunction, and even death. Albrecht (2006) cited the current reality of displaced Indigenous peoples across the globe who suffer from “disproportionately high rates” of social crisis—illness of body and mind, alcoholism and substance abuse, rampant crime—as modern-day manifestations of the harmful effects of being forcibly separated from one’s homeland (p. 34).

Separation from one’s homeland can also be an impetus for contemplation of the significance of that place. Home is a notion that is frequently only reflected upon when it is lost or threatened. In his exploration of home regions, geographer Terkenli (1995) asserted that “home is best discovered from a distance, whether physical, social, cultural, or historical” (p. 331). He noted that “with distance from home a person is temporarily or permanently
dissociated from it and becomes both more conscious of its role in life and increasingly 
appreciative of its inherent qualities as well as its contribution to personal sustenance and 
psychological well-being” (p. 328). When life goes as planned and home is reliably there at 
day’s end, it is easy to take for granted. When home is lost or unreachable, however, its 
importance becomes painfully obvious. Relph (1976) asserted that the depth of our associations 
with home “become[s] apparent only in times of loss and hardship” (p. 40). Kraszewski 
contended that “the idea of home…matters to people who have an affective attachment to a place 
where they can no longer live” (2008, p. 155), and Read asserted that “the loss of a loved place 
sharpens perceptions of what is most valuable” (1996, p. 102). Read’s historical analysis² of 
“migrations away from dying homes, streets, neighbourhoods, suburbs, towns, cities, and 
countries—and the return journeys to the empty spaces where once they were” (p. vii) revealed 
that people often do not recognize the depth of their feelings until home is lost to them and they 
are faced with recreating it elsewhere.

Because home is the intangible and elusive concept that she claimed it to be, Dovey 
maintained that its “qualities are often only identified when they are lost” (1985, p. 56). Being 
away from home gives individuals a different perspective from which to view that which is lost, 
a more reflective perspective, one of heightened awareness that provides insight into elements 
that make a place home. Indeed, individuals who have lost their sense of home must grapple 
with its meaning and attempt to “reconcile old and new worlds or suffer the anguish of a present 
severed from past” (Seamon, 1985, p. 239).

² Exploring what he called “returning to nothing” (p. vii), Read (1996) spoke to Australians who lost their homes 
and hometowns to such events as freeway construction, wildfires, cyclones, purposeful flooding for 
dams/hydroelectric power, and expansion of open-cut mines, visiting himself those lost and vanished places.
Home Is Connected to Other People.

An essential element of home revealed in the literature reviewed here, one that resonated with my conversations with Katrina’s displaced students, is the web of interpersonal associations that lead one to feel at home. Gamble described home as a collection of people “who are bound together by genuine affection” (2006, p. 295), and Hollander cited Milton’s Eve as defining home “not as a sheltered or contained place, but as the presence of the only other person” (1993, p. 35). The need for a supportive circle of social relationships is part of our humanity, and in the presence of this social support, we feel a sense of belonging, we feel at home (Terkenli, 1995).

Just who makes up this supportive social network can vary. Hareven (1993) traced an association of home with family in the West (an association also noted by Terkenli, 1995) to the “removal of the workplace from the home as a result of urbanization and industrialization, [leading the] household [to be] recast as the family’s private retreat” (p. 233). As the home became the place where a family gathered at day’s end, the place in which the family’s daily lives unfolded, the very nature of home came to be understood in terms of family. Hareven also cited mill workers who “managed to transform the factories [where they toiled] into a home by clustering at work with their relatives and friends” (p. 251), noting that friends, too were a part of the social component of being at home. Quayson asserted the primacy of the nature and character of relationships a person has in a place, claiming these “feed into the identity of the place in the mind and sensibility of the person” (2005, p. 131).

When home is threatened, damaged, or lost, the web of social bonds can be similarly weakened, enhancing feelings of isolation and “homelessness.” Erikson (1994) described the community of East Swallow in Colorado, under which was found a plume of toxic gasoline leaked from service station tanks:
The apprehension and stress reported by virtually everyone in the neighborhood are a product not only of inner psychological struggles but of the fact that a good part of the immediate social world on which people depend for security and coherence—home, neighborhood, wider community—has been harmed in decisive ways. (p. 102)

Feelings of community and connectedness were disrupted, replaced by isolation and fear. The “loss of a sustaining community” is painful, claimed Erikson, because “It is the community that offers a cushion for pain, the community that offers a context for intimacy, the community that serves as the repository for binding traditions” (p. 234). It is the community, in other words, that makes a place feel like home, and when that sense of community is shattered, with it goes the security of being in a place that is known and trusted.

From the rubble of a lost home, though, can also rise a new sense of community—the phoenix from the ashes of the home that once was. Erikson cited shared memories, a sense of connectedness, family relations, and friendships as “materials to build with” when home must be re-established (1994, p. 235). When home is lost to disaster, neighbors and rescue workers alike often respond with quick action, reassuring “victims that there is still life among the wreckage, and [leading them to] react with an outpouring of communal feeling, an urgent need to make contact with and even touch others by way of renewing old pledges of fellowship” (p. 235). The community that might have been forever destroyed is thus strengthened, and its members, “in a way…, are celebrating their own rebirth” (p. 235).

Fullilove too described communities that experienced the shock of destruction (2004). In a study of the experiences of African Americans whose neighborhoods were destroyed by urban renewal in the second half of the 20th century, she discovered that the loss described by participants was “in a crucial way, the collective loss. It was the loss of a massive web of connections—a way of being—that had been destroyed by urban renewal…” (p. 4). As a means

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People who have endured a shared loss of home, whether through disaster, exile, or even a voluntary change of location, frequently bond together to form a community in their new homes. Erikson noted that such a “source of commonality” could be the basis for a “spiritual kinship, a sense of identity” (1994, p. 231). He quoted a former hostage who related the ease of being with others who shared his experience: “We don’t have to explain things. We carry the same pain” (p. 232). Surviving a disaster or loss of home can lead some individuals “to feel estranged from the rest of humanity and gather into groups with others of like mind, drawn together by a shared set of perspectives and rhythms and moods that derive from the sense of being apart” (p. 240). A shared loss of home can be the basis for the formation of an entire new community, as in the Swedish “Emigrant” novels explored by Seamon (1985). Indeed, in a seven-step process he termed the *dwelling-journey spiral*, Seamon identified as two essential steps “coming together” and “creating community” (p. 228). There was an “interpersonal communal dimension of dwelling” that was created in these novels when more and more Swedes came to the Minnesota valley (p. 236). These individuals, while strangers in their home country,

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4 Examining novels whose protagonists voluntarily left Sweden to resettle in America, Seamon proposed a “seven-stage dwelling-journey spiral” that brought these characters from a position of “existential insideness, a situation of complete and unself-conscious immersion in place” (p. 229) to “existential outsideness, a sense of separation and alienation from their environment” (p. 233) and back again:

1. Lack of dwelling and a decision to go
2. Preparation
3. Journey and arrival (requires the land on which to settle, indicating the geographical component of home)
4. Settling
5. Becoming at home (together with step four, indicating the emotional component of home)
6. Coming together
7. Creating community (together with step six, indicating the social component of home)

The spiral was completed with a final step, “reestablishment of dwelling,” once the characters began to feel at home in their new land (Seamon, 1985, p. 228). Seamon proposed that “in its most general form, the dwelling-journey spiral asks the essential nature of the experience of changing places. [His] argument is that underlying any mode of this experience – migrating, touring, traveling, and so on – are common characteristics” (p. 241).
now had a shared experience on which to build community, and as a result, the valley became home for them.

A unique perspective on the importance of community and connectedness was provided by Kraszewski’s (2008) ethnographic study of the role of sports fandom in creating a sense of home. “Analyzing how displaced fans look to sports teams from their former places of residence as a way to understand ‘home,’” he studied the activities of displaced Pittsburgh Steelers’ fans. Away from their “primordial” home, the displaced Pittsburghers mingled in football bars in Fort Worth despite economic and social differences that would have divided them back home. Their talk centered around a shared love of their team and pointedly did not include any discussion of “class or class status in the [home] region,” for that would have caused home to “[lose] its nostalgic feeling of unity and become a place infested with divisive social tensions” (p. 153). By building community around their shared fandom, these individuals were able to “reconstruct a feeling of home” (p. 141) in new and unfamiliar surroundings.

**Home Is Deeply Connected to Our Identity, Our Understanding of Self**

There is a fundamental link between a place we know as home and our very selves. The experience of living in a place makes its mark on us, helping to shape our identities and the ways in which we view and interact with the wider world. Erikson (1994) described a true home, one “in which a person has made a real personal investment,” as “not simply an expression of one’s taste, [but as] the outer edge of one’s personality, a part of the self itself. And the loss of that

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5 With information gathered from a series of research assignments that arose from legal action on behalf of individuals whose homes were lost or damaged, Erikson presented a sociological look at the effects of disaster. He travelled “to a number of communities still stunned by the effects of a recent disaster,” noting that while “in one respect, at least, these events were altogether different. A flood. An act of larceny. A toxic poisoning. A gasoline spill. A nuclear accident,” in a more profound way, the “scenes of trouble had much in common” (1994, pp. 11-12). The individuals to whom he spoke shared experiences in which homes were threatened, devalued, or destroyed, providing insight into the nature of home, what they missed, and how they moved forward.
part of the self…is akin to the loss of flesh” (p. 117). Time and again in the literature reviewed, individuals who had experienced a loss of home equated it to losing a part of themselves (Dugan, 2007; Erikson, 1994; Fullilove, 2004; Gamble, 2006; Korosec-Serfaty, 1985; Read, 1996).

In his seminal phenomenological study *The Poetics of Space* (1958), Gaston Bachelard noted “the passionate liaison of our bodies, which do not forget, with an unforgettable house” (p. 15). Years after leaving a place, our hands remember the motion of turning a certain difficult doorknob, our noses recall the scent of a particular cupboard, we can close our eyes and see every chip in the paint of a well-loved room. Homes remain a part of us throughout our lives, having made their mark on us just as we shaped and cared for them. Geographical understandings of home—block, neighborhood, town—likewise reside in our very selves: “Try to find the shortcut you used to take to your best friend’s house and it is your feet that will carry you there. The cues from place dive under conscious thought and awaken our sinews and bones, where days of our lives have been recorded” (Fullilove, 2004, p. 10). Gamble (2006) likened home to “our second skin, ‘housing’ not just the actions of our everyday lives, but also our very understanding of who we are” (p. 277). As our bodily skin houses our physical selves, so the home with which we feel connected—whether house, neighborhood, city, or nation—houses our psychical selves, shaping our identity and personality, affecting the ways in which we speak, think, and relate to others.

Dovey (1985) asserted that we “draw our identity from that of the place” we call home (p. 41), noting that a primary means of “establishing who we are [is] by [establishing] where we have come from” (p. 42). Relph noted the tendency “to identify with and to feel oneself in a clear relationship with a region…. [Being] a Southerner or a New Englander… [means] more than being from a particular region – [it implies] something about speech and personality” (1985, p. 22)—it implies something about our very selves. Perhaps the strongest statement of the
connection between home and identity was that of French philosopher Gabriel Marcel, who claimed that “an individual is not distinct from his place, he is that place” (in Relph, 1976, p. 43). Noddings (2003) similarly characterized homes as “extensions of our bodies and selves” (p. 116), as our personalities and identities reach beyond our bodily boundaries to impact the places we inhabit just as those places impact us.

Homes can so shape our identities that when they are lost, we too are set adrift, unsure of who we are in a new place, feeling like we are living someone else’s life. Gamble (2006) examined domesticity in the novels of Angela Carter, noting that with a shift in location came a shift in self: Carter’s protagonist found “herself hard to recognize in these new surroundings, [feeling like] a stranger, so alien, and somehow so insecure in her own personality” (p. 281). In unfamiliar territory, attempting to regain a sense of identity that was closely tied to home can be akin to “rummaging in the dressing-up box of the heart for suitable appearances to adopt” (Carter’s *Fireworks*, 63, in Gamble, 2006, p. 285). Exploring phenomenologically the ways in which burglary transformed homes into unsafe spaces, Korosec-Serfaty (1985) described the experience of being separated from home as “a rupture with oneself, and any ‘going-home-again’” as a return to the self. She characterized home as “this sum… of stability and of continuity that every being needs in order to weave the links between identity and essence constantly. After wandering, [home] is the place where one experiences the return to unity with oneself” (p. 70).

Dugan (2007)\(^6\) described her experience leaving New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina as a loss of identity, a leaving behind of a “sense of knowing who I am in relationship to

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\(^6\) Dugan, a nursing student from New Orleans, reflected on her experience during and after Hurricane Katrina, focusing on the effect of her permanent relocation to San Antonio on her sense of identity (2007). Presented in a psychiatric care journal, her essay provided insight into the emotional impact of losing her home and taking up residence elsewhere, and of experiencing the loss and destruction that Katrina brought to her region. Written almost
my surroundings” (p. 41). She referred to the work of Eisenbruch, who claimed that when “an entire culture is wiped out due to a natural disaster, an individual may experience a loss of identity” (in Dugan, 2007, p. 41), and noted that almost six months after the storm, she continued to feel as if she was not living her own life: “[It] just feels like my former self in another world is still carrying on without me” (p. 45). Without her home, she felt that she was not herself, for all that was her home was a part of her very self as well.

In thinking of home as a geographical region, Terkenli (1995) noted that “representations of home become representations of the self” (p. 327). Often home regions have representative symbols that are so well-known that the sight of them immediately calls to mind the neighborhood, the city, the state, the nation with which they are associated. Think of the immigrant to a new country who carries the flag of his or her homeland, or the fleur-de-lis that is associated with New Orleans and can be found on cars, clothing, and even tattooed on skin in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. When we feel intimately connected with home, its symbols often become symbols of ourselves, whether we are ensconced within its borders or far away.

“Home is where one starts from.”
- T.S. Eliot (in Read, 1996, p. 102)

Connected as we are to the space we know as home, shaped by it, formed by its influences, home becomes the center from which we experience the rest of the world (Hareven, 1993; Relph, 1976; Rykwert, 1993). Rykwert described home as “the centrifugal hearth, the fire burning at the center of my awareness” (1993, p. 50). It is the site from which we come, the source of ourselves, our place of origin (Dovey, 1985; Erikson, 1994; Gamble, 2006; half a year after the storm forced her displacement, the article revealed that losing home is indeed a deeply traumatic experience: “How do you say goodbye to a home? I still do not know” (p. 45).
Hobsbawm, 1993; Hollander, 1993; Kraszewski, 2008; Rykwert, 1993; Terkenli, 1995). It is an anchor, allowing us to know that, wherever we are, we have a space in the world that is ours, and we are “its” as well. Simone Weil asserted that “to be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul” (1952, p. 43). Rootedness, a sense of belonging, described by Terkenli as a “state of mind or being in which a person’s whole life and pursuits are centered around a broadly defined home,” can “enlarge personal being by making individuals aware of their own identity through an expanded appreciation of local customs and traditions and of the possibilities that arise from extending their life circumstances to the past and to the future” (Terkenli, 1995, p. 330). Robinson too, in a phenomenological examination of the experiences of homeless youth, asserted the importance of putting down roots, of feeling at home “in terms of a sense of experiencing connectedness to physical place and community” (2005, p. 52). Robert Coles noted that

it is utterly part of our nature to want roots, to need roots, to struggle for roots, for a sense of belonging, for some place that is recognized as mine, as yours, as ours. Nations, regions, states, counties, cities, towns—all of them have to do with politics and geography and history; but they are more than that, for they somehow reflect man’s humanity, his need to stay someplace…. (in Relph, 1976, p. 38)

Rootedness allows us to venture out confidently into the world, knowing that there is a safe haven to which we can return, a place we know and where we are known, to rest and refresh ourselves before setting out again into the unfamiliar (Dovey, 1985; Relph, 1976; Terkenli, 1995). bell hooks (1990) similarly spoke of the homeplace in African American society as “that space where we return for renewal and self-recovery, where we heal our wounds and become whole” (p.49)—a characterization that can apply regardless of the race or gender of residents who seek from their homes a place to heal the hurt inflicted by others outside the home (Hareven, 1993; Terkenli, 1995). Eric Dardel related the geographical concept of place to the
notion of home, “a base to set down our Being and to realize our possibilities, a here from which to discover the world, a there to which we can return” (in Relph, 1985, p. 27).

This place of origin was characterized as the home not only to which we do periodically return, but more importantly as the place to which we ultimately long to return. As it was for Homer’s Odysseus, “all human endeavor,” according to Gamble, “is, at root, a journey back towards the source of being, towards the one place where you can truly belong” (2006, p. 282). Hollander likewise described home as the “human point of ultimate return” (1993, p. 29). Popular usage labels death as a “going home,” indeed a final point of return. In life as well, though, home can be thought of as the site to which we ultimately long to return, regardless of where our journeys take us, even if this return is only in memory. The “place from which we set out,” wrote Hobsbawm, is the place “to which we return, at least in spirit” (1993, p. 61). The protagonist of a series of novels in which Swedish immigrants resettled in America coped with his wife’s death years after their move by returning in memory to the comfort of Sweden, tracing his fingers over and over again across the map of his homeland, picturing himself there in his younger days (Seamon, 1985).

Even if there is no desire to return physically to the place of origin, we can still feel a connection to the location that makes itself manifest in our lives elsewhere. Hareven (1993) described immigrants from French Canada who brought with them paintings of their Quebec farm houses, displaying them prominently in their New England tenement homes. He noted that “even though they had no desire to go back to the poverty on the farm which they had left behind, they hung these portraits…as a reminder of their ‘real home’” (p. 257). If home is our system of roots, our anchor, it is always there with us, no matter the distance we travel, and a part of us is always connected to it.
Just as our homes contribute to the formation of our personal identities, we transform a place into a home by making our mark upon it. This reciprocal practice of appropriation was described by Heidegger as a “process through which we take aspects of our world into our being and are in turn taken by our world” (in Dovey, 1985, pp. 47-48). Such becoming-at-home is an active endeavor, different from what Dovey calls “being-at-home, [which] is unself-conscious and taken for granted” (pp. 46-47). (The emotional state of being at home is explored further below in the discussion of home as an emotion-based concept.) Hanging a portrait of a former homestead in a new house, decorating “shabby and crowded dwellings” with photographs and vases of flowers, attending to the aesthetics of a place rather than simply its functionality—these are transformative actions that give “an air of home likeness to [a] place” (Hareven, 1993, p. 254).

Home Is Connected to History

Hollander (1993) related a story told to him of an instructor from China who encountered in the United States a real estate sign reading, “Homes for Sale”: “‘Homes for Sale? How can you buy or sell a home? Home is [and he groped for the formulation]…memories’” (p. 37). The literature on home was resplendent with evidence of the importance of time spent in a place that is known as home (Dovey, 1985; Erikson, 1994; Fullilove, 2004; Hobsbawm, 1993; Hollander, 1993; Korosec-Serfaty, 1985; Marroum, 2008; Read, 1996; Relph, 1976; Relph, 1985; Seamon, 1985; Terkenli, 1995). Exploring phenomenologically the differences between the concepts of house and home, Dovey described home as “an experience of complete insideness that can only develop over time” (p. 37) and as a “relationship that is created and evolved over time” (p. 54). Geographer Relph noted that “places…are constructed in our memories and affections through repeated encounters…. Place experiences are necessarily time-deepened and memory-qualified”
Korosec-Serfaty wrote of historicity, “the time component in [our] relationship with the world through personal perceptions, memories, anticipations” (p. 68).

As we live our lives in a place, we create a storehouse of memories and associations that can enhance our feeling of being at home. Rooms become more than just walls that contain furniture; they become the sites of the events of our lives—the hall where a baby took her first steps, the den where best friends gathered every Friday night, the kitchen where a family created holiday meals together. With the living that goes on in a place that is home, Fullilove asserted that the place “becomes imbued with sounds, smells, noises, and feelings of those moments and how we lived them” (2004, p. 10). When we think of homes of our childhood or homes we have lost, when we return to a place that was once home to us, our thoughts often center around the events that happened there, the memories, the experiences (Hobsbawm, 1993; Marroum, 2008; Read, 1996; Relph, 1976; Seamon, 1985). Read spoke with an Australian woman who described the role of time in developing a sense of being at home:

> I think it’s important for people to have places that they feel like they’ve trod, often and all the time….you feel like this place is, because you’ve put so much of yourself into it or walked over it so many times it’s going to protect you rather than fight against you. (p. 6)

And Dovey (1985) discussed Steinbeck’s *Cannery Row*, in which a group of homeless men transformed an old warehouse from a simple shelter from the elements into a home: “Their feelings for the place grew with time, with familiarity, with sustained shelter...” (p. 49). The actions of their inhabitation made the warehouse into a “center of security, of shelter, of warmth. It gained meaning through time and activity, through familiarity and through their joint efforts” (p. 50).

A sense of home also develops over time as a result of the comfort of routine, knowing what to expect. Terkenli (1995) contended that home, besides being a physical location, also
“connotes…habitual conditions” (p. 325). When we have established patterns of behavior or repetition of events, “these patterns become part of home because they represent recurrent, familiar points of reference in time, space, and society. Repetition is an essential element in the transformation of place into home” (p. 326). Likewise, according to Dovey, “The home environment is predictable. Although when we are away from home we need to be alert and adaptable, at home we can relax within the stability of routine behavior and experience” (1985, p. 37). We know what to expect at home, for we have created its routines and patterns, and we know them intimately and often without conscious thought.

Those who are displaced frequently look to these historical elements of home to help recreate a sense of home in a new place. Immigrants bring customs from their native lands to new countries, and photographs and family heirlooms are given places of honor in a house, regardless of material value, because of the memories they call to mind (Gamble, 2006; Hareven, 1993; Seamon, 1985). Among the most poignant examples of the preservation of historical links to lost homes were stories recounted by Read (1996), who spent time with Australians who had lost home places to mining development, intentional flooding, and bushfires. Residents of Yallourn, a town demolished to expand mining interests, bought materials such as lumber from the high school building and bricks from the town square to use in rebuilding elsewhere. One such resident, Bernadette McLaughlin, was not sure exactly which building her bricks came from, but what mattered was that they were Yallourn bricks: “The buildings were part of [my] life” (p. 91). Other residents “bought their houses and re-erected them elsewhere, or hunted for them in nearby towns and photographed them. They dug out plants, they souvenired bits of their houses and the public buildings…” (p. 99). One Yallourn man chose Canberra as his new home partially because “Canberra’s planned streets and autumn leaves remind him of Yallourn” (p. 99). In the wreckage of a home destroyed by bushfire, another of Read’s participants discovered
a decorative plate which had hung in her last two homes. After a thorough cleaning, she hung the plate in her new bathroom and designed the entire tilework of the room around it, noting that “there’s a pattern, a continuity, a symmetry about that” (p. 113).

**Home Is Connected to Geography**

Any of us who has ever traveled away from home has in all likelihood been asked, “Where are you from?” The question is never “who are you from,” or “what are you from,” but *where*. At its most basically understood level, home is a geographical location, a spot on the globe which we can identify as ours. As described by one character in Marroum’s (2008) study of literature of exile, home “is a land that he can touch with his face when he kneels down, taste its sand, and even embrace its trees” (p. 505). Erikson described what he termed the “geography of self”:

> People need location almost as much as they need shelter, for a sense of place is one of the ways they connect to the larger human community. You cannot have a neighbor (or be one) unless you are situated yourself. You cannot be counted a townsperson unless you have an address. You cannot be a member unless you are grounded somewhere in communal space. (1994, p. 159)

Having an identifiable geographical home orients us in the world; it allows us to develop the sense of community with others from our region that was discussed above (Dovey, 1985; Erikson, 1994).

Eric Dardel explored a concept he called *géographicité*, or geographical experience, which “refers to the entire realm of feelings, acts and experiences of individuals in which they apprehend themselves in a distinct relationship with their environment” (in Relph, 1985, p. 20). These are the “ties of region, landscape, space and place that link people to the earth” (Relph, 1985, p. 17). Geographical experience involves much more than geography, taking in all the complexity of our human relationship to the places we know and love, but it is ultimately an
experience that is dependent upon place. All the events of our lives have a physical context, an environment in which they take place, and our relationship with these environments constitutes a part of what Heidegger termed our “being-in-the-world,” the “basic state of human existence” (in Relph, 1985, p. 17).

Hollander posited that there was “a series of radiating circles of hominess,” of which a specific house known as home was but one component (1993, p. 33). Home can be understood in increments—with the self as the ultimate home, the center of our own awareness, we move in concentric circles to the house we know as home, the neighborhood in which that house is situated, the city of which that neighborhood is a part, the state or nation to which that city belongs. Dardel likewise proposed that “the world is structured into regions of lived-meaning around the place where one lives” (in Relph, 1985, p. 22). The farther we go geographically from our place of origin, claimed Terkenli, the broader our concept of home will likely become. Whereas a man who has never traveled from the city of his birth might answer the question “Where are you from?” by identifying the location of his house, a woman in exile from her home country, or a traveler to a new continent, would likely respond with the name of the nation from which she hails (Hobsbawm, 1993; Terkenli, 1995).

Our sensual experience of places that are home is central to our connection with those locales. Reflecting on the home she lost to Katrina, Dugan noted that she missed the smell of the morning I knew so well in New Orleans. I miss the sounds that woke me each morning. I miss the food I grew up on. I miss the familiar faces, the architecture that speaks like no other; I miss the history of my city. I even miss what I hated. (2007, p. 45)

Quayson was reminded of the home from which he was exiled by “the smell of rain in the West,” the sight of “snow falling through a window,” the “smells of food” from his homeland (2005, p. 133). Marroum (2008) noted the pang that can come from the accents of travelers passing by
whose voices have the sound of home, and the reaction we can have to photographs that resemble our part of the world. In his examination of displaced Pittsburgh Steelers’ fans, Kraszewski (2008) noted the comfort of foods and beverage brands from Pittsburgh, and the use of regional language not used in everyday life in their new city. He described how gaining membership into a group of Steelers’ fans in Fort Worth, Texas, required a discussion of the part of Pittsburgh from which one hailed, noting parks, roads, and towns in the Pittsburgh area.

**Home Is an Emotion-based Concept**

Perhaps more strongly than any of its other revelations, a review of the literature on home made clear that home is an emotion-laden concept. Kraszewski characterized home as an idea that “powerfully attaches human emotions to a place,” noting that “these attachments are particularly important to people displaced from regions that they cherish” (2008, p. 141), such as the Pittsburghers he studied in Fort Worth. Dovey (1985) called home “an emotionally based and meaningful relationship between dwellers and their dwelling places” (pp. 33-34). Read (1996) quoted Margaret Johnson, who reflected on moving from the home property where she had lived her entire married life, raised her children, and spent time with her grandchildren, as being “in love with ‘the feeling of the place’” and having a “real physical tie to the land, a feeling that is part of your spirit that’s divorced from all arguments of logic and reason and behaviour” (p. 2). In popular sentiment, we describe home as “where the heart is,” and we speak of “feeling at home.” We have feelings for the places that are home to us, we feel certain ways when we are there, and we feel differently when we are away or when our homes are threatened.

In her psychological study of the effects of urban renewal, Fullilove (2004) defined a concept she called *root shock*, “the traumatic stress reaction to the destruction of all or part of one’s emotional ecosystem” (p. 11). Root shock threatens the ability to function normally, as the
loss of the home environment plunges residents into a state of emotional shock similar to the
physical shock of bodily injury. Also like a physical injury, “the experience of root shock…does
not end with emergency treatment, but will stay with the individual for a lifetime” (p. 12). She
further described the lasting emotional consequences of root shock:

Root shock, at the level of the individual, is a profound emotional upheaval that destroys
the working model of the world that had existed in the individual’s head. Root shock
undermines trust, increases anxiety about letting loved ones out of one’s sight,
destabilizes relationships, destroys social, emotional, and financial resources, and
increases the risk for every kind of stress-related disease, from depression to heart attack.
Root shock leaves people chronically cranky, barking a distinctive croaky complaint that
their world was abruptly taken away. (p. 14)

This tendency toward mental and physical health problems associated with loss of home was also
noted by Cutter, Emrich, Mitchell, Boruff, Gall, Schmidtlein, Burlon, and Melton (2006) in their
exploration of regions impacted by natural disaster. Albrecht (2006) described a phenomenon he
termed solastalgia: a sense of emotional distress, pain, or sickness “caused by the loss of, or
inability to derive solace from, the present state of one’s home environment” (p. 35). Bridging
the notion of nostalgia to contemporary experiences of individuals whose homes are “radically
transformed” by disaster, Albrecht noted the “place-based distress” that can occur when what
once was home suddenly becomes a dangerous, altered landscape (p. 35). Homes transformed
by war or natural disaster into dangerous or unrecognizable locations, he contended, become
places that do not provide the emotional support one normally associates with home, causing a
longing for a return to the emotional safety that home should be, a homesickness that belies the
fact that one is still physically in the place that was home.

In an attempt to distinguish between house and home, Dovey asserted:

love can elevate any place…into a home. People who are thoroughly immersed in an
activity that they love can convey a sense of home to that place. Thus home may be the
relationship between…a pianist and a piano, a cook and a kitchen, a gardener and a
garden, a sportsperson and a playing field…. [T]he place is elevated into a home by
virtue of allowing such homelike activities to take place. (1985, p. 39)
An emotional connectedness between dweller and dwelling place transforms an ordinary location into a place that is home.

When home places are lost, damaged, or threatened, we often react emotionally. Erikson (1994) described individuals’ “grieving for lost homes” (p. 118) and experiencing “panic and fear” in the wake of a loss of home (p. 174). Read (1996) wrote of “feelings of despair” (p. 15), of a “longing to be back” (p. 107), and of “crying for that loved one, that old house” (p. 20). Robinson characterized displacement as a “deep psychological and emotional state” (2005, p. 53). Psychologist Marc Fried reported that Bostonians forced from their neighborhoods experienced “grief, [a] sense of painful loss, continued longing, depression, helplessness, [and] direct and displaced anger” (in Read, 1996, p. 21). One Yallourn resident who lost her home to mining expansion continued to return to the site even after all the debris of her former homestead had been cleared away because she “just wanted to be there,” because the “ritual of returning…answered a psychological need” (Read, 1996, p. 113). According to Raphael (1986), most evacuees will indeed return to their homes after disasters, for emotional “attachment to place and home is very powerful, even if it is a place of risk” (p. 131). Marroum (2008) described a character who was drawn to return to her home country because of “an emotional pull” (p. 495), and a Swedish immigrant character examined by Seamon (1985) experienced “a homesickness and inner turmoil” in her new residence in Minnesota (p. 235), as her process of “becoming at home”—one step in the dwelling-journey spiral—called for “inner, psychological changes” (p. 234):

Here [Minnesota] was away for Kristina – Sweden was home. It ought to be just the opposite: the two places should change position. She had moved, but she could not make the two countries move, the countries lay where they had laid before – one had always to her been away, the other would always remain home. And she knew for sure now, she had to admit it to herself: in her heart she felt she was still on a journey: she had gone away but hoped one day to return. (Moberg, quoted in Seamon, 1985, p. 235)
If a loss of home engenders these sentimental reactions, a sense of *being at home* is likewise infused with emotion. There is a feeling of *comfort* at home (Albrecht, 2006; Erikson, 1994; hooks, 1990; Mack, 1993; Marroum, 2008; Seamon, 1985), a sense of *belonging or fitting in* (Breytenbach, 1993; Hollander, 1993; Marroum, 2008; McCredden, 2007; Read, 1996). Home is where we are accepted and allowed simply to be, for we belong to the places that are home just as they belong to us. Poet Robert Frost described home as “the place where, when you have to go there, / They have to take you in” (in Hollander, 1993, p. 27).

Home is too a place where we can feel *sheltered, safe and secure* (Albrecht, 2006; Dovey, 1985; Erikson 1994; Gamble, 2006; Hareven, 1993; Harris, 2002; Heidegger, 1971; hooks, 1990; Mack, 1993; Relph, 1976; Robinson, 2005; Terkenli, 1995; Trachtenberg, 1993). William M. Thayer quoted a clergyman who described home as a “safe and alluring shelter…amid the vicissitudes of life” (in Hareven, 1993, p. 237). It is a refuge or haven from the rest of the world, walls that protect us and keep us safe within from the dangers that swirl without. Vycinas characterized home as “a refuge in the world, a cozy, warm place in juxtaposition to its immense, unknown surroundings, where people may regenerate themselves” (as cited in Terkenli, 1995, p. 331). Home is a secure spot from which we may experience the rest of the world, feeling anchored by the roots we have established so that we can venture out, knowing that we have a safe place to which to return.

Erikson contended the following:

*It is hard to think of a more basic tenet of the American way—and maybe even especially for those who come from small towns and farms, as the majority of [the people to whom he spoke] do—than that individuals should be independent and self-reliant, free to chart their own lives, to take care of their own families, and to command the spaces they earn title to.* (1994, p. 112)

Having a home that is ours inspires a feeling of *independence*, a sense of *power* and *autonomy* (Dovey, 1985; Erikson, 1994). This autonomy allows us to take charge of our own destiny, to
shape the direction our lives will take, and it is strengthened by the knowledge that there is a place that is ours. There is an emotional security that comes from having a place to call one’s own, a sense of freedom from dependence on others and of being in control within that space.

**Conclusion**

This review of the literature on home offers insights into the concept’s multi-layered meanings for scholars and critics in wide-ranging fields who have examined it. From the social sciences to the physical sciences, from psychiatry to literary studies, notions of home have inspired reflection and analysis. Despite differences of perspective in this body of literature, similar themes were clear—home’s multifaceted nature, the emergence of home’s import in times of loss, and home’s connection to elements of community, self, history, geography, and emotion. By attending to aspects of home that these varied analyses revealed, I sought to elucidate the literature’s contribution to an understanding of the phenomenon of home itself. In the next chapter, I describe the methods I used to examine literary representations of home and its upheaval in the wake of disaster in order to add insight into the nature of home for those who faced its damage or loss.
Chapter 3 – Method of Investigation

“Knowledge is the grasp of an object that is simultaneously gripping us.”
- Husserl (in Magliola, 1977, p. 17)

Having been “gripped” by the notion of home, I aim to use the lens of phenomenology to examine representations of this concept as revealed in the experiences of characters in young adult literature.

Overview of Phenomenology

When I was first introduced to the field of phenomenology several years ago, one phrase stood out to me as its central goal, a phrase which resonated deeply and has remained with me ever since: *mining the essence of lived experience* (van Manen, 1990). What is it about a concept or phenomenon that makes it what it is? What is essential to it? Despite the differences in the details of its manifestations, what is at the core of its identity? These questions intrigued me then and continue to fascinate me now, and by applying them to the concept of home, I sought to contribute to a deeper understanding of its fullness and complexity. This goal was uniquely suited for a phenomenological analysis, as Creswell (2007) indentified the kinds of problems best examined phenomenologically as those “in which it is important to understand several individuals’ common or shared experiences of a phenomenon…in order to develop…a deeper understanding about the features of the phenomenon” (p. 60). Given the “intangible nature of the concept in question,” I sought, as Dovey did, to “deepen [my] understanding of an intrinsically intangible phenomenon” (1985, pp. 34-35).

Phenomenology has been defined as “a reasoned inquiry which discovers the inherent essences” of phenomena (Stewart and Mickunas, 1990, p. 3), and as the “descriptive study of lived experience (phenomena) in the attempt to enrich lived experience by mining its meaning”
Heidegger’s interpretation of its etymology reveals its purpose: *phenomenon*—something which “shows itself in itself”—plus the Greek *logos*—understood here as speech, “a specific mode of letting something be seen” (in Magliola, 1977, p. 62). Thus the goal of phenomenological inquiry is to examine the phenomena of which we are conscious in such a way as to see them more clearly, to uncover their true nature, in order to deepen our human experience and help us make meaning in our lives. One must look at the phenomenon from many viewpoints, consider it in its many unique manifestations, in order to begin to understand the fullness of its meaning. To use the tools of phenomenology is to “methodologically, carefully, and thoroughly [capture] and [describe] how people experience some phenomenon—how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others” (Patton, 2002, p. 104). This requires deep reflection on experiences, perceptions, memories, expectations, and imaginings of the phenomenon (Stewart and Mickunas, 1990) in a quest to find its essential underlying nature and meaning for those who have lived it.

A key assumption of phenomenology is that consciousness only exists in terms of being conscious of something, that consciousness is always directed toward that of which it is conscious. As a result, the concern of the phenomenologist is not to determine the *reality* of the world itself, but rather to uncover the *meaning* of that world for the human beings who experience it (Creswell, 2007; Stewart and Mickunas, 1990). To uncover this meaning, according to Husserl, is to reveal the essence of the phenomenon under investigation. This essence does not exist independent of our human experience of it; rather, it is revealed only through our experiences, our consciousness, so that a deep understanding can only be gained through attending to the ways in which the phenomena are experienced by people in the world.
Our human experience of any phenomenon is laden with emotion, as is our very existence. Accordingly, Heidegger stressed the importance of “emotion-consciousness” as opposed to “intellect-consciousness,” acknowledging the overwhelming role of emotion in our perceptions and realities as human beings, and thus in the consciousness we have of the phenomena we experience (in Magliola, 1977, p. 5). Willis identified the key subject of phenomenological inquiry as our human perceptions of the world we experience, perceptions that are first experienced emotionally:

We simply feel inwardly in certain ways about the external world we perceive before we can consider what our feelings mean or before we can consciously attempt to change anything. These personal and inwardly perceptual portions of individual life-worlds are where our distinctively human experience begins. Everything flows from them…. They are what phenomenological inquiry investigates. (1991, p. 175, emphasis added)

It is impossible to understand the nature of any human experience from a detached intellectual viewpoint; we must “feel our way forward to the essence….” (Heidegger quoted in Gordon and Gordon, 2006, p. 13). A concept’s complexity can never be grasped in something as simple and cold as a definition, but must be felt and explored as experienced in order to be understood. Nor can a phenomenon be fully comprehended without taking into account the context in which it is experienced by an individual. The key question is not What is this phenomenon?, but rather “what is the nature of the phenomenon as meaningfully experienced?” (van Manen, 1990, p. 40, emphasis added). Through careful examination of lived experiences of the phenomenon, one can gain insight into its meaning for those who experience it.

Examining the Phenomenon of Home in Young Adult Literature: Novels as Representation of the Lived Experience of Phenomena

To develop an understanding of the complex nature of a phenomenon, researchers must both reflect upon their own experiences of the phenomenon (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990) and
examine empirically the experiences of others. The philosophical tradition of phenomenology relied exclusively on the transcendental examination of one’s own experiences of phenomena, positing that “there is no need to inquire about life-worlds of others; indeed, such inquiry would be futile, since one cannot experience another person’s life-world” (Willis, 1991, p. 177). Van Manen, however, put forth an approach to phenomenology that broadened the understanding of the data that is appropriate for such an analysis. Despite criticisms of his approach to phenomenology (discussed below), Willis credited van Manen’s methodology as making a vital contribution to curriculum studies in

its affirmation that one’s own life-world can be known within the common sense world of everyday experience, for this affirmation opens the way for consideration of descriptions of the life-worlds of others…. Thus, any and all sources of descriptions of the perceptual portions of the life-worlds of others which can be encountered empirically are potentially valuable; one does not need to confine inquiry only to one’s own primary experience. Although the life-worlds of others cannot be known directly, one can still make reasoned inferences about them from whatever empirical evidence is at hand. (Willis, 1991, p. 181)

We can indeed find windows into the life-worlds of others, and through these windows we can learn much about the ways in which they experience a phenomenon. Such windows, the empirical evidence available for phenomenological evaluation, may come in many forms—observations, interviews, artwork, diaries, and, of primary importance here, novels.

Heidegger equated the quest of art with the search for understanding and discovery of the essences which lie at the heart of our being (Magliola, 1977). He described his own work with texts as a process of bringing forth the truths hidden within them (Gordon and Gordon, 2006). Holman characterized the artist as a “shaman, a myth-maker, speaking out of his unconscious a primordial truth” (in Scott, 1962, p. 249). Fiction is a construct of the active imagination, a place in which the author’s understandings of the nature of human experiences are revealed in the persons, lives, and experiences of characters. An author communicates how characters feel, what they think, how they experience the events of their lives. While characters are not living
human beings, we as readers often begin to think of them as such as we come to know them through the author’s words, suspending our own reality to enter the world the author has created and identifying deeply with characters who ring true to us. Because of this, the truths found in creative works hold clues to understanding the complexity of our own experiences; it is in these truths that we may discover the nature of the phenomena they explore.

In works of literature, young adult readers find “real life” recast in the experiences of characters, shedding new light on events that hold meaning for them as they see those events “lived” in the text. Adolescent readers are brought into the world of the novel, living and breathing it along with its characters, connected to them through a common “humanity.” In this world, young adults can engage with an author’s creation—they can ponder the actions taken by characters, examine why they made certain choices, reflect upon the meaning of their experiences, and observe the impact those experiences had on their fictitious lives. Coming to an understanding of characters’ “lived” experiences, readers arrive as well at a deeper understanding of their own experiences. Literature that impacts readers in such a way is likely to elicit powerful responses, stirring emotions and highlighting common “hopes, values, fears, and aspirations” (Guerin, Labor, Morgan, Reesman, and Willingham, 1999, p. 159). In such literature, young adult readers find manifestations of the lived experience of phenomena that can hold great meaning for their lives.

**Seeking an Understanding of Home in Literature**

Jung, in a discussion of archetypes, described them as “so packed with meaning in themselves that people never think of asking what they really do mean” (1969, p. 13), a description that could equally apply to a deeply meaningful phenomenon such as home. He further stated that when we do pause to dwell on the meaning of such concepts, we usually only
do so through reason, to which he referred as “nothing more than the sum-total of all [our] prejudices and myopic views” (p. 13). I contend that this tendency applies equally to a typical reflection on the phenomena of human experience. Therefore, my study of the lived experience of characters who grappled with the essence of home is an attempt to reach beyond my own experiences and myopic views, so that I might contribute richer insight into the nature of the phenomenon of home. I undertook this with an understanding that there is likely no one essence of home that rings true unilaterally. My goal, rather, was to “shed light…on single parts of the total phenomenon,” for “the phenomenology of the psyche is so colourful, so variegated in form and meaning, that we cannot possibly reflect all its riches in one mirror. Nor in our description of it can we ever embrace the whole…” (Jung, 1966, p. 85). I sought not “clarity and precision of basic concepts,” but “fullness of meaning and phenomenologically accurate characterization of phenomena” (Shelburne, 1988, p. 1). I aimed to discover, through the experiences of literary characters, elements that were essential to making places home, the features and themes that their struggles brought to light, with the acknowledgment that a concept so deep and meaningful as home can never be described with finality.

To do this, I employed the tools of phenomenology. Husserl’s process of phenomenology paired “careful scrutiny or observation of the individual phenomenon” with “exhaustive description” of it in a search for its essence (Magliola, 1977, p. 47). Accordingly, I sought to discover facets of the complex phenomenon that is home by examining many manifestations of home as experienced by characters in young adult novels who grappled with its meaning, seeking connections and consistencies as well as meaningful differences in the ways in which they experienced it.

A quest to discover the inherent essence of a phenomenon can be interpreted in more than one way. Is the goal to seek that which is constant and enduring in the many and varied
manifestations of the phenomenon? Or is it to understand more deeply the essence of the experience for each individual who lives the phenomenon? Van Manen characterized the aim of phenomenology as “describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon,” declaring that its “basic purpose…is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence” (Creswell 2007, p. 58). Moustakas likewise asserted that the goal of a phenomenological inquiry was to develop “a composite description of the essence of the experience for all the individuals” who have lived the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007, p. 58). This contention indicates that the essence of a phenomenon is its underlying nature, what is at its core despite all the differences in its appearance from one manifestation to another.

Willis (1991) offered a lengthy criticism of the phenomenological philosophic tradition’s insistence on the existence of one underlying essence that is common to all who experience a phenomenon (as seen in the works of van Manen and Moustakas, for example). Rather than an attempt to seek an “underlying structure,” an “underlying grammar,” or a “universal essence” (Willis, 1991, pp. 180-182) that makes a phenomenon what it is, Patton described the purpose of a phenomenological analysis as “to elucidate the essence of experience of a phenomenon for an individual or group” (2002, p. 487, emphasis added). From this perspective, a researcher need not compare one individual’s experience to another’s in order to find the essence of a phenomenon; rather, its essence is its true, underlying, most basic meaning for each human being who lives it.

Willis (1991) related the phenomenological examination to “peeling the onion,” noting that the original aim of philosophical phenomenology was to get to the center and find the essence of a phenomenon at its core. He contended, by contrast, that “one may…slice boldly through the entire onion empirically to discover that it has many different layers but no essential
center after all,” and therefore asserted that “there is no invariant structure of human consciousness and that the different layers of different individuals’ life-world perceptions can be described and valued for their own sake” (p. 178). Each layer that is revealed through empirical analysis can provide insight into the richness of the phenomenon. Each layer, each manifestation enhances our understanding and is valuable in itself, without the need to seek a universal center.

My approach to phenomenological inquiry draws from both of these interpretations of the search for the essence of a phenomenon. While I do not maintain the existence of an invariant structure of home, I saw in the experiences of students displaced by Hurricane Katrina that there are “‘commonalities’ within the primary experiences of different people and…[that] the dynamics of individuals’ perceptual life-worlds [are likely to] fall into…‘patterns’” (Willis, 1991, pp. 182-183). My primary goal was to use the lens of phenomenology to shed light on the complex nature of the phenomenon of home, to see home from a variety of angles and perspectives, to seek through representations of lost and damaged homes in young adult literature the varied ways in which they were discussed, contemplated, remembered, longed for, created. Would the experiences of each character who grappled with the notion of home be unique? In what ways would each experience contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex nature of home? Would there be commonalities in characters’ experiences, themes that emerged as central to the notion of home? If there was a “structure underlying this intangible concept,” (Dovey, 1985, p. 35) would attending to the lived experiences of a variety of characters uncover some of the elements that make up that structure?

**Selecting Novels to Study**

“A broken hammer is more of a hammer than an unbroken one.”
- Eagleton, 1983, p. 64
Defamiliarization of the everyday can highlight the true nature of things we take for granted. My review of the literature on home in Chapter 2 indicated that home is most often reflected upon only when it is lost or threatened, when a place that was home suddenly is changed (Dovey, 1985; Kraszewski, 2008; Read, 1996; Relph, 1976; Terkenli, 1995). In such situations, in the midst of grappling with the loss and rebuilding of home, the true nature of home can shine through. For this project, I examined twelve novels in which middle- or high school-aged protagonists (approximately ages 12 to 18) faced loss or damage to their homes in the wake of natural or humanly-caused disaster. (The twelve novels are listed at the end of this chapter, and an annotated bibliography is provided in Appendix B.) Only realistic fiction was included, some contemporary and some historical, and all novels were published within the previous twenty-five years. I strove for balance between male and female protagonists, though the numbers are not strictly equal, and I also included literature by both American and non-American authors, featuring stories set in the United States and elsewhere across the globe. The most essential criterion for inclusion was the novel’s contribution to a discussion of home; all novels chosen featured not simply the experience of disaster itself, but a grappling with notions of home in disaster’s aftermath.

**Discovering Elements of Home**

Through this project, what I sought to discover were enduring features which were most meaningful to characters as they struggled to capture, build, or reestablish a sense of home. To accomplish this, I looked at the ways they went about coping with lost homes and seeking new ones. What was essential to their concept of home? Did their words and actions indicate a drive to reestablish a sense of home? What did the authors’ words reveal about the phenomenon of home as experienced by their characters? In each novel, I closely scrutinized representations of
home to observe and note their essential qualities and the ways in which new or changed places became true homes for the characters (when indeed they did). I sought the ways in which home was experienced by characters who faced its loss, the ways in which it was remembered, perceived, imagined, longed for, spoken about.

No two of the homes I examined looked exactly the same. Some characters lived in lavish houses, others in tents on the side of the road; some relocated to take shelter with relatives, while others found themselves in new places where they knew no one. What I sought to discover were the qualities of all of these places that distinguished them as home for the characters who experienced them. I sought “significant statements,’ sentences, or quotes that provide[d] an understanding of how the [characters experienced] the phenomenon” of home (Creswell, 2007, p. 61) and analyzed what the author’s words revealed about the concept of home as meaningfully experienced. Examining each experience in its own right, I also was open to discovering areas of interconnectedness among them, “clusters of meaning” that might reveal important themes (Creswell, 2007, p. 61), elements that related “the particular to the universal, part to whole, episode to totality” (van Manen 1990, p. 36). In the many different particular manifestations of home, were there qualities that endured? Were there elements that seemed universally important? Were there key components that made these homes, in spite of whatever surface differences they might have, home?

Through this project, I aimed to uncover elements that contributed to making a place home by attending to representations of the experience of lost homes, representations of the experiences of characters who grappled with the notion of home and struggled to find it. What I sought was not a definition of home, or a checklist of its necessary qualities. Rather, my aim was to discover qualities at the core of literary characters’ experiences of home and gain insight into the fundamental nature of the phenomenon of home in the lives their authors created for
them, thus contributing to a deeper understanding of the concept. In this way, I sought to *feel my way*, through the meaningful experiences of literary characters, to a deeper insight into the complex nature of home.

**Procedures**

I began this study with a search for young adult novels in which characters faced loss of or damage to home in the wake of natural or humanly-caused disaster. In literature databases and library catalogs, I searched terms such as displacement, disaster, and home, limiting my search results to works of fiction for a young adult readership. I also searched more specific terms such as earthquake, hurricane, tsunami, and war in order to ensure that I had representations of a variety of disasters. Through these search efforts, I discovered and began reading approximately thirty novels, seeking those that offered the most to a discussion of home. Among the novels I read were contemporary fiction, historical fiction, science fiction, and graphic novels, all of which featured a disaster affecting young adult characters.

As I read each book, I underlined passages that addressed issues of home. My guiding aim in this endeavor was to seek insight into my first research question—In what ways was home experienced by literary characters who faced its loss or damage due to natural or humanly-caused disaster? What did characters’ words and actions reveal about the nature of home for them? Accordingly, the passages I underlined were ones in which home was discussed, remembered, imagined, rebuilt, or reestablished. Upon completing my reading of a given novel, I typed each underlined passage into a document before reading the next novel.

Once all novels were read and passages related to home typed, I began the work of narrowing my selection of novels for inclusion. Literary quality and contribution to a discussion of home were the key criteria. I elected to focus on realistic novels, both contemporary and
historical, and eliminated the science fiction and graphic novels from further study. In creating a
final list of novels, I sought representation of a variety of disasters, balance between male and
female protagonists, and inclusion of both American and non-American authors, characters, and
settings. In order to ensure such balance and inclusion, and retaining only novels of high literary
quality that addressed issues of home’s loss and rebuilding, my final list consisted of twelve
novels for examination.

With twelve novels selected, I reread each for a deeper understanding of the novel and its
characters’ experiences of home, and to ensure that all passages about home were underlined and
typed into my documents. Upon completing this, I turned to an examination of these passages.
Repeatedly reading and considering them, I sought, in keeping with my phenomenological focus,
the essence of each statement, labeling each with a word or phrase that captured its essence:
Was a particular statement about family? About memories? About a physical place? About
feeling at home? I then rearranged the statements so that all quotations addressing a given aspect
were grouped together in the document. As I did this with each novel, I noticed similar themes
emerging throughout the books. These aspects of home that held significance for a variety of
characters across multiple novels would become the categories discussed under each major
heading in Chapter 4.

Looking at the aspects of home that emerged across all the books, I considered them and
reflected on how some fit together under a larger umbrella. For example, longing for missed
family members, the role of friendships in establishing a new home, and a sense of community
are all social concepts. Other concepts fit together as personal ones, as physical/geographical
ones, as elements of an instinctual drive, as emotional concepts, or as temporal/historical
concepts. From this reflection, I came up with the major headings, or components, that are the
framework of the following chapter.
Novels Examined


Flores-Galbis, Enrique. (2010). *90 Miles to Havana*. (political unrest)


Harlow, Joan Hiatt. (2007). *Blown Away!* (hurricane)


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7 For complete bibliographic information and a brief plot summary of each novel, see Appendix B.
Chapter 4 – Results

Through my examination of twelve young adult novels that centered around natural or humanly-caused disasters, I aimed to discover qualities at the core of characters’ experiences of home, its damage, loss, and reestablishment. Focusing on the ways in which characters discussed, contemplated, remembered, reflected upon, and rebuilt homes in the aftermath of disaster, I compiled all references to home places, including what was valued, what was fretted over, what was appreciated, what was missed, what was felt as home was threatened, damaged, or lost. In characters’ dialog, thoughts, and actions, I sought the enduring features of their representations of the experience of displacement and what that experience revealed about the meaning of home in their fictional “lives.”

These representations of home were multifaceted. Pondering passages from the novels in which characters reflected on and communicated about their experience of displacement, the places where they lived, the things and people that were missed while away or worried over as threatened, I found similar ideas emerging. Some characters’ focus was on the people who were home to them—the families and friends with whom they felt a sense of belonging, the individuals who made their houses feel like homes, the larger community who defined the places where they lived. Such characters were likely to describe their neighborhoods in terms of the people who could be seen there; their reflections on lost homes dwelt upon friends and family members who were desperately missed; the new homes they established featured strong connections to other people—both new friends and familiar faces from their lost homes with whom they were reunited. Noticing the large body of evidence of the role of other human beings in making a place feel like a home, I termed this feature the social component of home.
Homes, for many of the characters I encountered, were places that could be thought of as their own. At home, such characters had authority and power; they could invite others in, or lock the doors. They tended to describe home places as my house, my island, or our city. Many characters knew who they were at home, how they fit into the larger community. As characters grappled with displacement and strove to recapture or rebuild a sense of home in the wake of disaster, many found themselves facing questions about their very identities. Away from the people who knew them so well, embittered by loss, or unsure of their role in a new place, such characters were left to wonder who they had become. Some found themselves transformed into individuals they neither recognized nor liked; others struggled to define themselves amidst unfamiliar people and circumstances. I have summarized these elements of the rights individuals enjoy in home places and those places’ formative impact on the individuals who inhabit them as the personal component of home.

Some novels revealed their characters’ strong connections to place. Homes in these cases were locations on the globe for which characters felt a deep affinity, places that formed them and that were points of origin for exploring the rest of the world. Occasionally, so strong was a character’s bond with place that it was thought of as a loved and treasured being itself, infused with emotion. Many experiences of home places focused on their physical characteristics. I encountered characters who longed for familiar sights, who were reminded of lost homes by recognizable scents, or who felt most out-of-place as foreign sounds assaulted their ears. As disaster struck, some well-known homes were rendered unrecognizable, while others became uninhabitable, forcing residents to relocate to other places. Grouping references to home’s place-based features, I categorized these as its geographical/physical component.

Home for some characters had always been a space in which to feel safe, a refuge from the world beyond its borders. As disaster transformed their homes, bringing danger and
uncertainty, characters were left to reconcile how home—by its very nature a place of safety in their minds—could become unsafe. In disaster’s immediate aftermath, they sought whatever meager shelter they could establish, highlighting the immediate need for some measure of protection. I encountered several characters who yearned to escape danger and build new, safe homes as far away from their former homes as possible, seeking above all the security of being in a home that was physically safe. Because this element of home satisfied a primal need for safety, a need shared by all living creatures, I termed this feature the *instinctual* component of home.

Throughout the twelve novels, characters’ dialog, thoughts, and actions revealed an intensely emotional connection with their homes. A number of references to home sites revealed that there was an emotional difference between a simple shelter and a true home. Some homes were beloved spots; others inspired pride or loyalty in their inhabitants. Home for a number of characters was described as a place of comfort, a place where they felt a sense of belonging, a place of ease and contentment. I encountered characters who longed for a return to the one place they truly felt at home, despite dangers still lurking there, seeking the emotional security offered by that place. For several characters, home was so beloved that it was thought of as their entire world. All these elements of the feel of home—comfort, belonging, love of and sentimental attachment to place—I have termed the *emotional* component of home.

In many of the novels, references to home revealed the vital importance of characters’ memories and experiences—time spent in the places that were home, events interwoven with the experience of those places. Within the spaces that were home—rooms, houses, cities, nations—both large and small events of life took place, all of which contributed to the formation of bonds between people and places. Home places might be the sites of tradition, where cultural beliefs held sway or families celebrated holidays the same way, year after year. They might be spaces
filled with familiar and treasured belongings, heirlooms from previous generations, or tokens that invoked precious memories of time spent at home. Within home places, life frequently had a pattern, a routine, a dependability. In the face of disaster, with homes damaged, destroyed, or altogether lost, many characters reflected on elements of time spent in the places that were home. Perhaps they held on to treasured mementos that were links to what had been lost; perhaps they immersed themselves in familiar activities that brought back a feeling of home; perhaps they reminisced about special occasions or the regularity of daily life. Such aspects of home connected to the time spent and the lives lived there, I have termed the *temporal/historical* component of home.

In the following sections, I present my findings regarding representations of home in the twelve novels. I examine the words, thoughts, and actions attributed to literary characters, with the goal of understanding what these reveal about the nature of home as meaningfully experienced. In keeping with the themes described above that emerged as I analyzed these representations of home, I have organized my findings according to six facets or components of home:

- The social component of home
- The personal component of home
- The physical/geographical component of home
- The instinctual component of home
- The emotional component of home
- The *temporal/historical* component of home.
The Social Component of Home

“‘One person is nothing. Two people are a nation.’
‘What are three people?’
‘A bigger nation.’”
- Pratchett, 2008, p. 252

Many of the novels I examined revealed the distinct importance of other human beings to the notion of home, the social connection between parents and children, siblings, friends, and neighbors. Time and again, characters displaced from home expressed longing for lost friends or family members from whom they had become separated. Some clung to friends from home in unfamiliar surroundings and accepted the friendship of new people who helped them adjust to their lives in new places, revealing the importance of people in a new place. Several reached out to others suffering from the disasters that struck their homes and offered assistance, companionship, and solidarity, indicating a sense of community. Many sought solace in the company of others in disaster’s immediate wake, most afraid of finding themselves alone. And for some characters, a place simply was not a home without the presence of specific others, those people who felt like home. In all of these ways, these novels demonstrated the significance of people to making a place home, whether that place was the home they had always known or a new and unfamiliar locale.

Longing for People Who Are Missed

When disaster strikes, it can become imperative to leave for the sake of personal well-being. Towns become unsafe because of hurricane floodwaters or the presence of war. Families are no longer able to make a living when drought or blight threatens farmers’ livelihoods. Whatever the nature of the disaster that compelled characters to leave home in the novels I examined, their displacement separated many of them from friends and family members who
were key components of their sense of home, and without these loved ones, the characters felt a deep loss. They longed to be reunited with parents and siblings, they mourned the loss of best friends, and they risked personal health and safety to find family members amidst rubble and chaos.

The characters in *90 Miles to Havana* (Flores-Galbis, 2010) exhibited a strong connection to loved ones as a component of home. When his parents made the choice to send Julian and his brothers to America without them, it was understood from the very beginning that reunion was the goal (pp. 47, 49). For all of Flores-Galbis’s characters, adult and child alike, separation was but a temporary trial to be endured in the name of safety, for only once families were together again would there be any sense of relief at having escaped the revolution brewing in their departed homeland. Both parents and children in this novel were willing to do all that they possibly could to bring their families back together. Those who found a way to make money sent the majority of it to their families in Cuba so that they could save to join them in the United States (pp. 122, 197). His friend Angelita refused an opportunity to escape the camp with Julian because she held out hope that her younger brother’s foster family would return to the camp to take her, too, reuniting her with her sibling (p. 173). Amidst fear and doubt, frequently unsure of his decisions once his brothers were sent to orphanages in other states, there was one certainty for Julian: “I want my family to be together again. That’s the only thing that I’m sure of” (p. 207). He was willing to make any sacrifice, endure any hardship, to make this dream a reality.

Once arrived in Miami and placed in a camp for Cuban children awaiting their parents, the immediate goal for Julian and his brothers was to stay together. Already without their mother and father, the prospect of additional separation from each other was unthinkable, and they knew that remaining together was vitally important, that indeed, if their mother “knew they might separate us…one way or the other she’d get here, even if she had to swim!” (Flores-
Galbis, 2010, p. 82). Rejecting the offer of being sent to orphanages in different states, they asserted that they would only travel together; being separated from their parents was difficult enough, and they could not accept the notion of being wrenched from each other as well (p. 86). Together there was safety, there was a link to home, almost anything could be endured (pp. 57, 76). Apart, “everything is broken and dangerous” (p. 57). Julian was willing to give up his most prized possession, a drawing book that contained images of his home in Cuba, in exchange for his brothers’ being allowed to remain, for losing his book “won’t hurt half as much as getting separated from my brothers” (p. 112). But it was not to be; the unthinkable did happen, and his brothers were sent out of state, leaving Julian to gaze around the camp, where “the gray metal buildings look even stranger than they did the first time I saw them: the distances seem bigger, emptier. I feel like there is nothing keeping the wind from picking me up and blowing me over the chain-link fence along with the red dust” (p. 118). The camp felt different, lonelier, less familiar, as soon as his brothers were driven away. And with the separation from two more people who represented home, Julian felt uprooted yet again, lost without any of his family there with him.

In addition to being separated from his parents and siblings, Julian’s displacement from Cuba left him without his good friend Bebo, a family employee who faithfully took the time to explain things to Julian and teach him all that he knew, from mechanics to navigation to cooking. Missing his friend, so many things in America reminded Julian of Bebo—the sputtering of an engine (Flores-Galbis, 2010, pp. 120-121), the shape of a man’s head leaning over a bridge railing (p. 246), a nautical chart showing the Florida Keys (p. 255), and, most notably, Julian’s new friend Tomás, who shared Bebo’s mechanical inclination and characteristic kindness in teaching Julian what he needed to know (pp. 123, 178, 200, 203, 226, 240, 259). Bebo’s decision to remain in Cuba to see what the revolution would bring left Julian with “an emptiness
in [his] heart,” knowing he would never see his friend again (p. 268). For Julian, his parents, brothers, and friend were all vital components of the home and life he had lost, and his separation from them brought sadness and longing to be together again.

Like Julian, *Quake!’s* Jacob Kaufman (Karwoski, 2004) found himself apart from his family and yearning for reunion. When the earth rumbled and buckled in April of 1906, swallowing up huge parts of San Francisco and leaving more aflame, Jacob was not at their apartment with his father and sister. From the moment he realized the magnitude of the disaster, his singular goal was to find his family. Not even safety was as important—he would take shelter anywhere, walk as far as he had to, endure whatever he must to locate his father and Sophie. From searching the rubble of their boardinghouse to traversing the city over and over again, Jacob never wavered from this mission. He tried the Produce District, where someone thought he saw them headed; he walked to Union Square, where, without his family, he felt “alone and stranded, like the only survivor of a shipwreck” (p. 66) even though surrounded by hundreds of other refugees. Jacob trudged to Golden Gate Park, passing “families huddled together” in the streets (p. 53), hoping to locate his own family among the thousands more who took up residence there as fires consumed their city. With signs posted throughout the park seeking information about lost loved ones, a tent set up to house children who were separated from their parents, and later a list of the residents of each tent in the park “posted in front to help family members and friends locate each other” (p. 124), it was clear that Jacob was not alone in his zeal to find and reunite with those he loved. Locating family members was of primary importance in the aftermath of the earthquake, as those who had lost houses sought the comfort of reunion with the people who were home to them.

Being separated from family wrought an emotional toll on Jacob that was far greater than his reaction to the physical devastation of his living space. As time went by and no information
about his father and sister was forthcoming, Jacob became increasingly sad, discouraged, and frightened, “his stomach knotted up and his thoughts scattered every which way, like panicky rabbits” (Karwoski, 2004, p. 126) as he contemplated a future without his family. Returning to his decimated neighborhood South of Market Street, Jacob thought to leave a sign at the site of his former house to let his father know where in Golden Gate Park he was staying. The simple act of posting this sign filled him with renewed “life and hope” (p. 116), the hope that reunion was possible, that he would be together with his family again. Unwilling to give up on the prospect of being reunited, he refused an opportunity to travel to safety with his new friend San’s family, opting instead to remain in the park where his family might find one another. When at last Jacob and his family were reunited, it was with relief, joy, and new appreciation: his father, who before the quake could think only of his deceased wife, acknowledged that “I could only see how much I’d lost—not what I still had. Then our house fell down, the city burned up, and my son disappeared. After that, the only thing that mattered was finding you” (pp. 140-141).

In Harlow’s (2007) Blown Away!, Jake Pitney exhibited a similar focus on finding his family in the aftermath of a Florida Keys hurricane. While they clung together for comfort as the wind raged and the rain poured down (p. 191), Jake awoke after the storm to find himself alone in a tree, and his first thoughts were of his family. Knowing that with his island devastated, they were all he had left, Jake screamed and searched for them tirelessly before at last locating them (pp. 199, 202, 203). The trial of their separation was not over so quickly, though, for when rescue came for his injured mother and sister, Jake was forced to stay behind on the island. Buoyed during their time apart by exchanging messages with his family through a Red Cross worker (p. 237), Jake distracted himself from the pain of being away from them by helping others recover from the storm and undertaking another search—this one for his friend Mara, a search that would not be successful (p. 223). Yet the hope of finding his lost friend, together
with the act of reaching out to others in need, provided a sense of comfort to Jake while he was away from his family and enabled him to get through their time apart.

The hope of reunion was a motivating factor for *Greener Grass*’s O’Tooles (Pignat, 2008) also, for whom notions of home and emotional well-being were deeply connected to family. When Mrs. O’Toole lost a son to the hardships of life during the Irish Potato Famine and was unable to cope, protagonist Kit reflected that “It’s not her fault…. I mean, she’s lost her husband and two sons, and now her home. How many parts of yourself can you lose before you’ve nothing left but emptiness?” (p. 137). Loved ones were indeed a part of self, and a piece of Mrs. O’Toole awakened only with the prospect of being able to join her oldest son in America. Upon receiving the news of this possibility, a light reentered her eyes, and her rocking, mumbling unresponsiveness gave way to anticipation (p. 156). Her son Mick O’Toole, Kit’s good friend, was kept going too by the anticipation of finding lost loved ones—first by the “hope of reuniting with his family” (p. 208), and then, accepting that they had not survived, the “hope of seeing [Kit] again” (p. 258).

*Little Cricket*’s Kia Vang (Brown, 2004), separated from her Laotian homeland where war raged and family members were left behind, faced life in a strange land, learning a new language, with customs, values, and surroundings that were unfamiliar and difficult to comprehend. Yet when Kia reflected on the home she had lost, it was the people, not the place or the sense of familiarity, to which she longed to return. From the moment her family was separated, their greatest goal was reunion. Those who went to America adjusted to life in their new home with varying degrees of success, but always there was the longing to be together again, to be a complete family once more (pp. 98, 116, 138, 147, 180, 200). When reminded by sights, sounds, or events of her Laotian home, Kia’s thoughts quickly turned to the people she missed. “Missing home desperately” inspired her to embroider pictures of her mother, father,
and young cousin whose smiles and laughter brought her such joy (p. 113)—the *people* who made up that home, not the place itself. Inhaling the scent of home from the black Laotian earth that clung to seeds brought with her to America, Kia hungered not for a return to the place, but “to see her mother and grandmother again” (p. 116). When she thought of how far away “her green mountaintop village in Laos” was, “her chest [became] tight with *loneliness*” (p. 117, emphasis added)—again, a yearning for people, not place.

For *Nation*’s Mau (Pratchett, 2008), disaster also brought a longing for the people who were home. From Mau’s first sighting of his island after a devastating wave, it was clear that the place had been transformed most notably by the complete lack of any other human beings (p. 24). Where once there was a Nation full of family, “the world had emptied,” and “everyone Mau had ever known” had become a memory (p. 43). The place that had been home to every person in Mau’s life was no more than a “lonely shore” (p. 50); all those he loved, the people who made him “feel that [he was] a part of something that had seen many yesterdays and would see many tomorrows” (p. 84), were gone. His feeling of loneliness was evidenced by his drawing in the sand of a Nation full of people separated by a wave from one lone stick figure—a drawing that fellow refugee Daphne believed “[meant] sadness” (p. 96), as she added her lone stick figure to his. As he imagined and dreamt of all the people who formerly populated his island, the “many [who became] one” Nation (p. 85), Mau contemplated the wisdom of the Grandfathers that told him that *one* could also become *many*—that *he* was the Nation, and that as long as he lived, the Nation lived as well (p. 85). He determined to see this through, to remember the people who were lost to him and bring his Nation back to life, and with Daphne and more and more survivors who made their way to Mau’s Nation from other islands, a new community was formed that transformed the ravaged island into a home once more.
Unlike Mau, whom disaster left without any of the people he had known, *The Truth about Sparrows*’ Sadie Wynn (Hale, 2004) made the move from her drought-stricken Missouri home with her entire family intact; yet her experience, too, illustrated the social component of home, for chief among the things she missed about Missouri was her best friend Wilma. Desperately lonely for her friend, Sadie was reminded of her at every turn—meeting Dollie, who looked “nothing at all like Wilma” (p. 30); hearing the music of Daddy’s fiddle, which “Wilma had loved to hear Daddy play” (p. 91); going to a school filled with unfamiliar people (p. 111); gazing at the print of a flour-sack dress Mama made for her, whose flowers called to mind “the blue dress Wilma wore the day [she] last saw her” (p. 133); telling ghost stories on the sea wall at Halloween, a tradition she and Wilma once shared “huddled around her potbelly stove” (p. 159). Her promise to Wilma that they would always be best friends weighed heavy on her heart, preventing her from opening herself up to true friendship with new neighbor Dollie, and she believed that “never again would [she] have a friend as good as Wilma to tell [her] thoughts to” (p. 4). For much of the novel, Sadie held herself back from Dollie, even lashing out in her loneliness for Wilma and hurting Dollie (pp. 110-111, 138, 183-184). Despite the guilt this caused her, Sadie could not seem to move past the overwhelming sadness that Wilma’s loss brought her—the loss of her “very best friend” (p. 25), the person who knew her all her life, the person with whom she shared more than anyone else. Without Wilma, though surrounded by family and new friends, Sadie felt alone (pp. 111, 153). The people she did have around her were not enough to compensate for the loss of the one person she truly wanted, leaving her feeling isolated. Worse still, she felt as if “the very last part of [herself that she] could still recognize had disappeared with” Wilma (p. 153). Her friend was more than a part of the life she lost; she was a part of Sadie herself, and her loss brought the loss of a vital part of Sadie’s own being.
Importance of People in a New Place

Sadie’s adjustment to life in Texas was gradually and finally made possible only when she opened her heart to the new people in her life. For many of the characters I encountered, new places began to feel like home as friendships were established or reinforced. From their first meeting, Dollie Mae Gillem extended a hand in friendship and offered her assistance, camaraderie, and companionship to Sadie and her family, helping them set up their household, introducing them to others in the community, sharing stories, and teaching Sadie about life in South Texas. Dollie had been lonely for a friend her age since her own arrival from Ohio two years prior, and she reached out to Sadie with welcome, happy at last to have someone with whom to share her days. Too preoccupied at first with missing Wilma to appreciate Dollie’s friendship, Sadie did at least value the fact that Dollie’s presence made her adjustment to a new place easier than it would have been alone. Dollie’s familiarity with the people in town and her knowledge of “how everything worked” there (Hale, 2004, p. 131) were an invaluable help to Sadie as she found her place in South Texas, but it was Dollie’s untiring support and understanding during Sadie’s difficult adjustment that marked her a true friend, allowing Sadie at last to feel a sense of home in this new place. When Sadie feared after one of her outbursts that she had driven Dollie away forever, she “knew [she’d] die for sure” (p. 181), but this new true friend understood Sadie’s pain at being separated from the life she knew, and she reached out until Sadie was ready to reach back, able to accept the people and place that were her new home.

In contrasting Little Cricket’s (Brown, 2004) Kia Vang’s adjustment to those of her brother and Grandfather, who struggled particularly with their sense of self and purpose in a new land (discussed below in the section on the personal component of home), it is notable that Kia was the only one of the three who made good friends and recognized their importance in helping her find her place in America. Though church members encouraged Grandfather to attend get-
togethers to “meet lots of new people like yourself who are trying to get settled” (p. 121), he kept to himself while Kia befriended her new neighbor Sam and his mother Hank, “good neighbors [who] made her happy with their joyous and quick laughter” (p. 140). With these good friends who valued people above money and things, a value taught repeatedly to Kia by Grandfather (pp. 75, 136, 162), it was easier to be brave and to cope with the difficulties of life away from home; Kia realized that finding true friends could make “the elephant…sitting on your heart…feel as light as a bird” (p. 202)—friends could ease the loneliness and heartache of being away from home and bring a sense of peace and contentment in a new place.

Friends, both new and old, were a vital piece of home for 90 Miles to Havana’s Julian (Flores-Galbis, 2010) as well. “You’re not alone here” was a line spoken to him at two very different points in the novel: by Angelita, a good friend and neighbor from Cuba whose presence in the Miami camp was a comfort to him in the absence of his brothers (p. 132); and by Darlene, a classmate at the Connecticut school where Julian felt so out of place at the novel’s end (p. 290). With Angelita, Julian was able to discuss their shared experience of the crushing sadness of separation from family (pp. 132, 174). Knowing that he was not alone in his grief made it somehow easier to bear; life in the camp, a life filled with the “muffled sobs” of children calling for lost parents in their sleep (p. 131), was made slightly less horrible with the presence of this old friend. Friendship also provided a path for Julian’s liberation from the difficulties of the camp when he decided to leave it to seek shelter with a new friend, Tomás. Though saddened that Angelita would not join him in his move to Tomás’s boat, Julian nonetheless found a sense of home with the hard-working and understanding Tomás (p. 233), whose goal was to take his boat to Cuba to rescue his own parents and a number of others. Tomás and Julian’s shared mission of reuniting their families made them kindred spirits, neither of them
missing the land from which they came, but both knowing with certainty that the most important task they could accomplish was to get their loved ones back together.

The social component of home was most evidenced in *Blown Away!* (Harlow, 2007) in the experience of Mara Kraynanski, whose connections to new people enabled her to feel at home during her very brief time on Islamorada. Upon learning that Mara had been orphaned, her only living relative, whom she had never met, reached out to her and offered her a place to live, a place that became a true home with the knowledge that Mara “still had someone in the world who cared what happened to” her (p. 48). Devastated by the loss of her father, Mara at first “felt so alone and lost, [not knowing] what to do or where to go” (pp. 47-48). But finding a home with Aunt Edith, building a friendship with Jake, and coming to feel like part of a family again—though far from taking away the pain of grieving her father—gave her a sense of belonging somewhere, a happiness she had feared she would never know again (pp. 165-167). Being loved by Jake, his parents, and his little sister comforted Mara and helped her cope with her loss. During her short stay on Islamorada before being killed in the hurricane, the place became her “island home” (p. 235), and through her eyes Jake developed a new appreciation for the beauty of the place he had known all his life in addition to gaining a beloved new friend.

Close friends were as much a part of the feeling of home for the characters in *Greener Grass* (Pignat, 2008) as were family members. As the novel drew to a close and the surviving Byrnes aimed to leave Ireland for safety in America, Kit’s young sister Annie befriended the child of a family who stopped to give them a ride to the harbor, and Kit appreciated the importance of Annie’s “[taking] that journey with a friend by [her] side” (p. 245) to lend comfort and companionship. And Kit herself was saved from the absolute despair of being left behind as her family sailed away by the appearance of her friend Mick, whose presence brought the great relief of knowing that she would not, after all, be completely alone.
The individuals who arrived on Mau’s shore in Nation (Pratchett, 2008) did more than provide friendship and help him repopulate his Nation; indeed, they saved his life—not only by helping him survive physically, but more importantly, by giving him a reason to want to survive: “I need there to be the old man and the baby and the sick woman and the ghost girl, because without them I would go into the dark water right now. I asked for reasons, and here they are, yelling and smelling and demanding, the last people in the world, and I need them” (p. 115). The stragglers themselves were men, women, and children who had “gone back to people and villages that weren’t there, and…scavenged what they could and set out to find other people” (p. 166). Seeking the companionship of others was their natural inclination after finding their own homelands deserted, and they soon made up “a kind of floating village” (p. 166) of lone survivors united by their shared experience who sought the comfort and presence of others in order to survive and rediscover a sense of belonging, a sense of home.

**Sense of Community**

With disaster looming or recently struck, several novels highlighted the sense of solidarity and community that contributed to making a location feel like home to its residents. A deep sense of community was a central part of home in Ruby’s Imagine (Antieau, 2008). The people who populated Ruby’s “Garden of Neighbors” (p. 11) in New Orleans consistently reached out to help one another, to visit and to offer assistance, invitations, and food. Rarely did neighbors or friends have a conversation in this novel without inquiring whether anything was needed, and they took pride in the fact that they “[looked] out for each other” (p. 68). Beignets were brought home from work to share with neighbors (pp. 13, 68, 77), vegetables from gardens were offered to friends (p. 14), snow cones were given freely to children who could not afford them (p. 39). With Hurricane Katrina approaching, many in Ruby’s Garden of Neighbors were
unable to evacuate the city, whether because they lacked transportation or because they had nowhere else to go. Yet no matter how frightening the prospect of the storm was, or how much personal difficulty they had in preparing for it, their sense of community overrode all else, compelling them to reach out and help others board up windows, drive those without cars to the Superdome, or take friends out of town with them. Ruby’s best friend JayEl and his father even came back to the neighborhood to find Ruby rather than going on to safety in the nearby city of Baton Rouge, leaving them in New Orleans as the storm struck. Again in the storm’s aftermath, the members of the community played a vital role in the rescue efforts of their neighbors, heading out on boats and braving the floodwaters to find family and friends and bring them to safety. So strong was the sense of caring for one another that when a group of men attempted to rob several survivors, demanding money and jewelry, one survivor replied, “We don’t have nothing like that. You is welcome to join us for dinner” (p. 139). The characters in Ruby’s Garden of Neighbors recognized that the most important thing they had was each other; they were “people helping people” (p. 168), and in doing so, they retained the strength of their community even in the face of its physical devastation.

As in Ruby’s neighborhood, the citizens of San Francisco in Quake! (Karwoski, 2004) portrayed a deep sense of community, unflinchingly helpful and giving in the aftermath of the disastrous earthquake that left them all in dire circumstances. There was the lavish assistance of Mrs. Merrill, who welcomed over sixty refugees of all nationalities and backgrounds into her home while it still stood (pp. 79-80) and even insisted on feeding them all one last bit of tea and toast before she would leave for the soldiers to dynamite the house. There too was a succession of families along the streets, in Union Square, and in Golden Gate Park who shared what meager supplies and food they had with Jacob and San: the Alexanders (p. 58), a group of Chinese men and women (p. 67), the Torellis (p. 97), and most notably the Flanagans (p. 92). Annie and
Kevin Flanagan, with three young children of their own in their Golden Gate tent shelter, took the boys in, assuring them that they were welcome as long as it took to locate their own families and that “as far as [they were] concerned, this camp is yer home now” (p. 96). Jacob and San did all that they could to reciprocate this selfless generosity, standing in relief lines for supplies for the camp (p. 98), offering back to Kevin their share of money made catching rats (p. 110), and lettering a sign that read “Camp Flanagan” to lend the place a sense of home (p. 107). Amidst the camaraderie of life in the park, people from very different backgrounds bonded over the similar circumstances in which they found themselves, lending an even greater sense of community among fellow sufferers:

“I swear there ain’t no better medicine than laughin’,” Annie said. “That’s what this city needs to get itself back on its feet.” Mr. Giannini, who lived with his sister’s family across the way, peeked his head out of his tent and asked what all the commotion was about…. Some of the neighbors brought musical instruments they’d saved from the fire—guitars, mandolins, flutes. Soon enough, a sing-along rang out over the tent village. Jacob looked around. A few weeks ago these people were strangers who lived in different sections of the city, like members of separate tribes. They wouldn’t have spent an evening in each other’s company, singing and laughing. But out here in the dim light from the campfires, their smiling faces looked so similar that they might have been kinfolk. (Karwoski, 2004, p. 128)

Through their willingness to share what little they had with others, their selflessness and sense of community, and their identity as fellow refugees, the characters of Karwoski’s novel illustrated the social element of what makes any place, under any conditions, a home.

Harlow’s (2007) characters in Blown Away! also exemplified the social component of home through their willing and ready help of neighbors before and after a hurricane struck their Florida Keys home. From boarding up houses to offering shelter to clearing rubble (pp. 147, 152, 218), the residents of Islamorada were there to assist one another even before being asked. So strong was the sense of community within these characters, in fact, that Jake’s time apart
from his family was made bearable because he was able to be of use to others who were suffering just as he was in the storm’s aftermath (p. 221).

*90 Miles to Havana* (Flores-Galbis, 2010) was populated with characters who realized the vital importance of family, even when the family in question was not their own. A Greek restaurateur offered twenty-five dollars of his “house money” to contribute to the transport of Tomás’s passengers from Cuba, and a recent Cuban immigrant proffered his wedding ring for Tomás to use to purchase gasoline for the trip (p. 235). And Julian himself was willing to risk his possessions not only to bring his own parents to America, but to rescue strangers as well. Once it became clear that his mother was already in the United States, Julian still handed over the golden swallow pin with which he had been entrusted in order to allow Tomás to make his rescue journey, noting that he was “trading it for something you can’t add or subtract. How can you put a price on fourteen people waiting on a dock?” (p. 255). Further, instead of immediately leaving to join his mother in Connecticut, Julian remained with Tomás to help him run the mission: “If I drop the rope and jump, this sad empty feeling that’s been living in my chest since I left my family will go away—I know it. But I can’t just jump and leave Tomás and those people on the dock; they need me” (p. 253). Julian knew from his own experience the trauma of being separated from family, and despite his own loneliness for his mother and brothers, he was willing to delay their reunion in order to make possible the reunion of other Cuban families as well.

This selfless sense of community seen in the works of Antieau (2008), Karwoski (2004), Harlow (2007), and Flores-Galbis (2010) was notably missing from Pignat’s *Greener Grass* (2008). While close friends and neighbors in this Irish village were willing to help one another, sharing what meager food they had and housing the evicted, the larger community exhibited a much greater propensity to look out only for their own: “Everyone kept to their own hearth.
With no money to spend, people rarely went to town. That, and the fact that the fever was spreading, kept most people to themselves” (Pignat, 2008, p. 141). While the presence of plague and the fear it inspired could help to explain the difference in this novel, it does not account for the men who volunteered their services to burn the houses of those who could not afford rent, some of whom Kit recognized “from the village, neighbors of ours, hired to burn others’ homes in the hopes of paying for their own” (pp. 227-228). Despite this absence of an overriding sense of neighbors helping one another, *Greener Grass* did illustrate the social component of home in another, truly unique, way, the tradition of the home fires: “People brought a burning ember to their neighbors so that their fire burned long after their abandoned hearth had gone cold. Long after they’d left home forever. The fire, the heart and soul of the family, must never go out” (pp. 143-144). This “heart and soul of the family” was entrusted to neighbors when leaving a place, so that a part of the family would live on and be remembered by those who knew them. This beautiful tradition was carried out a number of times in the novel (pp. 143, 225), until finally, after the Byrnes’ house was burned to the ground, an old friend recovered a smoldering ember and added it to her own hearth fire so that “the Byrnes’ spirit lives on” (p. 231). The burning of the fire symbolized the burning strength of hope and spirit in their hearts (p. 236), as they set out from the place that had been home to seek a new, safer home together. It is significant that neighbors played such a pivotal role in keeping this spirit alive, highlighting the vital importance of others to the concept of home.

**Being Alone**

In a number of the novels, characters reflected on the sadness, terror, or absolute devastation that accompanied the prospect of being alone. Facing the dangers of disaster and separation from friends or family members, these characters dreaded finding themselves alone,
and they worried for others who were without their loved ones as well. Several willingly turned down offers of help that would have required their separation, preferring to face the threat of disaster together rather than seeking safety alone.

Amidst the terrifying flooded streets of New Orleans that were once so familiar, the most frightening prospect of all for the characters in *Ruby’s Imagine* (Antieau, 2008) was being alone. Time and again, they expressed that what was most vital to them was staying together, from Mammaloose’s dread of being left by herself when Ruby went for help (pp. 103, 110, 126, 127) to Ruby’s acknowledgement that what had to be most scary for Miss Jenine was being “all by yourself in the dark like that” (p. 149). In fact, remaining together was so important that when a driver offered to take three members of Ruby’s party to safety and come back for the others, they refused: “We’re not getting separated again… Thank you anyway” (p. 187). Togetherness was more important to them than individual safety, and they opted to take their chances as a group rather than leave the flooded city without each other. Months after the storm, finally safe in Baton Rouge, Ruby, her father, and Mammaloose took up residence in an apartment near Ruby’s best friend and his family, and Ruby and JayEl were able to go to school together there. Ruby noted that, unlike them, “Many families were split up and taken to different parts of the country. They call this the Katrina diaspora. That word means ‘to scatter.’ Lots of scattering and shattering” (pp. 189-190). She recognized that being separated was shattering, and that she and the people who made up her home were most fortunate, “the lucky ones” (p. 188), for they had avoided the splintering effects of the hurricane by staying together.

Togetherness was a key element of home for Julian and his family as well (Flores-Galbis, 2010). With revolution brewing in Cuba, thousands of parents made the heart-wrenching decision to send their children to safety in the United States without them. What struck Julian about this, even before he learned that he and his brothers were to be among those leaving their
homeland, was that the children were being sent “to a strange country all alone” (pp. 48, 52). *Alone* was a significant word in Julian’s perception, an idea that came up again when Angelita left him in Miami to go back to the camp; in the city without his friend, he felt that “the dark windows of an empty factory [were] looking down at [him], … asking ‘Why are you here; why all alone?’” (p. 175). Being “alone on the bank of a strange river” brought feelings of fear and loneliness (p. 186). Alone was a frightening way to be, more terrifying even than the unfamiliarity of the place. Without the support and comfort of people who knew him, not only was he away from his geographical home, but he had no one with him who shared his knowledge of home, his history, his identity.

*Greener Grass’s* Kit Byrnes (Pignat, 2008) expressed a similar dread to Julian’s with respect to being alone—being “alive and alone” brought “a greater horror” than the prospect of death itself. For Kit, her family was everything, and when famine threatened her loved ones, bringing with it the possibility that she might lose them all, their centrality in Kit’s notion of home emerged. She opened the novel with a reflection that once her heart and home were complete, when her Da was alive and with them (Prologue). When Da was alive, his very presence had the ability to lift the sick Mam’s “spirits…better than any miracle tonic” (p. 115); with him gone, gone too was a part of Mam herself (pp. 171-172). In the impossible economic situation brought about by blight and famine, Kit came to realize that most important by far was her family. When she hoped, her hopes were for her mother, father, and siblings. When she was forced to make material sacrifices, she kept in the forefront of her mind the relief that “at least we were together. For all we’d lost, we still had each other” (p. 125). When an uncaring overseer put in motion plans to burn down the homes of any potato farmers who, like Kit’s family, were no longer able to pay rent, Kit vowed to “do whatever [she] had to to protect [her] family” (p. 195)—including attempting murder. Keeping her family safe for as long as she
possibly could was Kit’s goal, a higher goal than her own personal safety, a goal for which she would risk her very life. Upon her return home after a stint in prison for stealing food for her family, the relief Kit felt was the security of being back in Mam’s arms (p. 199), of seeing her younger brother and sister still alive. As the novel closed and Kit’s greatest fear came true, the boat carrying her mother and siblings to America departing without her, she described the horror of the scene:

I saw my family pressed up against the rail, clutching each other. Mam! Jack! Annie! Through tears, I watched my family leave. Fear and sorrow clouded their faces as they watched the Lynches, sure that I’d be caught and killed. But the truth of the matter was worse still. I wasn’t dead. I was left behind. (Pignat, 2008, p. 255)

In The Truth about Sparrows (Hale, 2004), Sadie Wynn’s apprehension about the prospect of being alone was reflected in her concern for the loneliness of others, particularly Mr. Sparrow. It was his quality of lonesomeness, not his lack of adequate shelter or food, that caused her the most anxiety. She worried about what might have happened to his family (p. 68), how he could have become separated from the smiling people with him in a photo she came across:

I just couldn’t abide the idea of him being alone and friendless. That last thought surprised me some. I guess I hadn’t realized what had been at the heart of my worry till that moment. I always thought it was his eating and sleeping I fretted about. But from the first day I saw Mr. Sparrow, it had really been the loneliness in him that haunted me. The way it sat so heavy on his shoulders and slowed his feet to a shuffle. When I looked into his sad blue eyes that first day, I felt it, too, that ache of his from being alone in the world, the same kind of loneliness I’d felt being without Wilma. (p. 151)

Sadie knew what it was to be away from someone she loved, she knew that of all the hardships displacement could bring, losing loved ones was perhaps the worst. Despite all that her family had lost in their move from home, Sadie realized that they “might have been luckier than some” (p. 31), for they did have each other. All she could hope for those in similar circumstances—Wilma and Mr. Sparrow, both away from their own homes as well—was that they find “folks as good as” the new friends she made who gave her finally a sense of home (p. 233).
The People Who Feel Like Home

Underpinning all the evidence of the social component of home in these novels was the role of human beings in making a place feel like a home. Cities that had been lifelong places of residence were characterized by the individuals who lived there, and when disaster struck, thoughts and memories of those places were intimately connected to people. In situations where characters were unable to return to their original homes, forced to relocate and begin their lives anew, it was through the connections to loved ones that these places took on the feel of true homes.

The San Francisco neighborhood in which Jacob Kaufman lived with his father and sister was a place defined by its residents, a place where “people streamed in and out of every doorway” (Karwoski, 2004, p. 10). Familiar faces filled the streets—classmates from school and merchants from local shops—and children skipped, played, and were happy (pp. 10-11). Jacob’s family was surrounded by a network of Jewish immigrants from Poland like themselves, most of whom knew each other well (p. 5). Within Jacob’s apartment, however, the reassuring feel of home was missing, for four months prior, Jacob’s mother had died, and “there’s no such thing as a home without a mother!” (p. 4, emphasis in original). Where once there were smiles and joy, now there was only aching, empty longing (pp. 4, 19). Without his mother, the apartment was cold; it was a shelter, but not a home for Jacob. The feeling of home was gone from his household without the comforting presence of his mother as Jacob, his father, and his sister struggled to cope with her loss.

Overwhelmingly for Kia Vang in Little Cricket (Brown, 2004), home was connected to family. A member of a close-knit Hmong community in Laos, Kia’s home life was filled with the laughter of cousins (p. 2) and the camaraderie of working the land together with loved ones (p. 117). Community was everything; the people of Kia’s village respected and valued one
another, and indeed, the worst punishment that could be given out, “one of the saddest things that can happen to anyone,” was “being cast out from your home and away from fellow human beings” (pp. 18-19). Their heritage was described as one of “family growth and togetherness” and respect for “all the generations before them” (p. 129), and the goal of the nomadic life of their ancestors was “to find a home where we can live in peace and love our families” (p. 50). When Communist soldiers arrived, destroying huts and killing and kidnapping the men of the community, the feeling of home was taken from her village. In its stead was left the loneliness of fractured families and the fear of fathers, husbands, and sons who might never be reunited with those from whom they had been torn, and of mothers, wives, and daughters who were unsure whether the men they loved would live or die. With the men of fighting age kidnapped and gone, Grandfather reflected that the soldiers had “already taken everything” there was to take (p. 42)—their loved ones, their friends, the comfort of being together. Without this most important element of home, life was transformed and the place they knew was no longer homelike. Learning that her father was in fact among those who had not survived the Communists, Kia contemplated with shock the unimaginable reality that she would never see him again. Even when he was alive and well, her family’s hut never felt like home until Father got there at the end of a day (p. 68), and she could not imagine home or life without him. He signified home for her, and with him gone, all joy died from her life as well (p. 84). Even worse than the fact that Father was dead was the knowledge that “he [was] killed…far from home and those he loved” (p. 130). To Kia, being left to die without the comfort of loved ones was perhaps the worst fate imaginable. As one by one families left the village seeking safety elsewhere, the only home Kia had ever known became a strange and uncomforting place. She greeted with something akin to relief the news that her family too would leave the village, “because nearly
everyone had already gone, and she did not like looking at the abandoned huts that had been home to her laughing, fun-loving cousins” (p. 59).

Likewise for one of Blown Away!’s Islamorada families (Harlow, 2007), the place that had always been home became transformed with the loss of a loved one. When Billy Ashburn’s brother Roy was killed in the storm, doctors told Billy he was “lucky to be alive…But [he didn’t] feel lucky” (p. 228). His parents opted to bury Roy in a family plot in Miami—placing his body with the bodies of others to whom he was connected—and Billy expressed that he did not know whether they would return: “It doesn’t feel the same here without Roy” (p. 230). Islamorada had lost its air of home for the Ashburns; with one of them forever gone, the place they had lived together suddenly held an entirely different feel, one to which they were unsure they wanted to come back.

Uniquely among the novels I examined, the social component of home extended to the animals who populated Harlow’s (2007) Blown Away! The mule Jewel would go nowhere without her “faithful [canine] buddy” Rudy (p. 211): “They’re a pair. Jewel loves that dog” (p. 32). Together, Jewel and Rudy traversed their Islamorada home, and when the dog was killed in the storm, the mule lost much of her zest for life. She continued to assist with the clean-up efforts at the request of her owner, Sharkey, “but she wasn’t the same old Jewel. As soon as we came back to Sharkey’s, she headed for the sapodilla tree next to Rudy’s grave, then stood there with her head hung low” (p. 228). Jewel reawakened only when introduced to Ruby, a puppy who, as it turns out, was sired by Rudy before his death. Through Jewel, Rudy, and Ruby, Harlow pointed out that the importance of friendship might not be limited to humans, that perhaps all living creatures need a bond with loved others in order to feel at home.

For characters who were unable to return to the places that had been home, the relationship between loved ones and a feeling of home was most clear. In Brown’s Little Cricket

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Grandfather asserted that, quite apart from worrying about jobs or money, they would “have everything we need” (p. 240) just as soon as Kia’s mother and grandmother were able to come to America. The earthquake that struck his city brought to light for Jacob Kaufman the importance of his father and sister to his notion of home, and when at last they were reunited, “the awful doubts and fears were gone. For Jacob, the disaster was finally over” (Karwoski, 2004, p. 144). Though residing in a tent in Golden Gate Park with no indication of when or where they might find permanent shelter or when their city might be rebuilt, they were together, and that was all it took for Jacob’s aunt to refer to that tent as “home” (p. 141). A similar sentiment was expressed in 90 Miles to Havana (Flores-Galbis, 2010), when upon learning that his mother had arrived in the United States, where she was staying with her sister’s family in Connecticut, Julian expressed his most sincere desire: “I just want to go home” (p. 271). Home was not Cuba, home was not the camp, home was not any place he had ever seen before; home was his family, no matter where they happened to be. The reunion of Julian’s family brought a return of the sense of safety that togetherness brings: “Safe with my mother and brothers around me, I feel like I’ve been holding my breath for a long time and now I can finally exhale” (p. 277). Although in Connecticut rather than Havana, a place he knew not at all, with his mother’s arms around him, he was “home and swimming in her warm sea again” (p. 276).

**Summary**

These social connections between characters—families, friends new and old, loved ones both at home and in new places—were a vital part of the feelings of security, contentment, and happiness that made them feel at home. In the absence of these social bonds, separated from loved and needed others, characters struggled to cope with life in new places or with the experience of disaster in their devastated home regions. Reunion with family meant the
restoration of home, even in unfamiliar locales. This social element of home was indeed strong for many characters, indicating that their greatest source of comfort and belonging was the people who surrounded them.

The Personal Component of Home

“After a longer silence, the girl asked: ‘Would you go back? If you could?’ ‘You mean, without the wave?’ ‘Yes. Without the wave.’ ‘Then I’d have gone home, and everyone would have been alive, and I would be a man.’ ‘Would you rather be that man? Would you change places with him?’ asked the ghost girl. ‘And not be me? Not know about the globe? Not have met you?’ ‘Yes!’ Mau opened his mouth to reply and found it choked with words. He had to wait until he could see a path through them. ‘How can I answer you? There is no language. There was a boy called Mau. I see him in my memory, so proud of himself because he was going to be a man. He cried for his family and turned the tears into rage. And if he could, he would say “Did not happen!” and the wave would roll backward and never have been. But there is another boy, and he is called Mau, too, and his head is on fire with new things. What does he say? He was born in the wave, and he knows that the world is round, and he met a ghost girl who is sorry she shot at him. He called himself the little blue hermit crab, scuttling across the sand in search of a new shell, but now he looks at the sky and knows that no shell will ever be big enough, ever. Will you ask him not to be? Any answer will be the wrong one. All I can be is who I am. But sometimes I hear the boy inside crying for his family.’”

- Pratchett, 2008, pp. 325-326

An intimate connection between characters and their homes was revealed in a number of novels. Many felt that their very identities were shaped and defined by the places and people who were home to them, finding themselves questioning who they were once separated from all they had known. Within the spaces that were theirs, many characters enjoyed the rights and privileges of ownership, the personal autonomy that came with being at home. These characteristics bonding individuals to their home places make up a personal component of the concept of home.
Home and Identity

Home is often a place where people are known, where they have a place and an understanding of how they fit into the larger community. As such, its loss can have a devastating impact on residents’ sense of self. I encountered characters who felt a deep association with the places that were home, taking their identity from their neighborhoods, towns, nations, or islands. In the wake of disaster, separated from the people and places that were known and comforting, many felt alienated from the selves they had once been. Coping with the effects of disaster on their beloved homes, characters struggled to define who they were in new places and among new people, frequently feeling that they had left their true selves behind and transformed into someone virtually unrecognizable.

The Truth about Sparrows’ Sadie Wynn (Hale, 2004) gave voice to the dramatic shift in identity that can come with the loss of home. Displaced to South Texas, lost among “a flood of tents and tar-paper shacks and big brick schoolhouses,” she felt she “wasn’t but a scrap of what [she] used to be” (p. 111). Gone was the girl who lived in a real house in Missouri, the girl who had a best friend, a soft bed of her own, a porch swing built by her father, and a favorite sycamore tree to climb: “without them, I didn’t know who I was anymore” (p. 42). Without the context of the life and people she had always known, “the very last part of [her that she] could still recognize… disappeared… [She] was a stranger in this new place, even to [herself]” (p. 153). The loneliness she felt while listening to the sounds of her new home made her feel as though she had “lost a piece of [herself she] might not ever find again” (p. 21), and the bitterness and pain her loss caused were transforming her into a person she did not like (p. 186), “dirtying the bit of shine” she once had, “muddying [her] up till [she’d] never shine again” (pp. 153-154).

At home in Missouri, Sadie and her family knew who they were and were known by their neighbors as well. No one stared at her disabled father at home because “they knew Daddy was
more than just a cripple” (Hale, 2004, p. 16). In South Texas, they had a new identity—“bay rats” (p. 174), trash who lived in houses made of cardboard and tar-paper, people whom more fortunate children “[looked] right through” (p. 143). Thinking of herself as a person with a real home from which she was simply separated, and displeased about being “lumped into the same stewing pot with everyone on that bayfront” (p. 149), Sadie maintained for much of the novel that she was in fact different from them, better: “I came from better. I had a home—a nice home…. With real walls. And floors. And…and nice furniture. And a porch swing…and…and…” (p. 181). Though she sympathized with her new neighbors, she reiterated time and again that she did not belong in a tar-paper shack on the bayfront, that she was not “like them at all” (p. 149), that she would be returning to her real home one day. Only when Sadie came to realize that in fact she was not different from the other families who lived on her lane, and that her experience of losing a home and friends was not unique, did she begin to appreciate the place that was her new home and find a sense of self-acceptance, a positive new identity. Like the Swiss Family Robinson in the book Daddy read aloud, her family had “given up everything familiar to [them] and started a new life” (p. 131), but they were not alone. Dollie “had a nice home once, too” (p. 181), and Mr. Sparrow did as well. Understanding finally that “the Depression had turned [them] all into Mr. Sparrows” who were forced to “[flit] from camp to camp like birds making [their] way south” (p. 183), Sadie could at last begin to accept the reality of her new life, home, and self.

Identity was likewise a main theme of Katya Dubko’s displacement in the wake of the Chernobyl disaster. Aboard one of over a thousand buses taking refugees away from their radioactive homeland (White, 2008, p. 88), she believed that she “would have broken down except [for her] feeling that it wasn’t Katya Dubko” on that bus at all (p. 96). Surely, the “real Katya” was safe at home, doing something perfectly ordinary like planting the garden, while
“this person bouncing along in the red bus was someone else” (p. 96), someone unknown, someone she did not even want to know. Stepping off the bus in the capital city, almost two hundred miles from her home, she gained a new identity—“a Chernobyl person—someone whom everybody was curious about but no one wanted to befriend” (p. 115). The girl in the mirror was “a stranger” (p. 115) to her, an unknown being with shorn hair who came from “that place where nobody goes” (p. 116). She could not understand what she was doing so far from home and was deeply, profoundly unhappy. Even once her hair grew out and she no longer stood out physically as a Chernobyl native, she knew that still she was different: “I felt so different inside…. I was dormant, waiting and wondering if I would ever have a new life” (p. 119). Not knowing who she was herself, Katya was unable to connect with others, unable to make friends, and unsure whether it was her “own unfriendliness that made [her] stand apart and feel different, or the suspicion that other students had toward [her], the Chernobyl refugee” (p. 128). Her days at school were “featureless” (p. 128); once a top student in her class, she had lost her drive and focus, no longer taking pride in academic accomplishments.

Several years later, ensconced in a modern apartment in a shiny new city constructed specifically for the families of Chernobyl workers like her father, Katya’s transition from villager to townsperson was nearly complete. When I approached my home, I no longer expected to smell manure and grass as I had when I was younger. I didn’t listen for a dog to bark out a welcome. I didn’t long to feel the cooling shade of an old oak tree. (White, 2008, pp. 132-133)

Unlike the beloved cottage of her childhood, this “nondescript, modern space” bore very little sign of personalization—no photographs decorated the blank walls, perhaps because their “new lives in Slavutich felt too unreal to be documented” (p. 133). As she pondered her identity, her uncertainty about what to believe and who to be in the aftermath of “the total loss of [her] beloved home” (p. 109), she wondered who she might have become “if the accident hadn’t
happened… in the future that [she] should have had…in the future that [she] deserved” (p. 151). She discovered a new Katya—“neither the obedient girl from Yanov nor the silent one from Slavutich High School” (p. 211)—a girl with a rebellious streak, a willingness to risk punishment for the sake of slipping away to pay a visit to the buried site of her hometown, the place where she still believed the “real Katya” resided (p. 193). Returning to the place that was her home, she came to realize that “even though [she’d] lost all of [her] old things…the old ways” were still inside her (p. 229).

Away from their drought-stricken home and facing the hardships of life in Ankara, the family of Against the Storm’s Mehmet (Hiçyilmaz, 1990) also struggled with themes of identity. They were “country people” (p. 26), and as such were looked down upon by native city-dwellers, including their own relatives, who smiled at them “in a superior sort of way and [raised their] eyebrows” (pp. 31-32) as if to suggest that they would never allow themselves to be like “this family up from the country” (p. 64). Mehmet’s old friend Hayri, who with his studious ways seemed to belong in a privileged section of Ankara among “these quiet, serious people” (p. 132), was able to adapt to his new life with the wealthy Zekiye Hanım, slipping “as easily into it as a lizard on a sun-warmed wall slips into a crack” (p. 161). For Mehmet, though, who felt he was not special like Hayri, “there seemed to be no escape from the storm except to bend a bit lower. Nobody…offered him a home” (p. 157).

Life in Ankara wrought personality changes in Mehmet and his family. Faced with a daily struggle for survival in an unknown and unwelcoming city, Mehmet found “within himself a capacity for rage and anger…that made him feel much, much older” (Hiçyilmaz, 1990, p. 155). Gone were the carefree days of his childhood, and gone, too, was the feeling of the close-knit family he once knew. His mother, who at home in their country village smiled and joked, was “irritable” (p. 100) in Ankara, “made cruel or thoughtless or both” by the new hardships she
faced in this unfamiliar place (p. 166). Her spitefulness shocked Mehmet, who expected such behavior from his city relatives, but not from “his own family” (p. 168). Life “in the shantytown [made Mehmet’s family] as cautious and careful as a rat in the shadows” (p. 151), avoiding trouble at all costs, allowing others to “[walk] all over them” (p. 151). In their former life, for example, his mother knew that her nephew Hakan was a spoiled and unlikeable child, but now, at the mercy of Hakan’s parents for shelter, she seemed to have changed her opinion (p. 101). This new life, this fight for survival had stolen their courage and eaten “them up like some terrible disease” (p. 153), leaving them changed and unrecognizable as the people they had once been at home.

As *Nation* opened, Pratchett’s (2008) characters began with a clear sense of their own very different identities: Ermintrude, a proper English young lady from a “polite household” (p. 158), and Mau, a boy on the verge of manhood whose island Nation ran in his blood. With the coming of the wave, however, these identities became less easily defined. Ermintrude shed the stuffy trappings of the way she was raised and renamed herself Daphne, allowing at last her true nature to shine through—a girl who knew what she wanted and was strong-willed enough to fight for it (p. 67). While at home she had been forced into a life of leisurely, ladylike pursuits, she became a person who was needed in this new place: “Here I’m not some sort of doll. I have a purpose. People listen to me. I’ve done amazing things. How could I go back to my life before?” (p. 327). The person she was when the wave struck was replaced by one more confident and self-assured, and this new identity remained with her for the rest of her life.

For Mau, whose entire Nation was decimated by the wave, the struggle with identity was more problematic. He thought of himself as a soul trapped between boyhood and manhood; he was the homeless “blue hermit crab, hurrying from one shell to another, and the big shell he…thought he could see had been taken away” (Pratchett, 2008, p. 96). Unsure who he was
now, the lone survivor of all the many people he had known, beginning again to put together a life on a shattered island with refugees from other places, he reflected that in the wave’s aftermath, “Who knows what we are? We survived, that’s all…. And we become what we have to be….” (p. 122). A new community was formed among the survivors, a “kind of floating village…of children without parents, parents without children, wives without husbands, people without all those things around them that told them what they were” (p. 166). Mau knew only that he needed these people as they need him, that “without them I would be just a figure on the gray beach, a lost boy, not knowing who I am. But they all know me. I matter to them, and that is who I am” (p. 115). He became a leader, a chief among the survivors who came to his island, the bearer of all that was and would be his Nation. The boy who was the hermit crab found at last a new soul, a new sense of belonging and purpose, a new home. He rechristened the Nation itself as a new people for a new world, a Nation no longer of the sunset wave, but of the “sunrise wave…we are its children, and we will not go into the dark again” (p. 357).

For Harlow’s characters in *Blown Away!* (2007), there was great pride in being people of the Florida Keys. Calling themselves “conchs” (pp. 42, 43, 118, 165, 176), the natives felt that their identity was tied to the place they called home. With the hurricane, they took on a new descriptor—“refugees” (p. 188)—no longer people who were self-sufficient with their knowledge of place, but rather individuals who needed the help of others to survive. Personalities changed in the storm’s wake: “The storm had taken its toll on [Sharkey]. Although he tried to be positive, I knew he was tired and resigned” (p. 237). And those who were once young and carefree were no longer: “I knew that the storm had changed something else, too. We weren’t kids anymore” (p. 231).

*Little Cricket*’s Kia Vang took to heart her mother’s reminder upon leaving for America—“we are Hmong, no matter where we live” (Brown, 2004, p. 99)—and was able to
adjust to her new life so well that it was hard to “see the line anymore where the old [Kia]…blended with the new” (p. 226). Her brother Xigi and their grandfather, however, found themselves facing questions of identity in a new and unfamiliar country. Grandfather, a revered shaman and elder in his Laotian village, became “more and more quiet” (p. 119) and withdrawn upon leaving his home. No longer did people come to him seeking advice or healing; instead, he sat, “doing nothing,” feeling “he [was] not needed anymore” (p. 90). Away from home, he was no longer the same man he had been in the place where he was known and respected. A bit of his old self resurfaced on the occasions when he visited with another immigrant from his homeland, his “voice [becoming] strong and interested again” (p. 127), and embroidering images of home on his story cloths smoothed “the tired lines in his face” (p. 130), but by and large, he spent his days in Minnesota gazing out of the apartment window, refusing to learn English, speaking less and less even in his native language as time went by (p. 119). Looking at “his thin, bowed body and [feeling] there was nobody inside it” (p. 119), Kia saw the “proud, lively man he had been in Laos…fading” (p. 120), and worried that he would gradually disappear altogether.

Xigi too experienced a change in identity with his displacement from home and family. Once an avid artist, never seen without a drawing tablet in hand and a pencil behind his ear (Brown, 2004, pp. 20, 112), Xigi left behind these trappings of his former self as he became increasingly distant from Kia and Grandfather (pp. 81, 112). He stopped coming home for meals with his family, would not introduce them to his new friends, and grew “more and more…reluctant to speak the old language or follow Hmong customs” (p. 135). So much did his identity change in this new place that Kia felt he had “nearly become a stranger” (p. 136). Only at the novel’s end, when there was news that Mother and Grandmother would be joining them at
last in America, did Xigi’s “old yellow tablet” (p. 228) reappear, and Kia viewed this as a sign that perhaps the old Xigi was on his way back to them.

Neither her brother nor her grandfather recognized at first what Kia knew, that “coming to America [does not mean] we change from what we are” (Brown, 2004, p. 138). Nor did either understand the way the other was coping with his adjustment to a new home. To Xigi, Grandfather’s resisting change and living “only in his memories” (p. 138) was a model of exactly what not to do:

I can’t be like… Grandfather, doing things the old way, wishing our lives were the same as they had been in Laos, because nothing is the same. With Mother and Grandmother still in Thailand, we aren’t even a family anymore.… Everything has changed and I’m going to change with it. (p. 138).

And to Grandfather, “Xigi [was] too much of an American now” to make any time for his family (p. 134). One spoke only the old language, while the other refused to speak it at all. The elder remained isolated in the family apartment, while the younger spent as little time there as possible. Yet both grappled with the same basic issue—not knowing who they were in this new and unfamiliar place, trying to find a place for themselves amidst unknown people and customs, away from all that was their home.

In *Finding Sophie*, Watts’s title character felt that she knew who she was after years spent living with Aunt Em, and that was a girl who belonged in England, not in her native Germany: “Zoffie doesn’t exist anymore. I’m Sophie Mandel” (2002, p. 21). Aunt Em’s gift of a Star of David necklace, rather than a treasured link to her past, was for Sophie a source of confusion, as religion had no place in her new life (p. 27). Gone was the Jewish child she once had been, replaced by a young lady who felt little connection to the past she left behind. Thoroughly identifying herself as a British girl, no longer could she speak, read, or understand the German language (pp. 5, 107). Having been born in that country made her feel like the enemy (pp. 13-
14), and she worried that others saw her as a foreigner even after living more than half her life in England (p. 52). The tension between the self she felt she was and the person others believed her to be was a struggle of identity that left her confused and anxious as she sought to remain in England after the war ended.

In *A Sea so Far* (Thesman, 2001), the impact of home on identity was seen in characters’ quite different reactions to the earthquake and its aftermath. Those from the part of town South of Market Street, an area of boardinghouses and homes for San Francisco’s less fortunate citizens, were portrayed as experiencing the earthquake as an immediately apparent disaster. With their homes sunken into the earth or buried under rubble, they suffered the shock of losing everything that was theirs in a matter of seconds, “looking about them like stunned rabbits” (p. 11). Trudging through the city seeking safety from raging fires, they formed a “mass of silent refugees” (p. 31); with clothing layered on top of clothing in a bid to bring as much as possible with them, they looked and felt like “vagrants” (p. 37).

Among San Francisco’s more privileged, however, the enormity of the disaster was not at first recognized. In the wealthier parts of town that survived the quake itself without tremendous property damage, there was an air of frivolity, almost enjoyment of the occasion:

The families on the block behaved as if they were having a party. The men and the servants had dragged out everyone’s dining room furniture, and the maids carried around food to share. The men had their drinks and cigars afterward while everyone sat on chairs in the street and watched the rest of the city burn. (Thesman, 2001, p. 29)

There was laughter (p. 25) and anticipation of having tea with friends later that afternoon—“we’ll have the best time” (p. 23)—and a general belief that “there’s nothing for us to worry about here. We’re quite safe” (p. 24). Watching the already homeless refugees from the poorer parts of town file past their streets, some wondered curiously about the belongings they carried...
with them or where they spent the previous night (pp. 47, 48), but most felt, even through this curiosity, “as if the parade had little or nothing to do with them” (p. 48).

The contrast between these two very different reactions to the earthquake in its immediate aftermath highlights the interrelation of home and identity. Those whose homes were places of privilege carried a sense that they were indestructible, that the real damage would be done to the less fortunate. Characters who were accustomed to a life of struggle more readily recognized that they were not immune to the dangers of the quake, that indeed they had become refugees, vagrants, people in search of the shelter and safety that had disappeared in an instant.

Ownership/Rights

In six novels, the personal component of home included a sense of ownership, the rights enjoyed by characters in the places that were their own. Home is thought of as a place that belongs to its owner; it is the place where the owner has the authority to say what is allowed and what is forbidden. Homeowners may welcome others inside or opt to refuse them entry; they may hospitably share their space or choose to protect their privacy. Within their own domain, homeowners have control over their space and their possessions; they are afforded a measure of respect. Achieving ownership of a home can bring with it a sense of autonomy, of being the master of one’s own destiny, making one feel independent and accomplished.

In Antieau’s Ruby’s Imagine, (2008) Mammalooose asserted her ownership privileges to Ruby, telling her she was lucky to be allowed to live in her home, and that she must do as Mammalooose told her, for “This is my house! Mine” (p. 42). Likewise in Against the Storm (Hiçyilmaz, 1990), Hakan demanded to know why Mehmet was outside the house that belonged to his own father, a place to which Mehmet had no rights: “What are you doing here anyway? This is Yusuf Bey’s house….” (p. 29). These two statements indicated the significance of
ownership to the characters who spoke them. Both Mammaloose and Hakan felt a sense of empowerment in the homes that were theirs; they believed themselves to be in control there. For Mehmet’s aunt, Elif, who had shared lodging with her husband’s extended family for some time, having a home of her very own was a goal of utmost importance. Though her family was kind and welcoming, the thought of having “a little home of [her] own” brought a glow to her eyes (Hiçyilmaz, 1990, p. 10). The day she finally located a house to rent, “she came scurrying to tell them, her eyes shining with victory” (p. 99). Though her house was small, it was hers, a place for her to hang the green velvet curtains she had always wanted (p. 158), a place that she could make into whatever she wanted it to be.

In 90 Miles to Havana, Julian’s mother made clear that her home was her place, demanding of the government representative who usurped her authority, “Who let you into my house?” (Flores-Galbis, 2010, p. 45). Outraged at the woman’s presumption, she asserted that she had “no right to come into my house in the middle of the night!” (p. 36) and demanded that she “get out of my house!” (p. 46). The Cuban government, by contrast, considered itself the master of the people’s homes and belongings in the wake of the revolution, dictating what they were allowed to bring with them out of the country—“Fifty dollars and one change of clothes is all they’ll let us take out, and the government keeps everything else” (p. 49)—and sealing houses after the residents departed, forbidding neighbors or anyone else to enter what was now government property (pp. 27, 28, 45). Taking away the basic right of home ownership, command over one’s own place and belongings, was a sure way to control the population and shift the base of power, leaving Julian’s family and many others without the authority they had taken for granted in their homes.

The Communists encountered by the Laotian people in Little Cricket (Brown, 2004) also recognized the importance of ownership to the notion of home, declaring that indeed what the
people thought was their homeland was not theirs at all: “You act like this land belongs to you! Nothing belongs to you, do you understand? Nothing! You have no right to anything here!” (p. 30). Much like the Cuban revolutionaries’ actions, this declaration left the citizens of Laos without a place to call their own, powerless in the face of threat, and unable to assert the rights of ownership that they had once enjoyed, forcing them out of their own country to find homes elsewhere.

*Nation’s* Daphne (Pratchett, 2008) understood the importance of having rights in the place that was home, despite the fact that her father was part of an empire-hungry British monarchy. She recognized that the Nation was Mau’s island, that it should not have a British flag thrust upon its beach, that the king had enough land, and “doesn’t need [this island]! He can’t have it!” (p. 328). In a century in which “no little island was allowed to belong to itself” (p. 233), she objected and defended the Nation’s right to its own treasures and history: “don’t take this place away from them. It’s theirs” (p. 331). This place, built by their own ancestors, belonged to them, it was their place, it was their home.

In *Greener Grass*, Pignat (2008) presented a character who understood only the ownership component of home. Charged with collecting rent from farmers living on the land that belonged to Lord Fraser, the middle-man Lynch gave no recognition of a personal connection to place, an emotional bond to the site of memories of a life lived there; to him, a house was but a possession to be paid for, and “Those who cannot pay will be evicted” (p. 133). His lack of concern for the families who lived on his land extended to his decree that, once evicted, anyone taking shelter anywhere else on his land would suffer consequences (p. 153). To Lynch, the matter was quite simple: the land belonged to Lord Fraser, not to the suffering potato farmers, and if they were unable to pay, they had no right to remain there. Kit’s view was quite different. The home she had known all her life, the place where her family had always lived,
was precious to her, certainly not a mere possession. Her house was a place infused with personal connection, and its loss was devastating: “How could he? How could he take my home from me?” (p. 232). To Kit, notions of ownership and rights were not tied to financial investment; her home was hers because of the life she had lived there, because of the social, historical, and emotional investment she had in that place, and it was no less hers because her family was unable to pay rent during difficult times.

**Summary**

Homes were places that shaped their residents’ identities. They were places where characters could be autonomous and independent, where they had rights within the space that was theirs. Because of this deeply personal connection, the loss of home brought with it a feeling of powerlessness and a crisis of identity, a struggle to determine who to be and how to fit in among new people in an unknown place, where one was often at the mercy of others. This personal component of home was a poignant one, leaving characters to grapple with the loss not only of homes, loved ones, and possessions, but of their very selves as well.

**The Physical/Geographical Component of Home**

“‘There is a story, a very old story, about two brothers who fought. One killed the other, but in the battle it could have been otherwise, and the other one dead. The killer fled, knowing the punishment and taking it upon himself.’ ‘Was the punishment awful?’ ‘He would be sent far away from the islands, far from his people, from his family, never to walk in the steps of his ancestors, never to sing a death chant for his father, never to hear the songs of his childhood, never again to smell the sweet water of home. He built a canoe and sailed in new seas far away, where men are baked into different colors and for half of every year trees die. He lived for many lifetimes and saw many things, but one day he found a place that was best of all, because it was the island of his childhood, and he stepped onto the shore and died, happily, because he was home again.’”

- Pratchett, 2008, pp. 264-265
The novels I examined revealed a physical or geographical aspect of home: a strong pull to a particular location, a connection to place. For some characters, a house or nation was itself infused with emotion—more than a place to live, it was a place that seemed to have life of its own. As they encountered both homes and new places through their physical senses, such physical characteristics of place as sights, sounds, or scents were integral to many characters’ experiences. When disaster struck, rendering hometowns and islands unrecognizable, it brought shock and disorientation to some, while others, intimately connected to their home places, saw through the devastation to the land they knew so well despite the defamiliarization brought by disaster. These known geographical locations for some were viewed as points of origin from which they set out to experience the wider world, a spot on the globe that remained in thought while elsewhere, no matter how far away characters might have found themselves.

**Connection to Place**

Home, for many of the characters I encountered, was a place that was loved, a place to which they felt bonded or attached. Several were willing to risk their physical safety in order to remain in the hometowns or houses they cherished, believing that these places were where they truly belonged. Those who were forced to leave for new locations thought back fondly of the places they had left, sometimes longing more than anything for a return to the homes they once knew. Whether their attachment was to a house, a town, or a nation, these characters felt that place was a part of them.

In *Blown Away!* (2007), Harlow’s characters exhibited a real sense of identifying with the place that was home. Explaining to newcomer Mara that the very name of their town, Islamorada, meant “island home” (p. 46), Jake Pitney thought of his home as “paradise” (p. 46), and the larger Florida Keys, of which it was a part, as “jewels on the sea” (p. 23). Mara too
came to “love it here in the Keys...[wishing she could] stay here forever” (p. 165). Sharkey’s old boxcar home, though incomprehensible to many who lived in sturdier and larger houses, was a place he truly loved, and he reminisced that on one occasion when he was forced to be away, his “old boxcar never looked so good as the day I came home” (p. 23). For these characters, the place that was home was loved and treasured; it was the place they most wanted to be. It was also a place they knew intimately; being lifelong residents of the Keys, Harlow’s characters understood their home and could read its patterns. Unlike the veterans from other parts of the country working in camps nearby, the natives knew to “acknowledge the power of storms” (p. 142) and recognized “how unpredictable and dangerous they could be” (p. 141). They grew up depending on barometers, and could sense by the heaviness of the air that the storm that the Weather Bureau said might miss them was indeed coming directly their way (pp. 147, 176). The place where they had spent their entire lives had taught them its ways, had conditioned them to respect it as much as they loved it.

Love of their island home drew both Jake’s family and their neighbors the Ashburns back to it once it was inhabitable again after the storm. Forced to scatter to other places for safety in the hurricane’s immediate aftermath, these two families were thrilled when at last they were able to return home. Billy Ashburn expressed that, though initially unsure whether he would want to return, he “couldn’t wait [to come back] once the bridges were repaired” (Harlow, 2007, p. 241), and Jake, who remained in Miami for a year after the storm, longed for his island home and “could hardly wait to move back” (p. 245). He greeted with glee the news that his family was one chosen to move into sturdy houses constructed by the Red Cross. Once arrived, despite the reality that another storm could strike at any time, he felt tremendous relief at being “safe at home” again (p. 248). Though indeed there was no more guarantee of safety in his island home
than there had been before, simply being there, in that place that was his, gave him the security he missed while away.

Another character whose connection to place outweighed practical concerns for safety was *Little Cricket*’s Aunt Zoua (Brown, 2004). Living in a leaky mountainside hut in Laos “that nearly washed down into the valley each rainy season” (p. 9), Aunt Zoua refused for years all offers to move to a safer house in the village. When the rest of the villagers realized that they must leave their land to escape Communist soldiers, Aunt Zoua remained, claiming “she would die where she had lived” (pp. 59-60). The place where she spent her life held her; it was more meaningful to her even than her personal safety. Kia and Grandfather as well felt an abiding love for their Laotian home, though they made the difficult choice to leave it for the sake of survival. Separation from his “beloved” (p. 79) mountains that Grandfather knew “better than anyone” (p. 54) brought him great heartache, and Kia was saddened upon leaving the only home she had ever known:

Kia’s throat was tight with unshed tears. She had never been farther from home than the next green mountaintop, where the villagers had grown fields of corn, and the valley between, where the rice was harvested. She did not dare look behind her, but walked steadily forward just as the old red cow that pulled the plow used to do. She did not think. She did not feel. She just kept putting one foot in front of the other. That first day of walking was the worst. They crossed their barren fields, knowing they would never plant them again. (p. 64)

In *Greener Grass*, (Pignat, 2008) Kit expressed similar difficulty in leaving her home in Ireland, knowing she would never return:

We cut round the back way, to avoid passing our charred home. I wanted to remember it as it used to be—a place of laughter and love. Of song and story…. At the crest of the hill, I turned for one last look. Killanamore spread out before me with its rolling hills and sloping meadows trimmed in white stone walls. I carved the landscape into my mind’s eye. From this view, nothing seemed amiss. From up here, you’d never know there’d been blight, famine, evictions, and death. I half expected to see smoke drifting from Millie’s cottage, or see Mick watching cormorants from the stones just below. This was how I wanted to remember it. The sea wind climbed the valley and kissed my face. (p. 236)
For both Kia and Kit, leaving the place that was the only home they had ever known was an emotional and difficult parting. Home was a beloved site, a place to which they felt deeply connected, and the prospect of never seeing it again brought a distinct sense of loss. As Kia could not bring herself to look back at her war-torn village, Kit avoided the sight of her burned-down cottage; neither girl could bear the sight of home looking ruined, but wanted to remember it as the treasured place she had known so well.

*The Truth about Sparrows*’ (Hale, 2004) Sadie Wynn likewise had a profound love for the only home she had ever known, the devastated Missouri Dust Bowl region she was forced to leave. For much of the novel, she believed that her life in Texas was temporary, an existence to be survived until her family was able to return to their real home. The tar-paper shack that became her family’s new dwelling was, to her, an inadequate substitute for a “real house. My house. A house with walls and floors and a front porch” (p. 61). She longed to return to “the porch swing Daddy built and the big sycamore tree out back” (p. 42)—features of the place she knew and loved, the place that was her true home. Sadie worked tirelessly to contribute financially to a return to Missouri, willing to go without luxuries like new clothes or a completed floor in her family’s shack if it meant more money could be saved to get her home. Each new turn of good luck—a job peeling shrimp at the Rice Cannery, the successful floating of Daddy’s boat that meant there would be fish to sell, even the safety of her shack and the boat after a hurricane came through—was for Sadie a step closer to her family’s being able to return to Missouri. She believed deeply that it was only a matter of time before things in Missouri were better, before her family could save enough money to make their way back to the place they truly belonged (p. 42). Her single-minded determination to return to the home she knew made it
difficult to accept the possibility that this new place might just be where she would remain, that it too might become a real home.

The connection to place in Antieau’s *Ruby’s Imagine* (2008) was illustrated in two very different ways. Mammaloose’s bond was with her house, a house she loved so much that “she chose a man who would fit the house; he had to be small enough for the low ceilings” (p. 4). Refusing to leave as Hurricane Katrina approached, Mammaloose explained that “If we leave, they might never let us back. And this house is all I got” (p. 86). To her, the house she owned represented her entire worth; it was all she had, seemingly more important even than the people in her life. Ruby, in contrast, exhibited a connection to place that was much more nuanced, extending beyond a house or even a town. Ruby had a deep affinity for the natural world, one which compelled her to think of herself not as a resident of a given city, state, or nation, but rather as a “citizen of the earth” (p. 20). Feeling intimately connected with her natural surroundings, Ruby believed that “We’re not separate from Nature…. We are Nature” (pp. 32-33). Because of this conviction, Ruby felt that “if human people could see that everything is important—everything is kin, is people—then the world would be a better place. People could see how we all belong together, humans and trees and birds and the swamp” (pp. 162-163). Elements of place were a part of her, deeply loved and appreciated. Walking barefoot so that her “soul [could] touch the soul of the Earth” (p. 90), Ruby spent her days communing with the Flying People—birds she named Samuel Beckett Sparrow and Maya Angelou Hummingbird—and the Rooted People—the wisteria, the magnolia trees, and all manner of plants. The places she experienced filled Ruby with peace and happiness. On one occasion, testing out a threat from Mammaloose of being thrown out on the street for associating with the wrong kind of people, Ruby spent a day sitting in the street, where she felt “the earth trying to come up through the road and put a comfort on” her (p. 50). Gazing up at the Milky Way brought her “beautiful
feels‖ (p. 123), and “glad feels” enveloped her as she visited the park she knew as the Home of the Old Oaks and the Flying Horses (p. 39). Her propensity for naming animals and places illustrated her profound connection with the natural world, her conviction that place was an essential component of feeling at home. Indeed, she thought of the park as a home to the ancient oak trees and the carousel—more than simply a place where they could be found, the park was the place they belonged, the place that was theirs.

Ruby’s love for her surroundings and profound connection with the places where she lived and spent her time led her to characterize her Ninth Ward neighborhood with affection:

I heard Mammaloose once say that calling where you lives a ward make you sound like you living in some kind of institution. I can only be agreeing with her. I say I is a citizen of the Earth and right now I be living in a place somewheres between the old oak next to the yellow two-story and the gum tree out front of the pale green double shotgun. I lives in the place where the wisteria dips over the fence to hold hands with the magnolia that dips down to say hello to the Place Where My Vegetables Grow. That’s where I lives. At Café Brouhaha, where I work, the owner’s daughter, Louisa, asks me if I’m not afraid living where I lives. She thinks we killing each other all the time. I always tell her—‘cause she asks me a lot—I tell her, ‘Naw, that nonsense happens a few blocks down. We awright.’ She never seen violence where she live. It pretty all the time, I guess. I imagine my Garden of Neighbors likes that. I sees it all for what it truly is, I think…. I’m not saying bad things ain’t happening where I lives. I is saying other things going on too. (Antieau, 2008, pp. 11-12)

Rather than a place to fear, Ruby’s perception of her neighborhood was one of friendly wisteria holding hands with equally sociable magnolias. She enjoyed being in that place, being still and feeling connected to nature: “Sometimes it’s nice being still…. You can hear the Flying People, feel the ground at your feet, the breath of the Rooted People on your skin” (p. 22). Aware of the challenges of life in her neighborhood, she saw beyond them to the beauty of the place that was her home.

In Pratchett’s Nation (2008), the intimate connection between person and place was made evident in Mau’s first conversation with Daphne. Unable to speak each other’s languages, Daphne said her name to Mau—to her, the most important first word to share—while Mau
assumed upon hearing it that “she was from Daphne,” as the most essential bit of knowledge about a person in the islands was the land and clan from which she hailed (pp. 67-68). For Mau, this land that he knew so well, the Nation that was his, was a place that was forever there waiting for him, despite whatever travels he undertook. The place was dependable, it was constant, it was reliable; more than simply knowing it was there, Mau could feel the place awaiting his return when he was away (p. 84-85). Daphne beautifully illustrated the connection between Mau and the place he called home as she responded to an outsider’s claim that a man could not make a soul for himself: “This one did. He made it outside himself. You are walking on it…. And don’t try to shuffle away sideways. It covers the whole island, every leaf and pebble!” (p. 310). The island was more than a dwelling place for Mau; it was his very soul, a part of him as he was one with it. The island became a part of Daphne as well; though she returned to England to live out the remainder of her life, upon her death, at her request, her body was returned to the island and buried at sea there in the place she had come to love (p. 362).

In A Sea so Far, Jolie Logan’s connection to place was described by her father as “a passion for the house where her mother died” during the 1906 San Francisco earthquake (Thesman, 2001, p. 67). From the moment just days after the quake when Jolie first realized that she could not “remember clearly her mother’s face or what their home had been like only two days before” (p. 54), Jolie became obsessed not only with returning to the house—“Everything about Mother is in that house. We must go back” (p. 54)—but with returning the house itself to the condition it was in when her mother was alive. She dreamt of the house as she slept (p. 56), longing to have “everything… just the way it always was” (p. 55). She secured from her father a promise to have “the entire house… restored exactly the way it had been when Mother died” (p. 77), and devoted her energies to ensuring that all details—draperies, bedspreads—were recreated to look like the house her mother occupied. Accused by her father of attempting to create a
shrine to her mother, Jolie believed instead that she was merely fitting it “to seem like her mother’s home, quiet and serene and beautiful” (pp. 77-78), a tribute to “the quiet and beautiful woman who had raised her” (p. 120). Her mother’s house became her refuge, where she hid herself away from others as she attempted to recreate the past. A sickly girl even before the earthquake, Jolie remained confined to a wheelchair during her stay in Marin County as she awaited her move back to San Francisco, and only emerged from the chair upon her return to her mother’s house (p. 67). She felt stronger physically just being in the house that was her mother’s. And only within its walls did she feel secure enough to visit with friends, thinking of venturing out as “too big a step” (p. 89). Within the house, she felt connected to her mother, sometimes forgetting that she was gone and running into her room to share a bit of news, or even believing she felt “her mother’s hand brush her arm” (p. 84). The only way she could begin to think of surviving the loss of her mother was to restore the house in her honor, so that one day she would be able to live there with a daughter of her own—a daughter who would share her mother’s name (pp. 84-85, 120, 146). When her father’s concern over her obsession led him to send her to Ireland for a visit with her aunt, it was her mother’s house for which Jolie longed most (pp. 115, 120, 121, 158, 187), awaiting the day when she would return to “put her travel diary next to her mother’s on her mother’s bedroom bookshelf and feel that something important had been completed” (p. 122).

Jolie’s traveling companion and caretaker Kate was likewise smitten with a place that was once her own deceased mother’s—Ireland, the land of her mother’s birth. Kate thought often of the way her mother spoke of Ireland and its green hills and longed to “see everything that [her] mother saw” (Thesman, 2001, p. 56), to “experience all that her mother had experienced, growing up in that green and misty land” (p. 113). Though her mother left Ireland willingly to make a new life in the United States, Kate yearned to walk the streets of her native
village and gaze “out across the ocean toward America, the way she did” (p. 158). Ireland represented for Kate a connection to the mother she had lost, and she believed that in that land, not only would she find an escape from a ravaged San Francisco with its “memories of falling bricks and screaming people trapped inside buildings and the terrible gray dust drifting down” (p. 112), but she would finally find “her true place, her true people” (p. 152) amidst “her mother’s green fields” (p. 70) that “unfolded to the sea” (p. 65). Kate’s romanticized notion of Ireland was what compelled her to seek employment as a companion to the sickly Jolie, who would soon be traveling to Ireland in her father’s bid to get her out of the house in which her own mother died. But once in Ireland, despite her romantic notions, the place did not bring the magic Kate anticipated. While she did love life in Ireland, finding greater happiness there than she had known, still something was missing: “This land should be my home…but is it?” (p. 176). A visit to her mother’s hometown brought the expected joy of walking the paths her mother once trod, yet standing on a cliff overlooking the sea of which her mother so often spoke, Kate “thought for a moment that she could see the golden hills of San Francisco in the distance, and her heart seemed to jump in her chest” (p. 168). When Jolie’s illness made it apparent that she would never be well enough to return to her San Francisco home, prompting her to send Kate to make the return journey in her stead, Kate’s sudden recollection of the beauty of San Francisco’s hills had her thinking, “I’m going home….barely realizing that she was smiling even as she wept” (p. 183). Perhaps Ireland was not where Kate was meant to be after all; perhaps she, like her mother, was called to live in America, the land where her strengths “for building and creating [were] desperately needed” (p. 173), the land she understood, the place “where she truly belonged” (p. 169).
**Place Infused with Emotion**

Two novels featured places that not only inspired emotion in their inhabitants, but were themselves infused with emotion—places that seemed to live and breathe. Pignat wrote in *Greener Grass* of “the very soul of Ireland” (2008, p. 30), “the heartbeat of Ireland herself” (p. 91), and “the spirit of Ireland,” a spirit of strength and hope (p. 264). With the crops and people devastated, “’Twas as though the hills themselves were crying” (p. 61), and moisture dripped down the walls “as if the very house itself wept for us” (p. 172). In *Nation* (Pratchett, 2008), Mau’s island too was a place that was personified. Imagining the people who disappeared in the wave, Mau wondered if it was the island that “remember[ed] their footsteps and their faces, and put them in his head” (p. 85). For both Mau and Daphne, the island was “alive,” a place that helped them, encouraged them, and reached out to them in their times of need (pp. 85, 213). These two places came to life in the minds of the people who loved them, leaving their residents feeling loved in return by the places that were home.

**Physical Sensation**

Home places in these novels were experienced physically, through the senses. Characters reflected on sights, sounds, scents, and the corporal feel of the places they encountered, often reminded of lost homes by familiar sensations or longing for them in the face of foreign ones. The San Francisco home of *Quake!’s* Jacob Kaufman (Karwoski, 2004) had been characterized by the “familiar odors [of] cabbage boiling on the stove, latkes sizzling in the pan” (pp. 2-4), and thinking of these scents filled him with “an ache deep inside, an indescribable longing and emptiness” (p. 4). On Mau’s island Nation, the sound of “wind and the boom of the waves on the reef… was what counted as silence” (Pratchett, 2008, p. 209), and the scent of a cauldron of bubbling beer and an elderly lady were “reassuringly homely smells” (p. 294). In *Against the*
Storm, Mehmet was unsettled by the “incessant noise” of Ankara after the “quiet and stillness” of his village (Hiçyilmaz, 1990, p. 28). A Sea so Far’s Jolie (Thesman, 2001) longed for the sight of San Francisco’s “ruffled bay, the gentle hills” (p. 185), and was homesick for sounds of “the moaning foghorns, the impatient and angry toot of the tugs, the warning horns of the ferries. Sometimes she awoke suddenly at night, thinking she heard cable cars again. Or Mrs. Conner’s voice in the hall…. Or Joseph’s slippered feet whispering on carpet” (p. 189).

In Little Cricket, Kia Vang’s experience of the strangeness of life in America was tied largely to physical sensation:

Kia studied the people they passed. She had never seen so many people with hair the color of wheat and skin nearly as pale as cauliflower. And it seemed, in this land of so much, there was no silence to be found. Each night Grandfather said his ears were tired of the new sounds. Even the air smelled noisy, full of unfamiliar smells drifting out of doorways and lingering in the cold. (Brown, 2004, pp. 101-102)

The “snuffle of pigs and the self-important cluck of chickens” from home were replaced first by the “rattle of gunfire and rumble of planes” (p. 56) in the Thai refugee camp, and ultimately by “the never-ending drone of car tires on the busy street” (pp. 1-2) in Minnesota. Kia missed the “distant pink mountaintops,” the giggles of playing children, and “the smoke from the morning cooking fires [that] melted into the air” (pp. 7-8) in her Laotian village. The never-ending Laotian summer gave way to water that turned to ice “during [Minnesota’s] long, white winters” (p. 100), when the sky appeared “dirty and hard and Kia’s teeth chattered” with the cold (p. 101). Gazing upon the images Grandfather embroidered of their lost “stands of corn, ribbons of blue water, and villages like theirs with thatched huts and children playing” (p. 93) lightened Kia’s spirits and made her feel temporarily connected to the land that had been home. Though a small American apartment felt confining to a child accustomed to “the vast greenery of Laos” (p. 166), she could appreciate the “spring miracle of new leaves appearing on winter trees” and the
Minnesota air that was “sweet and clean, making her want to take long, deep breaths,” so different from the “humid, heavy air of Laos” (p. 115).

90 Miles to Havana’s Julian (Flores-Galbis, 2010) felt his strongest longing for the home he lost when reminded of Cuba by sights, sounds, and scents he encountered in Miami—the smell of suntan lotion (p. 188) or a Cuban coffee shop (p. 169); the harsh, loud noises of Miami (p. 170) and the Cuban-accented voices of people who “feel, and talk, like home” (pp. 191, 197); the sight of “sparkling blue water” (p. 188), sidewalk chalks (p. 219), and the drawings he created of scenes from home (pp. 104, 110). The differences between Miami and Cuba, though only ninety miles apart, were evident in the sight of Americans separated and organized on the beach (p. 192) and in the sea that was “much darker and wilder than my sea. The sun is different, too. It stings my skin, and its light is too sharp and clear for daydreamers” (p. 214). Thoughts of his mother, whom he missed desperately, were marked by the scent of her perfume, the sight of “her teardrop face floating above” him, and the sound of her voice (p. 251).

In Greener Grass (Pignat, 2008), physical sensation was a large part of Kit’s experience of place as well, particularly scent. She lovingly reflected on the smells of “sweet pine and rich earth” (p. 24) and the scent of “rain on [a] turf bog” (p. 91). The smells of hay and manure, for Kit, were “the scent of a prosperous farm” (p. 14), a scent destroyed by the blight, which brought a stench that was “the smell of hope rotting in their fields” (p. 61). Sights such as “a mist rolling over the hills” (p. 91) filled Kit with a love for her home. And sound was an indication of the country’s plight: in the midst of the famine, with thousands starving and dying, Kit made note of the “countryside’s silence… No bird sang. No dog barked. No child laughed. Grief lay like a wet blanket over all the country, smothering signs of life” (p. 239).

For Ruby Pelletier, life as a “citizen of the earth” (Antieau, 2008, p. 20) was steeped in physical sensation. Though her memories of life before Mammaloose were dim and shady, one
thing she vividly recalled upon first coming to live with her grandmother was “no more smells of the bayou” (p. 59). She enjoyed the sight of paintings throughout New Orleans (p. 18), the smells of flowers, beer, and cinnamon, and the sounds of music in the “dilapidated beauty” of the French Quarter (pp. 27-28). In the aftermath of the storm, Ruby’s world sounded very different; where once there were sounds of happiness, now she heard only the sad, lonely howls of dogs, an occasional pop from gunfire or electrical wires, and the chop of helicopters overhead (pp. 121, 137). The rich scents she knew so well were gone too, replaced by the stink of sewage and gasoline (p. 121). A bit of comfort came to her through the natural world, in the dragonflies that she described as “specks of beautiful wondrous color in this catastrophe of water and oil and junk.” (p. 143)

Sadie Wynn’s experience of place in The Truth about Sparrows (Hale, 2004) was resplendent with observations of sights, sounds, and scents. Memories of her lost Missouri home were suffused with physical sensation; she was haunted by “the picture of stunted grain, broken and spent,” the sound of “wind [rattling] through their papery bones” (p. 3). She recalled the look of the dry, devastated landscape, “crisp-fried like Mama’s hash brown potatoes” (p. 6), and the scent of “the hard-packed dirt beneath [her] feet” on the day she said good-bye to her best friend Wilma (p. 10). She longed for the sight of “sunlight glinting off the old grain silos,” and for the softness of the bed she left behind (p. 42). Sadie’s experience of her new home in Texas was likewise infused with physical sensation: the squawking of seagulls (p. 42), the salty scent of sea air (p. 21), the sting of “salt-crusted sand [burning her] feet” (p. 42). Fall in South Texas highlighted the difference in her two homes, as the trees remained green and leafy, the weather warm and humid, prompting her to recall how it was back in Missouri this time of year. If I were home, harvest-colored leaves would be rustling and swirling around my feet. I missed seeing my breath puff clouds into chill mornings. And the sound of frost crunching underfoot. And the smell of wood
smoke hanging in the air. I wiped sweat from my upper lip. All we had here was sticky-damp wind and heat, and trees that never seemed to drop their leaves. (pp. 157-158)

Just as Sadie’s longing for Missouri and sense of displacement in Texas were filled with sensation, so too was her realization of the affection she came to feel for her new home: “I loved the way the bay slicked off and light played across its glassy surface just before the north wind hit. But the real magic happened when the first cool gust swept across the water, breathing life into it, making it dance again” (p. 257). In fact, Sadie summed up the change that occurred within her at the end of the novel with a reference to sound:

I looked out over the bay and saw real flesh-and-blood seagulls silhouetted against the evening sky. I watched them glide and circle, remembering the first time I’d heard their calls. Their cries had stirred a lonesome, empty feeling in me, like I’d lost a piece of myself I might not ever find again. But now they just sounded like home. (p. 260)

Experiencing place through their physical senses, these characters invoked its memory through sight, sound, smell, and feel. They expressed longing for the scents that were so familiar, they recognized how out of place they were when sounds were foreign, they saw in their minds the sights of home. Physical sensation highlighted for them the differences between old homes and new places, providing both the comfort of familiarity and the disorientation of the unknown.

**Defamiliarization of Place**

One of the most immediate effects of many natural disasters is the defamiliarization of places that were once intimately known. *Nation*’s Mau (Pratchett, 2008) was thoroughly familiar with the land that was his home. Having been raised as a member of an isolated culture that lived in harmony with its natural surroundings, Mau had a deep sense of place, reading the skies and recognizing the outline of his island among the many in its chain (pp. 12, 20, 23). Once the wave came, however, this land he had known all his life became foreign territory, “a strange
place [despite the fact that] he’d been born here” (p. 25). The village, the huts where friends and family lived, canoes, monuments to the gods—all were gone, and “nothing was where it should be…on this lonely shore” (p. 50). The land that he once knew existed “just in his head now, like dreams, hidden behind a gray wall” (p. 37). The familiar, the intimately known, had become virtually unrecognizable in the wake of this natural disaster.

For many of Antieau’s characters in *Ruby’s Imagine* (2008), their home was made alien in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Their city was “drowned. All the places [they] sat and walked were gone” (p. 190). With landmarks blown down and entire neighborhoods underwater, the landscape was no longer the one they knew so well. Everything was “different” (pp. 117, 128), there was “desolation” (p. 170), the world was a “ruin” (p. 120), the city was “buried in water” (p. 180). Even houses that were recognizable seemed to have “moved closer or off or something. It was all different” (p. 117). In a world so changed, on streets that were formerly traveled so often as to make the paths automatic, many characters were unable to get their bearings or find their way from one place to another, even to their own homes. Mr. Lagniappe, telling Ruby that they hadn’t found Mammaloose, noted that “We couldn’t find the neighborhood,” and Mr. Williams continued, “I was all turned around. I couldn’t get my bearings…. I know this area, but now the houses and street signs and other things are gone or moved. I didn’t know where I was” (pp. 150-151). Even months after the storm, the smell of rot and the growth of mold left houses transformed into places to which some no longer wished to return (p. 192).

For Ruby, though, the devastation of her neighborhood did not create a place that was unrecognizable. Before the storm, she anticipated changes in the physical environment, telling her best friend JayEl, “Everything could be different. We might not know it anymore” (Antieau, 2008, p. 88). However, once the storm had passed and others were unable to navigate the streets
they once knew, Ruby’s deeper understanding of place enabled her to make her way. Upon Ruby’s leaving to find help, Mammaloose worried that with the landscape so changed, Ruby would be unable to get back to her, but Ruby knew better: “That old oak and the gum tree are still standing. I’ll know them… I know the Rooted People…I know the marks of the land” (p. 128). The landscape was indeed different, even “crazy-looking” (p. 132), but still Ruby was able to make her way because of her connection with the natural world—“even wrecked,” she knew the place that was home (p. 168).

**Point of Origin**

As a boy raised in an isolated Nation, Mau was largely unaware of the rest of the world before the wave came. He had encountered the occasional fisherman or traveler from a nearby island, but the English-speaking Daphne and two refugee brothers who had sailed with the “trousermen” (Pratchett, 2008, p. 127) opened his eyes to a much wider physical world, awakening his interest in knowing where his Nation was situated geographically in relation to the rest of the world. Learning about maps and compasses, he discovered tools that told a person “where home is…and where it isn’t” (p. 162), that indeed, “the world is a globe—the farther you sail, the closer to home you are” (p. 284). And he further determined, with exploration of an ancient cave, that his ancestors knew all about their place in the world, that his island was a point of origin for much of the early world’s discovery:

So this is the world, he thought…. There were a lot of these lines, and they all led to the same place—or, rather, away from it, as though some giant had thrown spears around the world. And he was my ancestor, Mau told himself as he lightly touched the familiar symbol that told him this was no place built by trousermen. (p. 281)
Learning that his home was a point of origin for exploration and discovery filled Mau with pride in his ancestors who had been so brave to sail “beyond the seas they knew, under unfamiliar stars” (p. 283).

Summary

These connections to place illustrated that, while indeed there are other elements of home, geographical location is among the most important. Home was frequently thought of as a spot on the globe, a place to which one might feel a deep connection, a place that itself might seem alive and a part of one’s self. The physical ways in which home places were experienced accounted for a great deal of characters’ thoughts about their devastated homes, and the transformation of towns and nations in the wake of disaster was a disorienting and shocking result of the events that characters faced, highlighting the geographical/physical component of home.

The Instinctual Component of Home

“…hundreds of people were still walking, shuffling, struggling toward a place where they could safely rest.”
- Thesman, 2001, pp. 29-30

“They’re safe at home. And so are we.”
- Harlow, 2007, p. 248

The need for safety is an instinctual one, shared not only by all human beings, but indeed by all living creatures. All who dwell in the world, human and animal alike, have a driving need to seek protection—from the threat of the elements, from predators, from the fear that accompanies danger. Within the spaces that are their own, living beings seek refuge from the dangers of the world without. In many novels, characters conceptualized home as a safe place, a
place that offered protection, a space where they could be “all right.” In the face of a loss of safety at home, when the place that had offered sanctuary from the rest of the world became unsafe in the wake of disaster, many characters struggled to cope with the mystifying notion that homelands and houses could be places of danger. Longing for a safe home became fundamental for such characters, as the instinctual need for safety at times overrode sentimental ties to people and place. In disaster’s immediate aftermath, many sought whatever measures of safety they could acquire, focusing on the immediate need for shelter as a first step in reestablishing a sense of home.

**Home as a Safe Place**

A number of characters expressed the assumption that home is a place of safety and refuge, a haven from the world without, where danger and uncertainty lurk. They perceived home as a place where bad things did not happen, where there was no need to “be scared” (Karwoski, 2004, p. 21). Their belief was expressed with simple statements like Kit Byrnes’s “I’m all right…I’m home now” in *Greener Grass* (Pignat, 2008, p. 198), and Sophie’s mother’s plea for her father, a Jewish man in Nazi Germany, to “be more careful. Go to work, come home. Stay home with us” in *Finding Sophie* (Watts, 2002, p. 33). In *Quake!*, Jacob Kaufman’s sister worried that a stray dog would not be able to find his way home, that something “bad [would] happen to” him (Karwoski, 2004, p. 18). In *Greener Grass*, with blight, famine, and fever spreading across Ireland, “Everyone kept to their own hearth” (Pignat, 2008, p. 141). Within their own homes, though by no means safe from the particular dangers they faced, each of these characters nevertheless felt *safer* than they would outside the walls that were their refuge.
Throughout these novels, characters’ statements about home revealed that they perceived it as place of safety, even when overwhelming evidence indicated that it was not. Amidst the smoke and fire consuming San Francisco in the aftermath of the 1906 earthquake, *A Sea so Far’s* more privileged characters expressed that there was “nothing for [them] to worry about” on their own block (Thesman, 2001, p. 24), for they were “quite safe here” (p. 28). Harlow’s *Blown Away!* (2007) hinted at the implication of safety at home when Mara believed that, aside from a little gloominess, she and her aunt “should be safe” in a house that had “gone through some powerful storms before” (p. 163), and when Star expressed relief that turtle hatchlings were “safe now...back in their own home” (p. 248), despite the reality that their home was a beach recently devastated by a hurricane. In *Radiant Girl*, White (2008) communicated the same assumption of safety at home as Katya’s teacher sent her students home from school immediately after the Chernobyl explosion: “‘The outdoors is dangerous,’ Nina Ivanovna warned us. ‘Go straight home’” (p. 68). Surely at home, the belief seemed to be, there was safety to be found, respite from the danger that existed beyond its walls.

**Loss of Safety at Home**

The transformation of home, a refuge and haven, into a place that was not safe was among the most devastating realities of the disasters in these novels. Structures that once offered protection crumbled, cities and entire islands became unstable and dangerous. San Francisco was transformed into a threatening place for the characters who called it home, leaving them “walking, shuffling, struggling” to find a sense of safety (Thesman, 2001, p. 29) in the aftermath of the quake that robbed them of their houses and well-being. And Depression-era Missouri for Sadie Wynn’s family in *The Truth about Sparrows* was changed by drought into a place that inspired fear for their very lives (Hale, 2004, p. 115).
No longer a place to take refuge, Jake Pitney’s island home in the Florida Keys became a danger zone where his family was “trapped” (Harlow, 2007, p. 162) as a hurricane approached. The comfort and sense of well-being it once offered were gone; now, the Pitneys’ being there inspired a longing to be elsewhere (p. 159). With the storm surge overtaking the island, they felt as though “The hurricane is here inside our house. The wind is blowing the windows out; the ocean is creeping into the store. The whole house is shaking” (p. 180). The home that once was a shelter against the outside world now threatened to “cave in” on them (p. 181), and they knew they must leave, or they would “all perish” (p. 181). Their fondest desire was escape from the Keys, escape that would bring a safety that could no longer be found in their home (pp. 170, 193-194), which had become a “godforsaken place” (p. 220).

Similarly, with Hurricane Katrina approaching Ruby’s New Orleans home, many recognized that “sometimes the best thing is to leave” (Antieau, 2008, 76). Time and again characters expressed that the best course of action was to “get out of town” (pp. 72, 82, 83, 93), and Ruby herself was aware that Katrina “could blow this city away. It could drown us all” (p. 94). The clearest indication that home was no longer perceived as a safe place came from a voice on the radio: “the birds are gone. I know the powers that be say not to panic. I’m telling you, panic, worry, run. The birds are gone. Get out of town! Now! Don’t stay! Leave! Save yourself while you can. Go…go…go!” (p. 98). Safety at times outweighed the desire for togetherness with other people: The relief Ruby felt at seeing familiar faces in the storm’s aftermath was tempered with worry that these loved ones had not gotten away to safety (pp. 130, 133), and her relief that Mammaloose must have been brought to a safe spot overshadowed the concern of their continued separation upon finding her gone from the house (p. 170).
Longing for a Safe Home

For two characters, disaster brought with it not only disbelief that home had become a threatening location, but also a desperate longing for a sense of safety, regardless of where that safety might be found. In the immediate aftermath of the Chernobyl explosion, Radiant Girl’s Katya Dubko found it unthinkable that her home could be a place of danger, as officials claimed it was:

If the outdoors were dangerous, hailstones would be pummeling us. A tornado cone like the one I had seen in my science book would be swirling around the Ministry of Culture. Or at the very least, lightning bolts would be crisscrossing a dark sky. Instead, the day was still beautiful. (White, 2008, pp. 68-69)

The danger that destroyed Katya’s home region was invisible, yet indeed the area was now a perilous place, one that threatened their very lives (p. 83), one so contaminated with radioactivity that seventy entire villages were buried underground (p. 144). No longer was there solace to be found at home; Katya’s “home, [her] possessions, everything” her family owned was now to be feared (p. 109). In fact, the thought of living anywhere in the vicinity of her old home, any town close to the Chernobyl plant, filled Katya with dread. She would rather “move away to a far-off country” (p. 129), even though remaining nearby would allow her to see old friends. She had to steel herself in order to join her classmates on a field trip to the place that once offered sanctuary, repeating over and over her father’s assureence that a short time there would not be too great a danger (p. 191). Longing for a time when “the whole world was clean and safe” (p. 167), Katya struggled to accept the fact that “not only could [she] never return home, [she] had to live next to the largest nuclear waste dump in the world” (p. 163). Proximity to her old home was a prospect that brought fear, not comfort, as she yearned to feel secure again in her own surroundings.

It was likewise hard for Little Cricket’s Kia Vang to believe that her Laotian home could become a place of peril, that her family “[would] not be safe here anymore” (Brown, 2004, p.
29). With the onset of war and the arrival of danger not only in her own village, but throughout her nation, her family was compelled to seek safety elsewhere. More important than their connection to place was their well-being, their survival, the opportunity to live and grow and flourish, and their quest for that security led them ultimately to America, for “There, we will be safe” (p. 60). Even their overwhelming desire to remain together had to give way to the need for safety; when Grandmother recognized that they “[could] not keep Xigi and Kia [in the refugee camp] any longer [because] it is not good for them to stay here” (p. 97), she and Mother were willing to stay behind and allow Grandfather to take the children to safety in America. Such sacrifice was the only way to ensure Kia’s and Xigi’s well-being, and the women wanted, above all, for their children to have a safe place to call home.

### Need for Shelter

At perhaps its most rudimentary and instinctual level, a home for any living creature must provide protection from wind and rain, blazing sun and bitter cold. From tents to tar-paper shacks, the characters in many of these novels sought, in the immediate aftermath of their loss of home, basic shelter from the elements. Earthquake victims strung bedding or clothes from trees to form makeshift tents (Karwoski, 2004, pp. 86, 92; Thesman, 2001, p. 40) until sturdier shelters could be forged from “scraps of lumber and sheets of tin” (Karwoski, 2004, p. 123) salvaged from the devastated city. Mr. Sparrow made “a cardboard box his home” in The Truth about Sparrows (Hale, 2004, p. 62), and both Sadie’s parents and their neighbor Mr. Gillem felt blessed (pp. 60, 63, 232) to have their “shanties…built from scraps and covered with tar paper” (p. 38). Nation’s Daphne, stranded among refugees from a tsunami on Mau’s island, recognized that “Since there was going to be a future, it would need a roof over its head” (Pratchett, 2008, p. 141), and Mau created steadily improved shelters as time went by—first simply “leafy branches
up against a big rock” (p. 28), later “a hut, [though with] canvas sides [that] rattled in the wind” (p. 161), then a hearth and a sturdier hut “a lot higher up the slope” (p. 292). In *Greener Grass*, Pignat’s characters, evicted by the unfeeling overseer Mr. Lynch, were forced to choose between constructing scalpeens in the woods—“ramshackle lean-tos made of whatever they could salvage from their homes” (2008, p. 197)—or the workhouses that were supposed to provide food and lodging, but more often brought only disease and death. The characters in *Against the Storm* illustrated the necessity of an adequate shelter, as Muhlis sought refuge from the harsh Ankara winter in his meager abode, reminding Mehmet “of an animal crouching in his cave and waiting for the coming of spring” (Hiçyılmaz, 1990, p. 165), and Mehmet’s family struggled in the unfinished apartment building that was impossible to keep cool, even with sheets nailed over the windows (p. 83)—a place that was filled with flies and mosquitoes, where the driving rain made its way in, soaking all their belongings (pp. 83, 90). Though far from luxurious—or even comfortable—such dwelling places at least satisfied the primal need to be sheltered from the elements, that most simple and straightforward role of a home.

**Summary**

The drive to seek a place of safety is a basic instinct, one that defines life in much of the animal kingdom and can gain primacy among all, including human beings, when safety is threatened or lost. As characters in these twelve novels faced the destruction of houses and homelands that were once assumed to be safe spaces, their association of home with safety became clear. With the world beyond their walls transformed into a danger zone, many huddled within the houses they still relied on for protection. When those houses fell and towns or islands were distorted by disaster, characters were left shocked by the notion that home could be a place of danger. Whether seeking temporary, makeshift shelters or foregoing social and geographical
ties in favor of greater safety in other cities or countries, characters’ pursuits revealed the fundamental role of safety in the reestablishment of a sense of home.

The Emotional Component of Home

“The say home is where the heart is…. Where is my home when I have neither heart nor hope? All is lost.”
- Pignat, 2008, Prologue

“They had food and fire, but that wasn’t enough. You had to find water and food and shelter and a weapon, people said. And they thought that was all you had to have, because they took for granted the most important thing. You had to have a place where you belonged.”
- Pratchett, 2008, p. 84

If home is indeed where the heart is, then it is a place to which people feel strong emotional attachments. It is a place that is loved, a source of refuge, a place that offers the peace of being in one’s own surroundings. More than simply a roof over their heads, true homes—homes that satisfied more than a need for physical safety, but further felt like home—in these novels were places where characters felt loved and wanted. A number of characters I encountered exhibited deep emotional connections to the places that were home. The experiences of many underscored the importance of feeling at home in their surroundings—a sense of belonging, of comfort, of contentment. For some, home was so beloved that it felt like their entire world—as significant as life itself.

The Emotions Connected to Place

In The Truth about Sparrows (Hale, 2004), Sadie Wynn’s experience of leaving her Missouri home and starting over in a new place was bursting with emotion. Recalling how her “stomach rolled and sank” the day she overheard her father saying they would be leaving (p. 7),
Sadie expressed the inner turmoil that moving from home triggered. Leaving home made her “mad” (pp. 3, 6, 17), filled her with “bitterness” (pp. 3, 23, 181), made her “stomach turn sour” (p. 3). Her “feelings bucked all over the place” (p. 6) as she rode away for the last time, and she was “too sick” to speak when parting from her best friend (p. 9). Giving up the only home she had ever known was not “fair” (p. 3), and she recognized that others felt “sad” (p. 5) and “achy with misery” (p. 8) as well. Arriving in South Texas and attempting to make a new home, Sadie heard the sounds of seagulls, sounds which “stirred a loneliness” that made her “insides feel hollow” (pp. 20-21). It seemed to Sadie that everyone but her had a place where they felt at home, a place that was theirs: “I watched ants marching back to their dens, spiders spinning webs, doodlebugs digging funnels in the sand. They all had homes” (p. 62). Why then did she not have a place to belong? Her new neighbors the Gillems seemed “happy to be home” in their overcrowded tar paper shack (p. 38), yet the news that her family had purchased a shack of their own “hit [her] like a slap” and left Sadie feeling “numb” with shock (pp. 60-61) rather than as though she had a new home. The house itself, “huddled in the corner of the seawall, almost swallowed up by the dark,” looked as “sad and lost” as she felt herself (p. 64). Her heart was filled with “poison… [so] stone cold and empty” that she could not even cry (p. 62). Her shack and the reality of her separation from home, much like the cardboard box that sheltered the “sorrowful” Mr. Sparrow (p. 62), felt confining to Sadie, prompting her to hope that they would “both be free of [their] boxes before long” (p. 97). Hearing her father play his fiddle filled Sadie with the “sweet sadness” of remembering her friend Wilma, who loved his music (p. 91). She became “achy-tired of strange people and the idea of starting over in a new school” (p. 110), and “bone-tired of caring” (p. 112), rejecting new neighbor Dollie’s attempts to commiserate and using Dollie’s “friendship to ease [her] loneliness without giving even a portion of it back to her” (p. 184).
Just as Sadie’s separation from her old home and adjustment to life in a new one were filled with emotion, so too was her eventual realization that she had, in fact, found a true home in this new place. As the novel came to a close, Sadie expressed “love” for the sights of South Texas (Hale, 2004, p. 257), “finally [understanding] what [she’d] been feeling in [her] heart for weeks. [She] didn’t want to be anywhere else” (p. 242). Gone was the loneliness she once felt upon hearing the seagulls’ calls; instead, they sounded “like home” (p. 260). She had come to feel a sense of belonging in South Texas, and it was now a place she wanted to be, no longer a place she was simply enduring until she could return to her former home. This feeling began in her heart long before she came to an intellectual understanding of it, highlighting the strength of home’s emotional component for her.

Like Sadie’s, Katya Dubko’s connection to her Yanov home and her experience of losing it to the Chernobyl explosion in Radiant Girl (White, 2008) were deeply emotional. When Katya was a child, her grandmother likened their land to their hearts (p. 10), and Katya’s heart still seemed to reside with the place that was her home. Her cottage, whose “bright blue shutters made [her] home look happy, almost grinning” (p. 14), was “dear” to her (pp. 51, 213); her home was “beloved” (p. 109). Home in White’s novel was a place where characters felt “comfortable” and “welcome” (pp. 50, 189), while being forced away from it was a source of “shock” (p. 93), leaving Katya and the other evacuees “quiet and dispirited” (p. 97). At home, Katya had a sense of belonging (p. 119); away from it, she felt “self-conscious” (p. 106), like “an outcast” (p. 119). Her first months away from Yanov were for Katya “a blur of pain, loss and discovery” (p. 106), and her unhappiness was so deep that she felt certain it must show (p. 119). Displaced from home and seeking safety from the nuclear fallout first in Kiev and later in a town built specifically for Chernobyl families, White’s characters “[felt] like trees out of the ground without roots” (p. 123). There was not a place that was theirs, a place where they belonged, where they
felt connected; there was only the constant worry, fear, and sadness of being away from the home they knew as “paradise” (p. 231). Two years after the disaster, Katya expressed that she had “been upset every single day of [her] life since [they] moved away from [their] cottage” (p. 126).

Returning to the Dead Zone on a class field trip after four years had passed, Katya and the others from the area were quiet and sad in comparison to their classmates who had never lived there (White, 2008, p. 192). Their tour guide’s callous remark that those who went to school in Yanov had “come home… brushed past all the heartache of [their] broken lives” (p. 203). On the trip, Katya was compelled to enlist her friend Sergei’s company and sneak away from the group to make her way to the buried site of her cottage in Yanov. Her reasons were unclear, “too complicated to understand, even for [her],” but she was “desperate” to return (p. 210). Attempting later to explain her actions, she found that she could not: “‘I wanted…I’m not sure.’ My voice faded off…. How could I explain all this to Papa?…. As I climbed into the Jeep, I was still wondering how I could explain my actions. I didn’t completely understand them myself” (p. 225). The most she could put into words was, “I…I had to go back to Yanov” (p. 227). The pull was not logical, it was not even explainable, but it was indeed emotional. Katya’s deep need to see the place where she had lived, to see what remained of her cottage and her town was one she must indulge, despite the danger it brought. Arriving in her village, an “all-consuming ache” began in her stomach and “quickly spread out into [her] limbs, filling [her] head” (p. 213): everything was gone. Her home, the surrounding houses, all buried under “mounds of dirt [that] bulged where these wooden cottages had once graced the earth” (p. 213). What once was the site of her family’s home now looked “like nothing more than an abandoned construction site—never loved by anybody” (p. 214). All signs of the emotion invested in the place had been turned under the earth, bringing Katya an “achy sadness” (p. 214).
Just as Katya’s grandmother equated their Ukrainian home to their hearts, *Greener Grass*’s Kit Byrnes believed that heart and home were intertwined, and with the loss of her home to the Irish Potato Famine, her “heart was broken” (Pignat, 2008, p. 232). At a time when her “heart and home were whole” (Prologue) Kit had happiness; with her home destroyed, both Kit and the nation itself were smothered in the “grief [that] lay like a wet blanket over all the country” (p. 239). The most striking emotional component of home in Pignat’s novel was hope. Hope, according to Mam, was what “makes the difference. Never give it up…. No matter what. Never give up hope” (p. 97). When Mam lost her own sense of hope with Da’s death, when “the embers that once stood for the hope Mam protected and stoked were dead” (p. 172), old Lizzie, the village healer, came to the rescue with a glowing ember to feed their dead hearth fire, symbolizing the renewed hope that would help the family move forward in the face of all they had lost. Encouraging Kit to “guard the seeds” of her own “gift of hope” in order to regain a life that “will yield wondrous things” (p. 235), Lizzie reawakened Kit’s spirit and helped her begin to put her heart and home back together in a new place.

The emotional connection to home was manifested in *Nation* (Pratchett, 2008) through Mau’s “fierce, burning pride” (p. 283) in his place and people. To Mau, his island Nation felt as big as the world, of utmost significance and importance. Upon encountering the first world map he had ever seen, he assumed one of the large land masses was his Nation, and was shocked into “astonished disbelief” (p. 163) to learn that in fact his island was quite small, too small even to be drawn on the map. Recovering, he asserted that though it was a small island, it was “the best one…. Just so long as we remember that. This is our home” (p. 163). When Mau learned of the central role his ancestors had in world exploration and discovery, he was pleased to know that such important work was done by his very own people, that they were not and had never been inferior to the “trousermen” from other parts of the world (p. 281). The Nation was a place to be
protected, leading both Mau and the Unknown Woman in turns to stand watch over the beach, staring out to sea and “[guarding] the Nation from the darkness” (p. 118).

**Feeling at Home**

Though even the most basic shelter can provide safety from some of nature’s danger, more is required to make a place feel like a true home—one where residents experience a sense of belonging, the comfort and emotional security of feeling at home. The absence of this sense of emotional security can bring into stark relief its necessity for those who long for the feeling of home in the midst of negative experiences. Ruby Pelletier made clear the difference between a house and a home when she reflected on the meanness Mammaloose had shown her all her life (Antieau, 2008, p.42, 51, 135). Though Mammaloose prided herself on having given Ruby shelter, on feeding her and putting “a roof over [her] head” (p. 114), she failed to show her “love and kindness” (p. 119), treating her as a “responsibility” rather than as a cherished granddaughter (p. 95). In Mammaloose’s house, Ruby was not made to feel wanted; it was a place of “no glad tidings” (p. 59), not a place that felt like home.

Likewise, the unfinished apartment building offered as shelter to Mehmet’s family in Against the Storm, far from being a true home, was simply a place where his city relatives could “put [his] family” (Hiçyilmaz, 1990, p. 30). What they needed was a “real home” (p. 100), not only a place of physical comfort, but a place that was theirs, where they knew they were wanted, where they felt valued and not like a burden to others. While his friend Muhlis’s home was just as physically uncomfortable, it seemed like a place of refuge to Mehmet whereas his own family’s apartment did not. In fact, Mehmet chose to spend more time at Muhlis’s house than with his family. This filled-in space between two real houses, with slabs of wood and plastic sheeting arranged on top as a roof and “an iron bedstead with a thin, dirty mattress and a few
ragged blankets” (p. 76), was cramped, with a “closeness [that was] overpowering” (p. 165). Yet Mehmet spent most evenings visiting Muhlis there and sharing supper rather than having meals with his own family. Muhlis, for his part, found his meager abode to be a refuge not only from the harsh Ankara winter (as noted above in the section on the need for shelter), but also from the life he escaped by running away from his own village, where his mother was unkind and the town offered no safety or even medical care (pp. 56, 58). In his Ankara dwelling, shared with an older brother when he was not away with the Army, Muhlis felt a sense of safety and belonging. The feeling of home at Muhlis’s house was deepened with Ayşe’s efforts to make it more comfortable and inviting:

Instead of the muddle of dirty, tumbled rubbish on which [Muhlis] had been lying when Mehmet last saw him, there was now a new green quilt edged with a new white sheet. And Muhlis’s long head lay on a new white pillow. There was a band of embroidered flowers on the pillow, and they looked so bright and fresh that Mehmet felt he wanted to pick them. The bags and boxes had been cleared from the corner, and in their place stood a small blue table and four blue chairs. Ayşe took from her bag a small pile of new bowls and dishes and set them down as quietly as she could on the table. It all looked so nice that you almost forgot the floor was made of stamped earth and that Ramazan was curled in a rug in a corner like a dog. (p. 117)

In this house, which looked now more like a home than a cold, bare shelter from the elements, Ayşe seemed comfortable, too (p. 117). While she and her mother undertook similar efforts at their family’s apartment, it was here that Ayşe felt most at home, lending credence to the notion that what made a place home for her as well as Mehmet was, more than anything, an emotional connection.

Mehmet’s drive to return to his drought-stricken native village in Turkey illustrated the magnitude of home’s emotional component for him. While there was an element of the geographical in Mehmet’s return—it was indeed his physical place of origin for which he set out at the novel’s end—his longing illustrated most clearly the emotional concept of being where he felt a sense of belonging. Only sparingly in the novel did he refer to physical characteristics of

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his village: when he first learned that his family was to leave for Ankara and was shocked that “anyone could talk of going away in the spring,” such a beautiful time of year there (Hiçyilmaz, 1990, pp. 1, 2), and when he began to contemplate the idea of returning and described to Mühlis the springtime there (p. 173). Rather than the geographical location itself, what Mehmet seemed to crave throughout the novel was a return to the feeling of being at home. From the moment of his arrival at his uncle’s house, he was aware that he and his family were unwanted there (p. 30). His life in Ankara was marked by a sense of unease and fear, feeling “as though [he was] always waiting for something [he] did not know about” to happen (p. 71). Being in the shantytown held an “unexpectedness” that “crept up on [him] when [his] back was turned” (p. 77); he could not attain a sense of peace or contentment there. Nor, it seemed, could his sister Ayşe, who reacted much more emotionally to events in the shantytown than she would at home, prompting Mehmet, upon finding her in tears, to wonder when he last saw her cry and note that, unlike at home, “here, there seemed to be no…easy solution” to her disquiet (p. 47).

Mehmet’s concept of home was not a social one, for he was perfectly willing to leave his family and strike off on his own. At no point in the novel did he mention any people to whom he would like to return. His best friend was gone to a place where he felt most happy and at home himself—“among numbers” (Hiçyilmaz, 1990, p. 175), studying mathematics in America—and Mehmet intended to leave his family behind in Ankara. Contemplating whether he would join his sister in Switzerland if she sent for him, Mehmet knew “with certainty” that he would not (p. 184). Likewise, he was invited towards the end of the novel to stay with his wealthy employer Zekiyê Hanım in her luxurious house, but politely refused both the social connection and the much improved physical comfort such a move would provide (p. 188), opting instead to set off alone to return to the village he was forced to leave.
Finding Sophie (Watts, 2002) presented an intriguing conflict that underscored the prominence of the emotional component of home. For Sophie Mandel, the struggle with home was between, on the one hand, her native country of Germany and the parents who sent her away for her own safety as a young child, and on the other, the place and people who were her refuge in the seven years following—her family and place of origin versus her family and place of emotional attachment. For Sophie, the key element in the concept of home was a sense of belonging (pp. 16, 43, 59, 91, 107). Home was where she—the modern, 14-year-old girl, not the 7-year-old child who left Germany—was known. In the time she spent in England with Aunt Em, Sophie formed emotional attachments, made close friends, and was truly happy (pp. 86, 130). She had a room that made her “feel safe and calm” (p. 15) and a place and family where she wanted to remain forever (p. 87). Confronted with people who made her “feel temporary” (p. 43), as if with the war ended she should be ready to “go home” to Germany (pp. 57, 103, 105), Sophie reiterated time and again that she was home, that she was right where she belonged. She considered England to be her real home and her life with Aunt Em to be her “real life” (p. 16), while thinking of Germany as a place to which she feared being “sent back” (pp. 90, 91, 103, 107). In seven years she had not heard the German language spoken or seen it written, and her native language was replaced by the language of the nation she now called home, as evidenced by memories of the anger she felt upon receiving letters from her parents that she was unable to read (p. 95). Her references to Germany were of the place “where [her] parents live” (p. 82), and of her “place of birth” (p. 91); never did she use the word home in discussing the land from which she moved. Her identity as a German, in fact, was a source of discomfort, even guilt, perhaps contributing to her emotional attachment to England and its people. She felt she was born “the enemy” (p. 13), a notion reinforced by British police when they found her out of school sketching local landmarks—she was a gifted artist, and wanted to capture the beautiful
buildings before war destroyed them—and suspected her of spying for the Germans. She likewise felt responsible for a fight that broke out between her friend and a taunting boy who implied that Sophie should go back to Germany, as though it was her fault for being born on the enemy side. Having spent a good portion of her formative years living in a nation at war with her homeland, Sophie felt an emotional distance from Germany and longed to remain in England. She felt complete “loyalty…to the country that [had] given [her] refuge” (p. 91), even seeking British citizenship from the aptly named Home Office in a bid to assure herself a permanent place in England after the war. Thoughts of being “shuffled back and forth” like a possession (p. 107) and of “losing the person who became [her] ‘foster mother’ all these years” (p. 90) filled her with terror, made her heart pound “so hard, [she could] hear it thumping away” (p. 84). Though she loved her father and was overjoyed that he had survived the Nazis, she “hardly [remembered] him and he [didn’t] know anything about” her (p. 107); the prospect of being reunited with him “unnerved” her (p. 125). Her connection to him was a part of her past, while Aunt Em was the home of her present, and she simply felt that she “[couldn’t] go back” (p. 131). Sophie’s language clearly indicated the emotional connection she felt to England and Aunt Em, and the lack of such a sentimental tie to Germany. She wanted to be where she felt she belonged, the place that was her haven, the place where she felt at home.

For both Sophie and Mehmet, the feel of home was of utmost importance. Sophie, having found a place where she felt she belonged, wanted to remain there in what she felt was her true home rather than return to her family and native land. Mehmet, missing home’s sense of contentment and ease in a harsh and unknown city, longed to recapture an emotional connection by returning to the village he was forced to leave. Each of these characters’ experiences illustrated the prominence of emotional ties to a sense of home.
Home as World

Several novels suggested that home’s significance to their characters was total. Against the Storm’s Mehmet (Hiçyılmaz, 1990) equated leaving home permanently to dying (p. 55), as did The Truth about Sparrows’ (Hale, 2004) Sadie Wynn, who pondered as she drove away from her Missouri home “how you can’t start a new life without the old one dying first” (p. 6). Finding Sophie’s title character too thought of her efforts to remain in England after the war as “fighting for her life” (Watts, 2002, p. 107), and 90 Miles to Havana’s Julian regarded his move from Cuba as “leaving everything behind” (Flores-Galbis, 2010, p. 52). For these characters, home was as vital as life itself, and a loss of home felt like a loss of life.

For Radiant Girl’s Katya Dubko (White, 2008) and Ruby’s Imagine’s Ruby Pelletier (Antieau, 2008), the magnitude of home’s significance was evident in their description of it as their world. To Ruby, the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina on her New Orleans home looked like “the end of the world” (Antieau, 2008, pp. 135, 141, 158, 166). And Katya, warned that her world would be destroyed by the nuclear explosion, was reassured in its immediate aftermath by “a glance at [her] cottage with its blue shutters…. Maybe the station, which I didn’t really care about, was damaged. But my world, my cottage, was intact!” (White, 2008, p. 57). Time and again, she comforted herself with the knowledge that her cottage showed no signs of damage (pp. 70, 72), but when ultimately the cottage was buried along with her entire village, she had to accept that indeed her world had changed dramatically, that the prediction that her world would be destroyed had been correct (pp. 163, 216). Home, for these two characters, was everything—all that they knew, all that they loved—and experiencing its destruction was akin to the end of the world.
Summary

Homes in these novels were places of deep emotional attachment. Inspiring love, loyalty, and pride, home places were sites that offered a sense of belonging. For some characters, home was their entire world, their everything. Perhaps what had once been home was not a safe place, perhaps there was no one or nothing obvious left there to go back to, but still there was a calling, an emotional pull to return to the site that was loved. Going away or seeing their places of refuge transformed into threats left many characters struggling with fear, sadness, and anger. When a former home no longer felt like home, the emotional toll was indeed significant, an emotional devastation that paralleled the physical devastation of their home sites. As characters grappled with the loss of homes and strove to reestablish or rebuild a sense of home in new places, the import of home’s emotional component was clear.

The Temporal/Historical Component of Home

“There was a time when my heart and home were whole. When Da would sit by the fire, smoking his clay pipe and telling tales he’d learned from his da.”
- Pignat, 2008, Prologue

The temporal/historical component of home accounts for the ways in which time spent in a place leads it to become a home. Many characters associated memories with the places that were home, recalling events that took place within those spaces. Occasionally, places themselves were marked by the events of the lives lived in them. For several characters, there was a reassuring dependability of routine and tradition that brought a feeling of continuity with years past, or with earlier generations who also called those places home. Displaced by disaster, some characters found consolation and security by surrounding themselves with treasured belongings tied to the places and people who had become lost to them, or by spending time
immersed in comforting activities that were once part of life at home. These elements of time and historical connection to place make up the temporal component of home.

**Memories**

As the only survivor of a wave that destroyed his island, *Nation’s* Mau (Pratchett, 2008) was solely responsible for holding the memories of the people of his homeland—their traditions, their beliefs, their very existence. Shortly after the wave, Mau heard the voices of his ancestors imploring him to remember, for “WHILE YOU REMEMBER, THE NATION LIVES!” (p. 31). Very little that was part of the home he knew remained, leaving its entire history entrusted to Mau. He knew that he must stay alive, for “If he died, then the Nation would never have been. The island would be left to the red crabs and the grandfather birds. There would be no one to say that anyone had been there” (p. 43). It was Mau who must ensure that his Nation lived on, and that would happen only as long as there was memory of it, memory that he must hold and, ultimately, share with survivors from other places who came to his shore.

The memories connected to home for Pratchett’s (2008) characters included bright ones that infused place with the feel of home, such as Mau’s memory of his last meal sitting around the fire with all of his family (p. 49), and tragic ones that stripped away the sense of home, such as Daphne’s father’s compulsion to leave his English house because “It is…too lonely. It has too many memories! It has too much silenced laughter, too many unheard footsteps, too many soundless echoes since [his wife and infant son] died!” (pp. 82-83). As happy memories lent a homelike quality to Mau’s island Nation, heartbreaking ones left Daphne’s family searching for the sense of home that had been lost through time. These historical connections to place wove themselves intimately into the minds of those who lived through them and impacted their feelings about the locations that were home.
For *Quake!’s* Jacob Kaufman (Karwoski, 2004), earlier events left a void similar to Daphne’s. Even before the earthquake struck, home was a thing of the past; it was the way things were “when Mamma was alive, when Papa came home smiling every night” (p. 19). Life in his family’s apartment had lost the feel of the home he had known all his life, a place of joy and love. His memories of this home were awakened later in Union Square upon seeing ash from the burning fires settling over the refugees—“It reminded Jacob of the flour that used to collect on his mother’s hair and dress when she was baking” (p. 61)—and upon hearing a beautiful voice singing, which called to mind

his mother, [and] how she used to sing to him and Sophie at night. Jacob remembered how his father used to tease Mamma about singing off-key. But Jacob didn’t care. He’d always loved listening to her voice. Long after he had grown too old to ask for a lullaby himself, he liked to listen when Mamma tucked Sophie into bed with a song. (p. 62)

These memories were an integral part of the home Jacob missed and longed for both before and after the quake, highlighting the historical component of home for him.

*A Sea so Far’s* Jolie (Thesman, 2001) also wanted “her past back again” (p. 68), wanted “everything [to] be just the way it always was” (p. 55) after losing her mother to the earthquake. So obsessed was she with recapturing the home of her past that she devoted herself to returning the house to the exact condition it was in while her mother lived, down to the last detail (pp. 77-78). By recreating the home her mother had inhabited, she sought a connection to the mother she had lost, to the past that she had known, to the home of her history.

Similarly, in the face of famine and loss of home in *Greener Grass*, Kit Byrnes longed for “things to be the way they were” (Pignat, 2008, p. 97). When her “heart and home were whole” (Prologue), her father would tell stories by the fire, she and her friends would run through the hills playing warriors and princesses (p. 89), her family would sing the churn song together while making butter (p. 152), and special days like birthdays were celebrated and did
not go unnoticed (p. 180). Her new life was consumed with the fight for survival and devoid of the happy memories that had once made home so beloved. Leaving her village at the end of the novel, she avoided seeing the charred remains of her cottage, for she “wanted to remember it as it used to be—a place of laughter and love. Of song and story” (p. 236). The place it had become bore little resemblance to the site of her treasured memories, and she wanted to preserve the purity of its memory in her mind as she sought to make a new home elsewhere.

In *Little Cricket*, Brown’s (2004) characters exhibited a similar propensity to focus on the happy memories from their Laotian home once displaced to America, recreating scenes from their lives in their *pa ndaus*, or story cloths. These embroidered cloths functioned much like family photo albums (p. 173), holding images of the home that the Vangs had left: Kia’s memories of her mother gardening, “the speckled chicken clucking on her shoulder,” and her father as a child “tumbling headfirst out of a basket” (p. 113); Grandfather’s reminiscences of “men and women picking corn back in the green fields of Laos [as] children watered the pigs, and butterflies flitted among the trees” (p. 168). Sad and lonely in his displacement to America, Grandfather frequently sat at home “[fingering] the *pa ndaus* he…brought with him…as if they told stories he never tired of hearing” (p. 122). Through these images, he felt a connection to the life and home he had left behind—too much of a connection, according to his grandson Xigi, who believed that Grandfather “[lived] only in his memories” (p. 138) and himself rejected all trappings of his former life during his difficult adjustment to his new home (p. 139). Whether the memories brought comfort as they did to Grandfather or were avoided as they were by Xigi, they were an integral part of the place that had been home and impacted the family’s adaptation to life in Minnesota.

*Radiant Girl’s* Katya Dubko (White, 2008) had a home life that was infused with history. She lived with her parents in the same house where her grandparents once lived, sleeping in a
room that had looked “exactly [the same] since long before [she] was born” (p. 16). Though, by virtue of Papa’s working for the Chernobyl station, they qualified to have a modern apartment in a larger town, Katya’s parents chose to remain in the countryside village of Yanov because it reminded them of their own childhoods in similar rural surroundings (p. 26). Within her cottage, she knew every nook and cranny, each curtain that fluttered at a window, each picture that hung on a wall (p. 58). Neighboring Kayta’s cottage was a collection of homes she lovingly thought of as “the Ancients” because, to her, they “looked timeless” (p. 19). The memories surrounding Katya’s home were ones that she treasured—days spent playing with her dog Noisy and picnicking with her imaginary forest creatures (p. 110), hours of sitting next to her favorite boulder by the stream, believing the rock was magic and could “cure any problem and make any dream come true (p. 167), listening to her grandmother’s stories around the stove (p. 211), and hunting, fishing, and berry picking, activities which became forbidden after the area was saturated with radioactivity (p. 192). When her entire town was ultimately buried because of its radioactive contamination, Katya was shocked:

Until this moment, it hadn’t occurred to me that we would never go back. In my worst dreams, I thought it might be a year or two before I got to unfold my divan into a bed and have Angelika to sleep over; before I got to visit my woods, my boulder and my stream again. The total loss of my beloved home was too enormous to comprehend. (p. 109)

The burying of her village forced Katya to come to grips with “a painful fact. Some of my favorite things belonged exclusively to childhood” (p. 147). Never again would she have the opportunity to sit on the beautiful divan she received for her birthday the very day of the nuclear explosion; no more would the town look as it did in her memories. Now, the nearby town of Pripyat, where she had gone to school before the disaster—though not buried like her village of Yanov—was “a ghost town,” with crumbling roads and “decapitated streetlights [dangling] on electrical cords” (p. 201). The town square, once the site of May Day parades, babies in
strollers, and beautiful gardens, was now deserted—no cars, no people, no pets to give it any sign of life, and its “spooky emptiness...[made Kayta feel] sad” (p. 201). Worst of all was Yanov, where everything was gone, buried under the earth in an effort to contain its radioactivity. Where once stood the Ancients and her own beloved cottage, now there was a field that looked “like nothing more than an abandoned construction site—never loved by anybody. My home had vanished as completely as if it had never existed. It was as if my childhood had never existed either” (p. 214). With no sign left of the home she knew, the site of her beloved memories, she felt as if perhaps it had never been there at all, and by extension, perhaps those memories, along with the person who had lived them, had never been either.

Sadie Wynn’s Missouri home in *The Truth about Sparrows* was the site of countless memories for her family—picnics, swimming, climbing trees, picking ripe dewberries that turned their fingers purple (Hale, 2004, pp. 4, 120, 181). It was the place where Daddy read stories to Sadie and her siblings “chapter by chapter as far back as Sadie could remember” (p. 2), a tradition Sadie was very relieved to have him revive one evening in South Texas (p. 90). Leaving their house for the last time, Sadie looked back to see

the patched holes in the screen door.... The one halfway up, Jacob made with his cane pole. And the two down low, our hound started when she was chased by a swarm of bees. The next day, poor old Ruby died in Mama’s arms from all the stings. We buried her in the backyard, and Emily cried ‘cause we didn’t have flowers for her grave. I cried, too, but not for lack of flowers. (p. 5)

The events of their lives left marks on the place that was home just as they impacted the people who lived them, cementing the connection between history, location, and the feel of home.

**Life Lived in the Place**

The marks left by the Wynns’ life on their Missouri house (Hale, 2004) illustrate the impact of time spent in a place on not only the people who lived there, but on the places
themselves, another theme in the historical component of home. In *90 Miles to Havana* (Flores-Galbis, 2010), Julian described walking through his neighbor’s bedroom after the house had been abandoned:

> We step gingerly around the plastic horses, dump trucks, and army men scattered on the floor. The sad abandoned toys look like they’re waiting for Pepe to come home. The crumpled sheets on the unmade bed still hold Pepe’s sleeping outline. It feels like he’s about to walk into the room. (p. 34)

This place that was home to Pepe held the feel of its former inhabitant even in his absence; it seemed to be anticipating his return. The life he lived there characterized the place, as could be seen and felt in the trappings of that life that had been left behind.

This theme is evidenced on a grander scale in Pratchett’s *Nation* (2008). The Nation was for Mau more than place or even a particular group of people; it was something larger, something that had “seen many yesterdays and would see many tomorrows, with rules that everyone knew, and that worked because everyone knew them, so much so that they were just part of the way people lived. People would live and die but there would always be a Nation” (pp. 84-85). They ways of the Nation, its customs and routines, its timeless nature were a part of what made it a home with which Mau identified. The spirits of ancestors were deeply part of the place, with Grandfathers whose voices Mau heard, and Grandmothers who spoke to Daphne in “this place where [they] were born and gave birth and, often, died” (p. 213). The living that had been done in that place made it home for the ancestors, a home in which their spirits remained comfortably looking after their people even after death; the place was infused with the history of its people and the impact of the lives they had led there.
Traditions

The traditions that are part of life in hometowns and cultures lend a sense of continuity with the past, with generations before who have called that place home. They help to characterize life there, to make it feel familiar and enduring over the course of history. Home life for Julian and his family in *90 Miles to Havana* was marked by customs such as their annual December 31 father-son fishing trip and the belief that catching a fish that day would bring luck for the coming year (Flores-Galbis, 2010, p. 2). The Irish home of Pignat’s characters in *Greener Grass* (2008) was a place filled with traditions, such as the making of woven-rush crosses on St. Brigid’s Day (p. 15), the gifting of harvest knots to sweethearts (p. 125), and the planting of potatoes on St. Patrick’s Day (p. 176). It was a place of heritage—not the hunting trophies on the walls that were the heritage of the wealthy landlord, but a truer heritage, one of stories known word for word because they were so often told, one of love and family (p. 30). Customs that characterized life in Katya Dubko’s Ukrainian home included birthday traditions such as pulling the “birthday girl’s ears the number of years that she has been alive” (White, 2008, p. 33), the annual May Day celebration that Katya believed would never be cancelled “unless the world had ended” (p. 71), and the practice of inviting a family’s *domovyk*, or house elf, to come along for a move or a trip by bringing among the luggage an empty box (p. 85).

Tradition was a part of home in *Little Cricket* (Brown, 2004) as well, causing hardship for Grandfather in America, where values and practices were so different. In Laos, it was vital to be able to see a mountain from each house. Here, all he could see were whizzing cars on the black asphalt. In Laos, before a house was built, a hole was dug, and as many grains of rice as there were family members were placed in the hole. If the spirits moved the grain during the night, it was believed that the location was unlucky and another site for the house had to be chosen. [Kia] wondered how Americans chose places to build their homes. Maybe, she thought, because Americans already had so much, it did not matter to them if their homes were blessed by the spirits or not. (p. 103)
Traditions and beliefs surrounding home were very different in Minnesota from what Kia and Grandfather had known, and this difference contributed to their feeling out of place as they struggled to make a new home in America.

**Treasured Belongings**

Homes are filled with the possessions of their inhabitants, from the items used in daily life to the heirlooms handed down through generations. Often there are items of special significance, objects connected to precious memories of time spent in favorite places or with loved people. When homes are lost to disaster, these treasured belongings can be among the most difficult to be without, for they represent so much more than simple property; they are a link to the past, they signify the love of family, they embody the feel of home. Those who are fortunate enough to rescue such meaningful personal effects can take comfort from them in new and unfamiliar environments, recapturing something of the home that was lost.

In *Blown Away!*, Jake Pitney’s mother had such a treasured link to her past: the “genuine American Oriental rug [that] she’d had… shipped…all the way from her home back in Georgia when she moved to the Keys” (Harlow, 2007, pp. 9-10). The rug was her most prized possession, standing “for all the things she left behind when she married Dad and moved to the Keys from Georgia: her family and friends, a house with indoor plumbing and electricity…. [It was] the one thing that reminded her of her old home” (p. 134). She treasured it for its connection to her former life, to the home where she grew up, and having it in her Islamorada home brought the comforting feel of being in a place that was hers.

Bewildered by the immediacy of her evacuation after the Chernobyl explosion, *Radiant Girl’s* Katya Dubko (White, 2008) had very little time to contemplate which meaningful items she would like to carry with her to her new life—a life she did not realize at the time would be a
permanent loss of all she had ever known. She chose to take with her simply the motorcycle poster given to her on her birthday by her good friend and neighbor Boris (p. 85), a poster that remained the only decoration in her new room years afterward. Katya learned later that all her friend Sergei was able to salvage from his former life in Yanov was a sow he had recently killed that was already with an out-of-town taxidermist when the reactor exploded. This link to his home was a token of luck for Sergei, who touched its tusk for good fortune before all his soccer games in his new town (p. 215). Among Katya’s lost childhood belongings were those she once kept in her secret hiding place under her boulder in the forest—practical items like fishing line and hooks as well as more intimate ones like a note written to her by Sergei (p. 21). Upon her return to the buried Yanov years later, she rediscovered these treasures with a sense of satisfaction, feeling, despite the radioactive danger they contained, that “somehow [she] needed them to know how to go forward” (p. 217). Perhaps having these pieces of her past helped her reconnect with the home she would never see again; perhaps it provided a sense of closure that her rushed evacuation did not allow when she thought her separation would be only temporary, when it was unthinkable that all that was her home could be lost forever.

Treasured belongings were an important connection to a lost home for Julian and his family as well in 90 Miles to Havana (Flores-Galbis, 2010). A gold swallow pin handed down from Julian’s great-grandmother was a cherished possession first for Julian’s mother and later, when she hid it in his suitcase for him to smuggle to America, for Julian himself. Holding the golden swallow, Julian could “smell [his mother’s] perfume, see her teardrop face floating above me, hear her voice when she asked me to guard it for the family” (p. 251). Its presence made him feel closer to her despite the miles and uncertainty separating them. Clutching the pin in her hand again at the end of the novel, Mami, still distraught because her husband had not yet joined them in the United States, lost “the icy, bitter expression on her face…and [Julian could] almost
see the old sweetness in her eyes” (p. 290). Her reunion with this beloved item meant more than simply having a link to her past; it provided the financial ability to bring Papi from Cuba and make the family whole again. Another treasured belonging of Julian’s was much less financially valuable, but no less meaningful, than the golden swallow—the broken pieces of a plate he made for his father one Father’s Day. Carrying the broken plate always in his pocket to prevent its being stolen, Julian later glued it back together despite the missing piece in the center. Upon discovering it in his suitcase when they were reunited, Mami vowed through tears that “When we get our own house, I’ll hang it where everyone can see it, so we don’t forget” (p. 278). This shattered, incomplete, handmade plate was to earn a place of honor in their new home, for it represented for Julian’s family the way they had been broken apart and put back together in the wake of revolution. A final item that had a deep connection to home for Julian was his drawing book, for “it’s how I remember and it’s the only thing I brought from home” (p. 104). In the book he crafted images of the life, place, and people who were lost to him. The drawings recreated images of the home he left, providing a connection between his past and his present and lending a sense of comfort in a frightening and lonely place.

In both novels set amidst the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, characters made note of the items carried with the thousands of individuals wandering the city looking for safety. In Quake! (Karwoski, 2004), Jacob noted that people chose to rescue items necessary for survival like blankets, pans, and clothes, but also more intriguing ones such as a violin case, a lamp, and a piano (pp. 35, 53). In A Sea so Far (Thesman, 2001), one secondary character was described as being “fascinated with what the refugees carried” in their luggage, bags, and trunks—one of which was mounted on skates (p. 48). For Thesman’s protagonists, the most treasured items rescued from the quake were personal: precious photographs of Kate’s deceased parents, which she kept under her pillow when feeling particularly lonely (pp. 5, 8), and the Worth dress Jolie’s
mother wore to the opera the night before she died in the quake (pp. 24, 28, 51)—to Jolie, the only thing that mattered (p. 55). So focused was Kate on retrieving family photos that she later wondered “that she had not remembered to pick up a comb and soap from the bathroom or even a scrap of food from the damaged kitchen” (Thesman, 2001, pp. 13-14). Items that represented the homes that were lost were of greater importance to both of these characters than anything of practical necessity; they were what both girls felt must come with them wherever they ended up.

Items treasured in *Greener Grass* (Pignat, 2008) for their historical connection to home were, devastatingly, sold for meager earnings to ensure survival in the impossibly hard times of blight and famine. From the dresser carved by the deceased Mr. O’Toole (p. 23) to Mam’s tattered family Bible handed down through the generations (pp. 1, 2, 123), no amount of sentimental attachment could overcome the dire need for food, and so many precious links to the past were lost. Watching the peddler load virtually everything her family owned onto his cart next to the belongings of all of their neighbors, Kit realized “then what Murphy’s cart carried. Treasures, a trove of memories and heirlooms, priceless they were—forever lost to their families—all for a handful of pennies” (p. 123).

A beloved item lost in *The Truth about Sparrows* was the beautiful drop-leaf table Sadie’s Daddy built and gave to Mama on the day they were married, a table that was to be Sadie’s own one day (Hale, 2004, p. 2). Though promised a new table for their new life, Sadie knew nothing would ever be the same as this one (p. 3). This was the table she had known all her years, the place where family meals were shared, and its replacement in their Texas house was “nothing like Daddy’s table” (p. 61). Sadie had great difficulty accepting the tar-paper shack in which her family took up residence along the South Texas coast, reminiscing frequently about the “real house” she once had, the place that was the site of all her treasured memories (p.
It began to take on the feel of a home, though, on the day that Mama transformed it from an “ugly black box” (p. 75) into something very different:

when I stepped back inside I saw Mama’s best quilt hanging on the wall. The double wedding ring pattern splashed color across the dull cardboard as pretty as any wallpaper or fancy painting. I helped her hang Daddy’s cherry-brown fiddle on the right side of the door and her oval-framed picture of Grandma and Grandpa on the other. The photograph and a rose-patterned teapot were all we had left of them. We set the teapot on the topmost shelf and lined up Daddy’s books on the lower ones. When I didn’t think she could do any more, Mama spread her ivory crocheted cloth over the rickety table, the same cloth that had sat on Daddy’s shiny drop-leaf table back home. For a moment, I glimpsed loss in Mama’s eyes. I figured she missed Daddy’s beautiful table same as I did. But just as quickly as the sadness came, it was gone. She took my hand, stood back, and looked at the house. It was changed. Mama had managed to turn Mr. Winslow’s ugly black box into something he’d probably never recognize. She’d made it ours. (pp. 74-75)

By filling their new residence with the trappings of the home they had known and loved, Mama provided for the family a sense of being among their own things, a link to the past, a bit of familiarity in a most unfamiliar location, and made their shack just a bit more like a real home. The surest sign of Sadie’s eventual acceptance of her new life and home was her Christmas gift to her parents as the novel ended—lumber “for Mama’s table. For our new life” (p. 254).

**Time Spent in Activities**

Just as treasured possessions provided comfort in unfamiliar locales, two characters found solace by spending time immersed in activities that made them feel closer to the homes they had lost. While Julian’s drawings in *90 Miles to Havana* (Flores-Galbis, 2010) were cherished belongings because of their images of his life in Cuba, the activity of drawing was also vitally important in helping him cope with life in the Miami camp. When Julian’s beloved sketchbook was stolen by the camp bully, he took to carrying a piece of paper in his back pocket wherever he went (p. 129). In the tense and emotional time he spent away from his home and family, he was “afraid to stop drawing. Every time I put my pencil down, my thoughts get
jumbled up. I get sad and angry at the same time” (p. 130). When he drew, however, he found a measure of peace, a bit of help in sorting out his thoughts and feelings. Again at the end of the novel, once the family was reunited and Julian was enrolled in an American school, the comforting routine of drawing provided a release during a very difficult adjustment to a new home:

I’m stuck behind a pile of words that I can’t climb over. I’m getting left behind, and I can’t tell them to stop…. I rummage through the desk and find a stack of white paper and colored pencils. I’m never lost when I draw, so I start a picture of our house with a television antenna on the roof—our car in the driveway. The next one is of the man with the beard, pointing his cigar—dictating; then a golden swallow with ruby wings flying over Tomás in his boat with fifteen grateful people waving and smiling on deck. I draw one picture after the other until I run out of paper. (pp. 286-287)

Losing himself in this comforting activity helped Julian cope in unfamiliar places and provided an escape from the difficulties of adjusting to his new life.

Kia Vang, in *Little Cricket* (Brown, 2004), likewise felt closer to the home from which she was separated while absorbed in a favorite activity—gardening, which brought comfort and a “refuge [from] the uncertainty and grind of everyday life” (p. 90) in the strange and sometimes mysterious United States. Knowing Kia’s love of this pursuit, her mother entrusted her with seeds from their gardens in Laos and the refugee camp to take with her to America, for she saw how Kia lost her “worries…when [she took] care of a garden” (p. 99). Tending the vegetables brought both Kia and Grandfather back to thoughts of happier times, days of “togetherness with their friends and relatives” (p. 117), mornings spent searching “for herbs together on the village mountaintop” (p. 118), and harvesting crops amidst “laughter and celebration” (p. 166). While lost in this comforting activity, they could forget for a while the challenges they faced, the people they missed, and feel just a bit closer to the home they had lost.
Summary

Home was a place of memory, of tradition, of a life lived within the walls of a house, on the streets of a town, or in the fields of a countryside. The feeling of home was recaptured as characters surrounded themselves with the treasured belongings that were links to their damaged homes or immersed themselves in familiar and comforting activities. The temporal/historical component of home for these characters points to the ways in which time spent in a place can make it a true home.

Conclusion

Together, these twelve novels represent home as a phenomenon of a complex and multifaceted nature. Characters experienced aspects of home’s instinctual, social, personal, physical/geographical, emotional, and temporal/historical components as they struggled with its loss and rebuilding in the face of disaster. (For a summary of the components seen in each novel, see Appendix D.) In their words and actions are representations of the instinctual need for safety and shelter and of homes that were deeply connected to loved others. The novels presented homes that were places of characters’ own, places that shaped them into the individuals they were. They portrayed geographical locations that were beloved, that were sites of memories and treasured experiences, that were missed deeply upon their loss. They indicated as well a drive to reestablish notions of home when it is threatened, damaged, or taken away. In these themes are echoes of the words of Katrina’s displaced students and with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, connections which will be discussed in the following chapter.
Chapter 5 – Discussion

I undertook this study to determine the ways in which home was experienced by literary characters who faced its loss or damage due to natural or humanly-caused disaster. Through an examination of their words and actions, I sought to gain insight into the nature of home for them, an understanding of the nuances of its meaning in their stories of loss and rebuilding. What I found was a striking resonance with both the words of Hurricane Katrina’s displaced students and the literature on home reviewed in Chapter 2. A listing of the major themes revealed from each of these sources highlights the strong similarities. For the teens displaced from New Orleans in 2005, the revelations about home were these:

- Home was intimately connected to loved others, to family and friends. Their new city and school became more home-like as new friendships were established and connections were made with others who shared their experience of disaster and loss.
- A sense of home was recaptured by surrounding themselves with special items rescued from their former dwellings, treasured belongings that lent an air of familiarity to a new place.
- Even devastated houses, devoid of family members, still felt like home because they were the sites of memories, of childhood, of life lived within those walls.
- Home was a physical place that was known, with familiar sights, sounds, smells.
- Home had a “feel”—a sense of comfort, of ease, of belonging, and of security.

In the review of the literature on home in Chapter 2, the following themes came to light:

- Home is connected to other people. It is a place frequently associated with family; it is a concept marked by a sense of community.
• Home is deeply connected to identity, to understanding of self. People are shaped by the places that are home, and when home is lost, so too can be lost a part of one’s self, the sense of assurance with which the rooted experience the wider world.

• Home is where one starts from, a point of origin from which the rest of the world is experienced, and to which a return is frequently made, whether physically or psychologically.

• Home is connected to history, to sites of memories (and treasured belongings associated with those memories), to tradition, and to the familiarity of routine.

• Home is connected to geography. It is a location on the globe with which residents have formed a bond, a place characterized by the physical experience of sights, sounds, and scents.

• Home is an emotion-based concept, involving deep emotional attachments and inspiring feelings of comfort, belonging, security, and autonomy.

As I analyzed the ways in which home was represented in young adult novels of disaster, I found each of these revelations and themes emerging again. Whereas Katrina’s evacuees connected home to family and friends, and the review of the literature revealed the role of other people in home places, the novels indicated a strong social component of home, encompassing the importance of family and friends as well as the wider community. The literature on home pointed out the link between home and self; so too did the novels show a personal component of home—elements of identity linked to home places and the autonomy that comes with a sense of ownership. The physical experience of places that were home—sights, sounds, scents, connection to houses and cities—were evident in the words of displaced students, in the literature review, and throughout the novels as well, strengthening the idea of a geographical component of home. All three sources as well indicated the vital importance of an emotional
component—a sense of security, comfort, or belonging, the notion of “feeling at home.” Elements of time spent in a place, seen in the New Orleans students’ comments on houses as the sites of memories and familiarity and in the literature review’s revelations about tradition, routine, and treasured belongings, were echoed in the novels as characters expressed and negotiated these very same elements of a temporal/historical component of home. In each of these ways, this research lends support and confirmation to the elements of home revealed in other sources, building on and enhancing understandings of these various components of home.

One dimension not found in either the words of Katrina’s students or in a significant way in the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 is the importance of the instinctual drive towards safety that is a part of home. Perhaps because the students were safely ensconced in a new city when I spoke with them in the months after Hurricane Katrina, safety was not an issue with which they grappled. And too, perhaps because the scholars and literary critics writing about home explored the concept from a distance of time, not in disaster’s immediate aftermath, the instinctual urge to seek safety was not evident in their work. For the characters I encountered in young adult novels, though, disaster was immediately present, and safety was threatened or lost completely, forcing the need for shelter, the activation of a drive to escape danger and find whatever measure of protection they could find.

The aim of my research was to provide insight into the concept of home by attending to the ways in which characters in twelve novels grappled with its loss and rebuilding in the face of disaster. Examining and analyzing these works of young adult literature led to an ever-strengthening conviction that home was a complex concept made up of elements of the social, the personal, the physical/geographical, the instinctual, the emotional, and the temporal/historical, almost all of which were seen in the words of the New Orleans students and in the scholarly literature on home as well. The emergence of similar themes among these three
sources indicates that these patterns are widely-held understandings of home, ones that contribute to its establishment in times of ease, ones that are missed in their absence, and ones that can help reestablish a sense of home when it is lost.

Research Question: In What Ways Was Home Experienced by Literary Characters Who Faced Its Loss or Damage Due to Natural or Humanly-caused Disaster? What Do Characters’ Words and Actions Reveal about the Nature of Home for Them?

- How Was Home Discussed?
- How Was Home Remembered?
- How Was Home Imagined?
- How Was Home Rebuilt or Reestablished?

Faced with the devastation of damaged homes, separated by distance and time from the homes they had known and loved, characters were forced to grapple with its meaning, whether consciously or unconsciously, as they strove to reestablish a place for themselves. Home was a part of these characters; they revisited it in their minds, recreated its images on paper, on cloth, and in dreams, and reflected on its importance as they mourned its loss and adjusted to life in new places. The people and places of home in the twelve examined novels were discussed, remembered, imagined, and rebuilt or reestablished by those who saw them threatened, damaged, or lost, shedding light on home’s meaning for them. These discussions, remembrances, imaginings, and methods of reestablishing home were the source of my insights into the guiding research question, namely the ways in which home was experienced by these characters.

Home Was Experienced as a Social Concept

Home Was a Community of People

Many characters’ experiences of home in these twelve novels were closely tied to the people who surrounded them. Ruby’s characterization of her New Orleans neighborhood as a “Garden of Neighbors” (Antieau, 2008, p. 11) who looked out for and cared for one another
indicated the significance of the community of which she was a part. In the strongest communities, such as Ruby’s and those in the novels set during the San Francisco earthquake, residents continued to help each other as disaster struck and homes were destroyed, often at personal risk. They felt a responsibility for those around them and willingly gave of their time, energy, and material possessions in order to assist others, from storm preparations to feeding and sheltering to rescue efforts.

Just as Hollander (1993) described home for Milton’s Eve as “the presence of the only other person” (p. 35), Nation’s Mau spoke of the importance of community in establishing home, saying that while one person alone was nothing, “two people are a nation” (Pratchett, 2008, p. 252). In Mau’s memory, his island was peopled with all its former inhabitants—men, women, children, family, friends, pets—and he knew that part of keeping his Nation alive was remembering these people and telling others about them. With neighbors gone from home, or in new places away from those they knew, characters found themselves longing for the social connections they had lost. Jacob Kaufman recalled the people who had once populated his San Francisco community, the kindness on their faces, the sparkle in their eyes (Karwoski, 2004). Katya Dubko found herself shocked at the lack of life in a town that had once overflowed with people upon her return years after the Chernobyl nuclear explosion, remembering her own village as a place where neighbors had stopped by to visit and missing that social connection in her new dwelling place miles away (White, 2008). Kia Vang’s village in Laos as well was one filled with people who played, laughed, and worked together (Brown, 2004). The happiness of her home faded as more and more people left, their abandoned huts reminding Kia of the once-joyful people who had lived there. The friendship and camaraderie of others who grew up in the same place was a bond uniting one to another; finding themselves separated by disaster, away from the supportive network of known people, was among the most difficult results of
displacement. Characters in such situations found themselves aching for the companionship they had once known, feeling isolated and alone in new places, or anxious to leave lands that had lost all feel of home in the absence of former neighbors.

The establishment of new friendships was key to regaining a sense of home in a new place, as it was for the students displaced by Hurricane Katrina. Finally accepting the friendship offered by neighbors helped *The Truth about Sparrows*’ Sadie Wynn feel at home in South Texas (Hale, 2004). In *Little Cricket*, Kia Vang’s friendship with her American neighbors made the burden of adjusting and being brave easier, helping her feel more at home in Minnesota than either her brother or Grandfather, who lacked such emotional connections (Brown, 2004). For both Sadie and Kia, as for the students from New Orleans, finding a community of which to be a part took away a measure of the isolation of being new in an unknown area. Friends could help them learn the ways of the place, they could provide comfort during the difficult transition, they offered a sense of belonging that was essential to reestablishing a feeling of home.

**Home Was a Place of Family**

Many characters’ thoughts and memories of home revealed its deep connection to family, an association noted by Katrina’s displaced students and traced by Hareven (1993) and Terkenli (1995) in the literature review in Chapter 2. Homes were peaceful places for families to gather; they were spaces in which to reinforce notions of family despite all that was lost to disaster. Homes were sites of family togetherness, perhaps over stories or meals. In several novels, home was intimately connected to a parent. Even before her father’s death at the hands of Communist soldiers, Kia Vang noted that her hut never felt like home until he was there in the evening (Brown, 2004). Jolie Logan’s house, rebuilt after the San Francisco earthquake to look and feel exactly as it had when her mother lived, was a way for her to hold on to a bit of her mother
herself after she was killed (Thesman, 2001). Quake’s Jacob Kaufman too recalled the home he had when his mother was alive—a place filled with the scents of good food cooking, smiles and laughter on his parents’ faces—and felt that without a mother, there could be no such thing as a home (Karwoski, 2004).

For some, being reunited with loved ones was the key component to reestablishing a sense of home, even in unfamiliar places. Kia Vang’s Grandfather knew that once their entire family was together in America, they would have all they needed, despite the impossibility of ever returning to their Laotian home (Brown, 2004). In the earthquake’s immediate aftermath, Jacob Kaufman’s thoughts centered around his family, compelling him to that site because home was the place they should be found. Though they could not be located in their devastated boardinghouse, upon their reunion in Golden Gate Park at the novel’s end, the temporary shelter of a refugee tent became a home (Karwoski, 2004). Similarly for 90 Miles to Havana’s Julian, finding himself wrapped in his mother’s arms was a coming home at last, though he was in a location to which he had never been before (Flores-Galbis, 2010).

For each of these characters, what made a place home was being surrounded by family. This sense of home could be found in temporary shelters or in far-away lands; permanence and familiarity of place were less important than having loved ones with them wherever they found themselves. Their experiences indicated that home was a place for families to be together. It was the site of precious moments between parents and children, it was the house that held the spirit of a deceased mother, it was the land where cousins had worked and played together. Thoughts of home were intimately connected to the loved ones who populated them.
Summary of Home’s Social Component

The social component of the homes represented in the novels was vital to characters, just as it was for Katrina’s displaced teens and in the scholarly literature on home. Homes are connected in the minds of their residents to the people with whom they share their space. For the characters I encountered, homes were conceptualized both as a larger community of people and as places of more intimate social connections—those between children and parents, between best friends, among siblings. Social bonds made home a place of family as well as a community of people. In the wake of disaster, characters, like the students from New Orleans, found themselves missing those from whom they had been separated. They longed for lost friends and family members and found that, in some cases, even the most familiar place lost the feel of home without certain people around them. Places became less home-like too with the steady defection of neighbor after neighbor in disaster’s wake. The web of social connections was a key component of home for many characters, making home a concept that could be reestablished after disaster by reuniting with loved ones, even in the most unfamiliar locales, or by building new friendships after being displaced so that a sense of community and solidarity was established. This social component of home illustrates that for many, home is family—mothers and fathers, children and grandparents, the people to whom and with whom we feel we belong. Home is friends—their camaraderie and consolation, their reliability and reassurance. Home is a community of individuals living, working, and playing together. The people who make up home can help even the most forbidding and unfamiliar place feel more homelike with their presence, with their words, with their embrace. And the establishment of new bonds of friendship can do the same, making adjustment less painful and new places feel like home.
**Home Was Experienced as a Personal Concept**

Home Was a Place that Was One’s Own

For many characters, home was a place where they could be assured of being welcome, a place to consider their own. Characters in more than one novel were reassured that they were “home now,” secure in a place they could call theirs, a place where they could settle and remain happily. Sadie Wynn, though, lacked such a place in her new life in South Texas; noting that even the lowliest creatures had a place of their own, Sadie missed her lost Missouri home desperately and yearned for a place to call hers (Hale, 2004).

The language characters employed to describe their dwelling places indicated deep personal connections to their homes: my island, my own, my woods, my boulder, my stream. More than simply places to dwell, these spots were theirs; there was an intimate bond linking person and place. Shocked to learn that his island was in fact an extremely small one, Nation’s Mau declared that it was still the best island, as it was his (Pratchett, 2008). Such bonds withstood the devastation of disaster, as Jake Pitney continued to refer to Islamorada as our place after the hurricane, indicating that, in spite of its danger and destruction, it remained a place to which he felt connected, a place that he thought of as his own (Harlow, 2007). When a place is one’s own, there comes a sense of responsibility for it, as for Mau, who considered himself accountable for holding the memory of all that his Nation had been; home was his to hold in memory, his to carry forward (Pratchett, 2008).

Having a place to call one’s own implies permanence, rootedness, a spot to return to no matter what events life brings. These characters knew that their home places were indeed theirs, that in the midst of life’s uncertainties, there was somewhere they could go and be assured of admittance and inclusion. For some, this brought a sense of emotional security, the confidence of knowing that they had a place in the world. For others, having a place that was their own
afforded a measure of self-reliance by providing liberation from their dependence on others. The security of home ownership was a goal to be sought, as *Radiant Girl’s* Katya Dubko dreamed of one day being an adult with a cottage of her own (White, 2008), and *Against the Storm’s* characters longed for homes of their own that would give them independence and autonomy (Hicylimaz, 1990).

The theme of ownership and the rights enjoyed by individuals in the spaces that are theirs, though so significant in several novels, was barely touched on in the scholarly literature on home. Erikson (1994) stated that a fundamental American belief is that individuals are “free…to command the spaces they earn title to” (p. 112). Indeed, a number of characters viewed their homes as places that were fundamentally their own, sites where they were not only independent but also the determiners of what was allowed or forbidden. Mammalooose’s ownership of home in *Ruby’s Imagine*, for example, led her to think of it as the place where she was in charge, where she had decision-making power (Antieau, 2008). And in *Greener Grass*, the Irish potato farmers felt the vital importance of ownership through its absence (Pignat, 2008). The place that they knew as home was in fact not their own, and their residence there was dependent upon the permission of an uncaring overseer, resulting in the eviction of many during the famine. So keen on the primacy of ownership was this overseer that he had huts burned to the ground rather than allow those who could not pay to remain on his boss’s property, and he threatened the lives of any who set up makeshift shelters in his woods. For the families of these farmers, there was no guarantee of rootedness, no assurance that they could remain in or return to the place they called home, as their home was owned by another.
Home Was a Part of Self

On occasion, characters were so intimately connected to the places that were home that they described them as part of their very identities. Losing a home was indeed, as revealed in the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, akin to losing a part of self (Dugan, 2007; Erikson, 1994; Fullilove, 2004; Gamble, 2006; Korosec-Serfaty, 1985; Read, 1996). Seeking safety in another town, her dear cottage and village in the Ukraine remained for Katya Dubko the place where her true self resided and was left behind, as a stranger she did not recognize replaced the girl she had been (White, 2008). Sadie Wynn’s move from her Missouri home to South Texas left her too feeling like a stranger in her own skin, as though she had lost a part of herself that she “might not ever find again” (Hale, 2004, p. 21), and Greener Grass’s Kit Byrnes spoke of home as being a part of one’s very self (Pignat, 2008). Dovey (1985) asserted that individuals’ identities are formed by the places that are home, that many establish who they are in the context of the places from which they have come. Jake Pitney’s experience in Blown Away! illustrated this phenomenon; his island home shaped his identity as a conch (Harlow, 2007), a person born and raised there who knew the place and understood its patterns and ways.

These characters experienced home as an integral part of who they were. The places that were home shaped them into the people they became, and the spirit of these places lived within them. Seeing their homes destroyed by disaster and being uprooted at times felt unreal, leaving the impression that their true selves remained at home living the lives they always had, while strangers had replaced them on their journeys to new and unknown places—much as one New Orleans teen noted that she felt as though she were not living her own life after being displaced by Hurricane Katrina. Away from home, characters found themselves wondering who they had become; some experienced anger they had never known, others lost their passion for loved activities, and more found themselves feeling apathetic or depressed or unwanted. The happy,
carefree, self-assured people they had once been seemed out of reach, so consumed were they with the experience of losing their homes and attempting to define themselves in new places.

Summary of Home’s Personal Component

The personal component of home indicated in the novels resonated with notions of identity and self in the literature review, revealing through the deeply personal connections between characters and their homes that home is a part of its residents as they are a part of it. Further, the novels indicated the primary importance of a sense of ownership, of having a place to call one’s own, a notion that was merely touched on in the scholarly literature. Home in these works was often viewed as a place of one’s own, a site where homeowners have rights and authority. There they are autonomous, independent, and self-reliant, the makers of their own destiny. Home is a force that shapes many into the individuals they become, influencing beliefs, accents, and personalities. Characters felt themselves shaped by the places that were home; within its familiar boundaries, they knew who they were and how they fit in, while away from all they had known, many struggled to recognize or redefine themselves, feeling fundamentally changed and unsure how they fit in amidst new surroundings and new people.

Home Was Experienced as a Physical/Geographical Concept

Home Was a Place Appreciated for Its Physical Characteristics

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the New Orleans students missed the sights and sounds of the place they knew as home. Just as the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 indicated individuals’ strong association with such physical characteristics of home places (Dugan, 2007; Kraszewski, 2008; Marroum, 2008; Quayson, 2005), so too did these novels reveal the role of physical sensation in the concept of home. Many characters remarked on the physical
characteristics of their homelands—their beauty, the sounds and scents that were associated with them. Jake Pitney’s Florida Keys were “like jewels on the sea” (Harlow, 2007, p. 23), and Julian’s Havana harbor was a place of palm trees, boats, and blue skies (Flores-Galbis, 2010). Jacob Kaufman recalled the smells of food in his San Francisco boardinghouse apartment (Karwoski, 2004), Ruby Pelletier enjoyed the pleasing scents and ever-present music of the French Quarter (Antieau, 2008), and Mehmet remembered his Turkish village as a place of beauty in the springtime (Hiçyilmaz, 1990). Kit Byrnes reflected on the physical beauty of her Irish homeland, its rolling green hills with a sea breeze that kissed her face (Pignat, 2008), a place whose beauty belied the fact that famine and death had overtaken it. Both she and ships full of passengers gazed back upon their home before leaving it forever, for home was a place that they wanted to remember, a picture they wanted to carry with them in their minds wherever they settled.

Kia Vang’s memories of her Laotian homeland were marked with the sounds of animals and the laughter of children, while Grandfather recalled the sight of its beloved mountains and embroidered images of the blue water and thatched huts he missed after moving to America (Brown, 2004). At times characters were reminded of lost homes by similar sensations in new places, as when the Jungle Room of Kia’s American neighbors, filled with plants, called to mind the lush greenery of Kia’s lost home in Laos. On other occasions, the stark contrast of new locales brought a longing for the sights, sounds, and scents that had been so familiar. Away in rainy, rural Ireland, Jolie Logan recalled San Francisco’s pleasant climate and yearned for the sounds of home—the tugboats in the bay, the voices and hushed noises of household members—and the sight of the city’s green hills (Thesman, 2001).

Characters carried images in their minds of the locations where they had spent their lives, images that caused them to look back fondly in appreciation of the homes they had lost. Radiant
Katya thought of her bright blue-shuttered cottage as a place with a cheerful appearance, and her village as infused with an organic beauty, a paradise (White, 2008). Living in a city far from home after the disaster, she recalled the village’s earthy, natural smells and refreshing shade trees and the nearby town’s beautiful gardens. She thought back to the woods that surrounded her cottage and the stream that she had loved, with its clean, clear water rushing over rocks. In The Truth about Sparrows, Sadie also recalled the smells of home, the way the sun shone through the leaves, and the way autumn looked and sounded there (Hale, 2004). As the homes they inhabited, remembered, and missed were physical places, these characters expressed their thoughts in terms of their homes’ physical characteristics, confirming the role of physical sensation in the experience of home that was seen both in the review of the literature and in the words of Katrina’s evacuated teens.

Home Was a Place of Origin

T.S. Eliot noted that home is the place we start from (in Read, 1996). According to this understanding, home is a place where roots are established. Indeed, one interpretation of home found among characters in these novels was as the place from which they had come. Escaping from Cuba to Miami, or fleeing war-torn Germany for England, characters referred to these places of origin as back home, for these were the only dwelling places they had ever known (Flores-Galbis, 2010; Watts, 2002). Even after decades lived in a new place, a childhood home could maintain its significance, as for Jake Pitney’s mother, whose sentimental attachment to her “Genuine American Oriental Rug” indicated her desire to maintain a connection to the home of her youth from which it had come (Harlow, 2007). Perhaps home was a site from which to set out for adventure, expecting a return when the journey was complete, as for Nation’s characters who saw home as a place of origin that was left in travel, but sought out for return because it was
Home Was a Place Transformed by Disaster

Inundated with wind and water, withered by drought, collapsed as the earth trembled, or turned under the ground, homes affected by disaster became places even those who knew them best no longer recognized. With a hurricane raging, an island home was transformed into a hazardous location, a place that inspired fright where once there was fondness. Instead of offering safety, it was a place that threatened to trap its residents, a danger zone they longed to escape (Harlow, 2007). In the storm’s aftermath, the island that was once so beautiful, so well-known, was an unrecognizable shambles. It had become a “sad, pitiful” (p. 225), “desolate” (p. 223) and “godforsaken place” (p. 220). Ruby’s New Orleans likewise became a place of danger that seemed unpredictable and unknown with the arrival of Hurricane Katrina (Antieau, 2008). The storm transformed the city into a sea where everything was changed and different, a place that many could not navigate as it had become unrecognizable. With disaster, well-known sites
lost all traces of familiarity, became “strange … [even to those who had] been born there” (Pratchett, 2008, pp. 25), with everything and everyone they had known suddenly gone. After the 1906 earthquake, San Francisco became a muddle of collapsed buildings, gaping holes in the streets, and houses reduced to piles of debris (Karwoski, 2004). Both Jacob Kaufman and Kate Keely noted that their neighborhoods had lost all their familiarity. Jacob thought of his lost home, the world he had known, as “a shadow—a memory with no resemblance to the real things around him” (Karwoski, 2004, p. 114).

Homes could become so transformed by disaster that residents who once loved them longed to escape. Over time, San Francisco became a place Kate hated and wanted to flee, a “burned-out, half-rebuilt city surrounded by ugly brown hills, with the dirt blowing in the summer streets, and horses that had been worked to death lying by the curbs every single day” (Thesman, 2001, pp. 64-65). Likewise, Katya’s home was transformed by the Chernobyl disaster from a beloved place alive with happiness into a Dead Zone, where villages were buried underground and no one was allowed to reside (White, 2008). The place that once offered safety was now deadly, and living anywhere near the location of her former home, rather than bringing comfort, filled Katya with fear. Upon her return, she described the nearby town as a changed place, lacking all signs of the life that had once overflowed there. Rather than looking like a home, a site that was loved, her village looked now like “an abandoned construction site” (p. 214), with no signs of the lives and emotions that had populated it before.

With the places they knew transformed by disaster, home became a concept that, for some, existed only in memory. The reality before them bore precious little resemblance to the homes they had known so well. Beauty had become ruin; safety had been transformed to menace; comfort had been replaced by distress; happiness had given way to despair. No longer a place to turn to for sanctuary, home became a threat to health, safety, and even survival. Many
lost their bearings in places that were once so familiar, unable to locate houses or recognize streets they had traveled every day. Some characters longed to escape the damaged sites that had once been home, while others pined for the homes they remembered.

Home Was Reestablished through Returning to the Site of Damaged Homes

A number of characters retained their connection to the damaged places from which they had come, only able to reestablish a sense of home by returning to those sites—a return described by Read (1996) as answering a psychological need. For Katya, the return was brief, but brought with it a closure that enabled her to cope with the finality of her loss and find a way to move forward (White, 2008). Coming back to her family after her trip to the buried Yanov, she was at last able to cry about her lost home and begin to reminisce. Though she realized that sneaking off to her village had been a risky undertaking, seeing the buried site for herself was a necessary step in her moving on. Against the Storm’s Mehmet, on the other hand, felt compelled to return to his drought-stricken village permanently, choosing to leave behind family and rejecting offers of a more comfortable life elsewhere, unable to recapture a sense of home in any other location (Hiçyilmaz, 1990).

For these characters, there was an inexplicable force calling them back to their damaged homes. Some felt that the homes where they grew up were the places they needed to be, despite danger and uncertainty there. Simply being in those places offered a security that they were unable to find elsewhere. So strong was the pull of Mehmet’s village that he was willing to leave his family behind and undertake the difficult journey alone, with no assurance that life back in his village would be any easier than his experiences in Ankara. Only in these places did they feel at home, and, with or without family by their side, these were the sites where they wanted to be. Katya’s return to her buried village was temporary but no less necessary to her
healing process. Though brief, her time back in Yanov was a vital part of her recovery from disaster, making it possible for her to think back to the home she had lost with fondness. Only by seeing and saying goodbye to all she had lost could she move forward and begin to rebuild her world, her home, in a new place.

Summary of Home’s Physical/Geographical Component

Home is frequently perceived as a question of *where.* It is a place, a site, a location to which instinct leads us, a location in which and to which social, emotional, historical, and personal connections are made. Experienced physically through the senses, home places are felt, seen, smelled, and heard. They are described in these physical terms; they are recalled through the senses, brought to mind by a familiar scent or missed in the face of unrecognizable surroundings. Home is the place from which one hails, a point of origin, the ground into which one’s roots are sunk. It is a site to which connections are sustained even in the wake of the greatest devastation, a place that remains in memory and calls to its former residents, sometimes infused with a life of its own in the minds of those who dwell there. Much as they were in the scholarly literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and for the young New Orleanians, these physical and geographical elements of home were prominent throughout the twelve young adult novels examined here.

**Home Was Experienced as an Emotion-Based Concept**

Home Was a Place of Emotional Attachment

In the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 (Dovey, 1985; Erikson, 1994; Fullilove, 2004; Kraszewski, 2008; Read, 1996), home’s emotion-based nature was a prominent theme. For the characters in these twelve novels as well, home was a place of deep emotional attachment. For
some, it was a place that was passionately loved, for others, a place that inspired a range of strong emotions. Kit Byrnes’s Irish cottage, much more than a simple shelter, was a site that was cherished; it was a site she chose to remember as “a place of laughter and love” (Pignat, 2008, p. 236). Kit found it inconceivable that others could be so cruel as to take away something of such great significance, and the destruction of her home was heartbreaking, the image of it being burned down “seared on [her] heart forever” (p. 232).

Katya Dubko’s dear home in the Ukraine was likewise a place that was beloved to her, a place she thought of as her entire world (White, 2008). Her grandmother’s likening their home to their hearts highlighted an emotional connection to place. When the Chernobyl nuclear explosion transformed Katya’s home into a lost place that she “desperately missed” (p. 180), she thought of her buried cottage as a being she wanted to “rescue…from its tomb of earth and let…feel the sun again” (p. 214). Still a loved site, her former home was filled in her mind with a life of its own. Katya’s home called to her, compelling her to return, despite its danger, to see it one more time before she could accept its loss. Like Katya’s, Jake Pitney’s Islamorada home was also greatly missed, and he, his family, and his friends were eager to return as soon as they were able to reach their island after its destruction by a hurricane (Harlow, 2007).

Other novels as well featured characters who felt affection for their homes. New Orleanian Ruby Pelletier, while recognizing that hers was a neighborhood where violence was frequent, considered it so much more than that, finding the beauty and the good in the place that was her home and extending her affinity to the entire natural world—ground, sky, trees, plants, animals (Antieau, 2008). Sadie Wynn’s mother spoke of their Missouri house as being a place that had given its best to them, a place deserving their love and care in return (Hale, 2004). Julian’s home in Cuba was so beloved that he thought of it as his “everything” (Flores-Galbis, 2010, p. 52). Jolie Logan thought of her San Francisco house as a place that she cherished and
longed to return to after her travels; it was, in fact, a site she did not want to leave in the first place, feeling that there, life could be perfect (Thesman, 2001). Because it was her mother’s birthplace, San Franciscan Kate Keely had such a strong emotional tie to Ireland that she felt as though she knew the place even before she was born. Though her mother had left it willingly for America, this feeling—though divorced from all logic—made Ireland the place she imagined as being her true home (Thesman, 2001).

Love and affection were not the only emotions stirred by places that were home in these novels. Mau’s home was a place that inspired pride, a site that he revered (Pratchett, 2008). He recalled voyages away from his island when he had been able to feel the place awaiting his return, so strong was his connection to it. In Radiant Girl (White, 2008), characters felt duty and loyalty to their Soviet Union, referring to it as mighty, the Motherland, and a homeland that inspired happiness and patriotism. Even after the area’s destruction, residents spoke of living in paradise. In the case of Nation’s Daphne, home was a place that stirred negative emotions. Her father chose to leave their home in England because it felt lonely and carried unhappy memories of his deceased wife and infant son, and Daphne herself recalled being at home as a stifling experience of being a proper, well-brought-up young lady, leading her to feel more at home stranded on Mau’s island in the wake of disaster than she had within the walls of her own house (Pratchett, 2008).

Whether inspiring love, loyalty, pride, or unhappiness, home was a place of deep emotional significance. Often characters’ actions defied logic or rational explanation, but there was a pull that drew them to return to unsafe places, a compulsion to see and touch and experience again the homes that had been damaged or lost to them. They spoke of their cottages, huts, and houses as beloved, they thought of them longingly while away and held them close to their hearts. They respected their nations, taking pride in the accomplishments of their fellow
citizens. Emotional ties to home revealed strong sentimental associations, both positive and negative, between people and place.

Home Was a Place Where One Belonged

Reflecting on the recognized immediate need for shelter and sustenance in the wake of disaster—that instinctual drive toward safety discussed above—Nation’s Mau noted that the most essential necessity was often taken for granted—the need for a “place where you belonged” (Pratchett, 2008, p. 84). The experience of Sophie Mandel underscored the vital importance of this feeling, as she longed to remain in England where she felt she belonged rather than return to her family or country of origin (Watts, 2002). Contrasted with the sense of belonging inspired by places that felt like homes, new places could make characters feel like outcasts, lacking a fundamental element of being at home.

The feeling of belonging, of being accepted and wanted, is an essential component of home that was noted in the literature review (Breytenbach, 1993; Hollander, 1993; Marroum, 2008; McCredden, 2007; Read, 1996). Mau’s observation that this necessity is frequently taken for granted was quite astute; it is such a basic component of home that it seems to go without being said. In fact, few of the authors of these young adult novels used the word “belong” itself, yet the idea of belonging in the places that were or became homes underscored the experiences of almost all characters. Whether they felt they belonged with their family, or in a village they had been forced to leave, or in a foreign land that called to them, each character sought the sense of peace that came from being where they knew they should be.
Home Was a Place Where One Felt Needed

In *Little Cricket*, Grandfather’s Laotian home was a place where he was valued and consulted by others, a place where he shared stories and gave advice, and fulfilling this role made him happy (Brown, 2004). Thinking of the people who had sought his counsel at home, Kia remembered him as a “proud, lively man” there, one who in America faded to a shadow of the person he had been (p. 120). Daphne reflected that, stranded on Mau’s island, her true home was now “a mat in a hut, where she slept every night in a sleep so deep that it was black, and the [Women’s] Place, where she made herself useful. And she *could* be useful here” (Pratchett, 2008, p. 187). The island became a home for her because she felt needed, because she had found a place at last where she was valued. Here, Daphne had a purpose and accomplished goals, she was integral to the Nation’s survival. This feeling of achievement was lacking in her proper English upbringing, where she felt simply like a doll without true inner value. Being needed and respected caused Daphne to feel that the island was home, despite its drastic difference from the world she had known. In their home places, these characters had a vital role to fulfill. They were secure in the knowledge that they were an integral part of the place and community, that they were needed, valued, and respected. They contributed to the lives of others and to the workings of the societies of which they were a part. Feeling appreciated for their talents and involvement, they felt at home, and in places where they were unable to contribute, the feeling of home was lacking.

Home Was a Place of Comfort

As indicated in the literature on home (Albrecht, 2006; Erikson, 1994; hooks, 1990; Mack, 1993; Marroum, 2008; Seamon, 1985), there was an element of comfort implied in references to home in these novels. Home might be a tranquil hut where loved ones could gather
in peace, a friend’s boat where one was welcome and accepted, or a Golden Gate Park tent afforded a comforting quality by the presence of a pet. Conversely, a dwelling place filled with the unkindness of others could feel distinctly un-homelike. Such circumstances highlighted the significance of a feeling of comfort in a home. Homes that were places of comfort offered solace from worry, an uplifting of the spirit. Whether the soothing quality of such homes stemmed from the company of family members, from a loved pet, or from the presence of a welcoming friend, the comforting element of certain locations provided an emotional ease to its residents that resulted in their wanting to be in those places, the feeling that they were home.

Summary of Home’s Emotional Component

Home is a place that offers emotional sanctuary and comfort. Common vernacular speaks of “feeling at home;” more than a simple shelter from the elements, a true home is a place where one has a sense of belonging, of ease and contentment. Such feelings were evident in these young adult novels as well as in the words of Katrina’s evacuees and in the literature on home. Home is a place where one fits in and feels valued and wanted, where one experiences the satisfaction of making a contribution. For some, home is so emotionally significant that it feels like everything, the whole world, all that is known and treasured. Homes are places for which strong emotions are felt—love, pride, gratitude, duty. In the face of homes transformed by disaster, such emotions are supplanted by fear, and with forced displacement come the anger and sadness of being out of place, the bitterness of being away from cherished sites. The emotional toll of losing home places is as profound as the sentimental bonds uniting person and place; it runs deep and endures until at last one finds a way to feel at home again.
Home Was Experienced as a Temporal/Historical Concept

Home Was a Place of Familiarity

Several characters’ thoughts revealed that home was a place that was familiar, that was thoroughly known. It was an island whose outline could be recognized from afar, a neighborhood where every face was familiar and where people engaged in routine and expected activities. There was an ease to life at home, where residents did “not have to struggle with foreign words tripping up” their tongues (Brown, 2004, p. 166). Familiarity could outweigh creature comforts, as for one family who remained in a meager country abode despite offers of luxurious living space in the city because their rural setting offered a way of life that they knew and understood. Familiarity too could transform a new place into a home; the familiarity that came with the passage of time in her new home in South Texas allowed one protagonist to develop an affinity for the place, ultimately establishing a sense of home there that she feared she would never know again. Homes were places thoroughly known by the characters who inhabited them as a result of the time they spent there. As did the students displaced by Hurricane Katrina, these characters recognized the people, the landscape, the ways of life in home places. They spoke the language and were themselves known and understood by those around them. They knew what to expect from these familiar locations, lending an ease to life there that was missing as they began to learn the ways of new places and people. Familiarity was a reassuring quality, one that was quite significant in making a place home.

Home Was a Place of Tradition

Traditions such as one family’s daily reading of stories, another’s annual fishing trip, and yearly May Day parades held in town were an integral component of life at home for characters. One character described his island as a place where religious tradition was faithfully carried out,
and another remembered the people of his island knowing its chants and singing them regularly. In yet another home village, residents upheld traditional beliefs, such as choosing a home site carefully only after consulting the honored spirits. These customs and conventions were reliable fixtures for the members of a family or culture, characterizing the places that were home to them. Such traditions were a link to the past, a consistent feature of life at home that offered stability and another form of familiarity. Some provided a connection with earlier generations who had called that place home, while some were unique to the family that built a feeling of home around them. Through customs and traditions, memories were created in the places that were home, establishing a connection over time between people and place.

Home Was the Place Where Life’s Events Took Place

One teen displaced by Hurricane Katrina noted that what made her house a home were the memories tied up in that place. Again in the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, home was the site where lives were lived, where memories were established, (Fullilove, 2004; Read, 1996), and this quality of home held true in the young adult disaster novels. Mau’s ancestors spoke of their island as being the “place where we were born and gave birth and, often, died” (Pratchett, 2008, p. 213). In other novels, characters’ thoughts of home were marked by memories of the events that took place there—songs sung, stories told, days spent planting, gathering herbs, or picnicking with friends. The lives lived in such places infused them with a deep sense of home. Events that took place within the walls of a house, in a beloved garden, or on the shores of an island transformed those places from mere geographical locations to the sites of human lives. In such instances, home was the place where life was carried out—where celebrations were held, where losses were mourned, where routine activities were dependably performed. Thoughts of home for these characters brought memories of the lives they had enjoyed there.
Summary of Home’s Temporal/Historical Component

For my New Orleans students, for the young adult characters I encountered, and in the review of the literature, homes were sites connected to memories, to the large and small events of life that took place there. These sources revealed that home is familiar, it is known. It is a place of tradition and routine, where life is dependable and one knows what to expect. Feelings of home are strengthened over time, as a history is established in the context of place. Such feelings can be connected to treasured belongings that call to mind memories of home—items rescued from disaster and given places of prominence in new locations, infusing a new place with elements of the familiar. Feelings of home may also be strengthened through engagement in comforting activities that hearken back to earlier days, providing a link between past and present for those who find themselves in unknown places with which they have no historical connection. Through these elements of time, of life lived in a place, locations become homes for the residents who inhabit them.

Home Was Experienced as an Instinctual Need

Home Was a Place of Safety

When I spoke with students from New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, they had each established a safe place to live in a new city. Their stories were ones of evacuation before the storm struck and of what they missed about the homes they had left behind, and as such, did not address questions of an immediate experience of disaster and need for safety. Similarly, the literature on disaster reviewed in Chapter 2 included reflections upon home from a distance of time, and did not focus on the instinctual drive to reestablish safe shelter. In the novels, however, disasters were immediately present, and characters were forced to grapple with an instinctual need for safety that became a clear component of home in these representations.
In disaster’s immediate aftermath, an instinctual drive can be activated to seek a place of safety. In such cases, the relative safety of even the most primitive shelter from the elements led one young protagonist to characterize a cardboard box as a home. With time and reflection, however, there comes a desire for greater security, evidenced in characters’ memories of and longing for “real” houses (Hale, 2004, p. 61; Hiçyilmaz, 1990, pp. 76, 100), homes that were sturdy, reliable shelters to replace tents, shacks, or windowless, unfinished apartment buildings—places that offered not only basic shelter, but also a feeling of safety and protection. Whether providing the most basic of shelters to satisfy immediate need or the serenity of being where we feel truly secure, homes are believed to offer protection from the outside world. They are places where residents can take cover from storms and find warmth in the dead of winter. They are sanctuaries that afford a sense of well-being amidst the threatening world beyond their walls. Home is the place where bad tidings can be held at bay; it is a shelter from the dangers that exist beyond its borders.

Because of this belief about home, several characters spoke of it as a place where everything would be all right, even when clearly there was no guarantee of such safety. With the city around them ablaze and in shambles from the recent earthquake, A Sea so Far’s affluent characters assured themselves that there was nothing to worry about in their own neighborhood (Thesman, 2001). Similarly, returning after a hurricane to an island by no means safe from future disasters, one protagonist remarked that at last he was “safe at home” (Harlow, 2007, p. 248), demonstrating that, despite what happened there a short time before, being back on his island filled him with a sense of well-being. When the Chernobyl reactor exploded, contaminating the outdoors with radioactivity, a teacher sent her students home from school because the “outdoors [was] dangerous” (White, 2008, p. 68); the implication that their homes would provide safety from nuclear fallout was of course untrue, but illustrates that, even when all
evidence points to the contrary, home can be assumed to be a place of safety. Taunted in a new city for being from Chernobyl, Katya imagined herself home in her lost village, a vision that inspired feelings of safety, security, and relief at being back where she longed to be. Despite such dreams of what once was, however, the practical side of Katya longed to be far away from the site of her former home, yearning above all for the safety that place no longer offered and searching in vain to recapture the sense of safety at home that the nuclear explosion stole from her. Similar sentiments were expressed by Kia Vang’s family in Little Cricket (Brown, 2004), who willingly traveled across the globe to escape danger and establish a new home in a place of safety.

All living creatures, animal as well as human, have a drive to seek safety and shelter from the dangers of the world. Dens and nests keep predators at bay, tents provide shelter from wind and rain, houses become spaces of refuge from temperature extremes. From the most humble to the most luxurious, homes must offer their residents safety from the threats of the world without. Because of this instinctual link of home and safety, homes are often thought of as safe places—reaching the threshold, closing and locking the door can provide a sense of relief: one has made it through the danger and reached “home base.” When homes are lost or threatened by disaster, they can be transformed into dangerous spaces. In such situations, an instinctual urge to seek safety becomes apparent, as individuals strive to set up temporary shelter in the immediate aftermath of disaster or long for homes that offer the safety that they once enjoyed.

**Research Question:** How Do These Representations of the Experience of Home Inform an Understanding of the Concept of Home Itself?

The literary representations of home’s loss and reestablishment in these twelve novels add much to an understanding of the nature of home itself. Through the varied experiences of
characters who were forced to grapple with the notion of home in the face of disaster, we find insight into the complexity of such familiar expressions as “home is where the heart is” or “home away from home.” We come to see ways in which emotions and selves are invested in home places, as well as factors that help a new location to feel like a home. Above all, we come to see that home is indeed a multifaceted concept. This complex phenomenon incorporates many facets of human experience, from the personal to the social, from the instinctual to the historical, from the geographical to the emotional. It is brought to light in its absence and best understood when lost or threatened, when one is forced by circumstances to negotiate its meanings and seek to reestablish it. And indeed it is a phenomenon that must be reestablished; among the representations examined in this research, there is seen a seemingly universal compulsion to recapture a sense of home upon its loss, whether in temporary shelters or in permanent new dwellings, at the site of former homes or in new locations, alone or with others. What was valued in former homes is sought in new ones—those same elements of family, familiarity, safety, feelings of value or of belonging and comfort, for example. The representations of the experience of home examined here were as varied as the characters and the disasters they faced, but all revealed elements of more than one of these six components: the social, the personal, the physical/geographical, the instinctual, the emotional, and the temporal/historical. Some characters were more intimately tied to social aspects of home, valuing above all reunion with loved ones, wherever it might be found. Other characters were deeply connected to geographical aspects, compelled back to the sites of homes devastated by disaster. Still others focused on the emotional facets of recapturing feelings of home or working through the sadness, anger, or bitterness that came with home’s loss. Some found their personalities drastically changed away from home, others dwelled on memories of homes that were no longer. All, though, struggled in some way with elements of multiple components as they thought back to the homes they had lost.
and strove to rebuild a sense of home in the wake of disaster, underscoring the complexity of the concept that is home.

**Conclusions and Implications**

I have titled this project “(Be)Coming Home” in recognition of the complexity of home’s nature for those who face its loss. Some are forced to spend time away in disaster’s aftermath before returning, *coming home* again to a place of memories and established ties. Others are permanently relocated, faced with attempting to make a new place *become* a home. Regardless of the details of home’s loss, however, it is clear from the above discussion of the second research question (the contribution of representations of home in twelve young adult novels to an understanding of the concept itself) that home is a multifaceted phenomenon characterized by recurring themes, themes that come to light in times of loss and rebuilding. The resonance of these novels with the words of Katrina’s evacuees and with the patterns found in the review of the literature suggests that home is a concept with seemingly universal understandings or dimensions. The novels’ revelations reflect the experience of the students from New Orleans, echoing the ideas they shared during their own displacement and loss of home.

Since the genesis of this research in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, lives and homes have continued to be upended by disaster across the globe. More hurricanes—Rita, Ike, Irene—have devastated communities and displaced residents. Earthquakes have shattered Haiti and Chile. Tornadoes have flattened entire towns, leaving hundreds homeless. Forest fires have raged through California, tsunamis have inundated coastal areas, and wars rage in the Middle East. Individuals the world over continue to find themselves uprooted, their homes ruined by disaster.
Deeper understanding of the nature of displacement and the ways in which home is conceptualized and rebuilt is of value for several audiences. Librarians and teachers will undoubtedly encounter students who grapple with notions of home, young adults who are faced with the prospect of rebuilding their lives in a new place, as were the students Hurricane Katrina brought to my school in 2005. Perhaps by attending to the ways in which young adult characters grappled with notions of home in similar situations, we can gain insight into the needs of those displaced from their homes in the face of disaster, heightening sensitivity to the varied components of home that might be strengthened or reestablished. Young adult novels are primarily read by young adults—adolescents who may or may not face the same issues raised in works of literature. Encountering novels in which characters face a loss of home can help teens who have not lived the experience of displacement to develop insight and empathy for those who do struggle with notions of home—both peers they know directly and those seen in global news coverage. For young people who have faced disaster or lost a home, such works of literature can offer the assurance that they are not alone in their experience. These novels of disaster present characters negotiating a range of powerful emotions, illustrating that emotional upheaval is an inherent part of the difficulty of losing home. They also highlight the fact that home is multifaceted, that there are many ways to recapture, reestablish, or rebuild home. Reading the experiences of these characters has the potential to provide comfort to adolescents who may find themselves struggling with the emotional fallout of disaster or those who seek ways to reconnect with lost homes and recreate a sense of home in a new place.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

This research focused on twelve realistic novels featuring young adult protagonists whose homes were threatened, damaged, or lost due to natural or humanly-caused disasters. It did not
focus on differences in notions of home for characters of different ages, genders, or cultural backgrounds, or for authors of different genders or cultural backgrounds. Further research on home might explore such differences, along with differences based on the nature of disaster or the context of home’s loss (natural versus humanly-caused disasters, for example).

The current research did not include novels of fantasy or science fiction, nor did it examine works of nonfiction—memoir, biography, interview. Further research might add to these results by examining additional realistic novels or works from these other genres, works featuring younger children or adult characters, or works in which displacement is due to circumstances other than disaster—a family move, a divorce, an itinerant lifestyle, a personal tragedy. In fields outside of literary study, researchers may examine the concept of home by engaging directly with individuals who have been displaced from their homes, perhaps through interviews, questionnaires, or observations, deepening and enriching understandings of home through attending to the experiences of those who have lived its loss in their own lives.

Concluding Thoughts

Home. I began this research seeking to know more deeply a phenomenon that gripped me, a concept that reflection showed to be of central importance in my own life. Along the way, the understandings gained have prompted further introspection, examination of facets of my experiences of home that were not immediately apparent. I have not been forced by disaster to relocate and struggle to reestablish a sense of home. But I know young people who have, and with the insights I have gained, I have enriched not only my own appreciation of home, but my capacity for understanding their experiences as well.


Marroum, M. (2008). What’s so great about home?: Roots, nostalgia, and return in Andree Chedid’s *La Maison sans Racines* and Hanan Al-Shaykh’s *Hikayat Zahra*. *Comparative Literature Studies*, 45 (4), 491-513. (refer to article for accent marks on names and titles)


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Appendix B – Novels Considered for Inclusion


Appendix C – Overview of Novels Examined


This novel explores the experiences of Ruby Pelletier, a 17-year-old New Orleanian with a unique connection to the natural world around her. When Ruby’s grandmother Mammaloose, with whom she lives, refuses to evacuate before Hurricane Katrina, they seek shelter in their attic and have a front-row view of the devastation caused by the storm. In its aftermath, Ruby learns that her parents, whom Mammaloose has always told her were dead, are in fact alive, and that the man she has known as Mr. Lagniappe is her father. While coping with Mammaloose’s deception, Ruby, her best friend JayEl Williams, Mr. Lagniappe, and others (many of whom Ruby names poetically, such as the Lady with the Galaxy in Her Eye) work to rescue survivors from the floodwaters and begin the difficult task of rebuilding their lives.


12-year old Kia Vang and her family—brother Xigi, mother, grandmother, and grandfather—flee their war-torn Hmong home in the 1970s, where Communist soldiers have killed her father and other village men and burned down huts. They make their way from Laos to a refugee camp in Thailand. After three years there, they are given the thrilling news that they have received sponsorship to travel to Minnesota where they will be safe and Kia and Xigi will live a life of opportunity. When the paperwork comes in, though, Mother’s and Grandmother’s documents are missing, leaving Grandfather to take the two children to America without them. In her new Minnesota home, Kia is befriended by her neighbor Sam and his mother Hank, while Xigi and Grandfather struggle to find a place for themselves in this new and very different country as they all await the reunion of their entire family.

When revolution comes to 1960s Cuba, Julian and his older brothers Gordo and Alquilino are among thousands of children sent to safety in America through Operation Pedro Pan. Arriving in Miami, the boys are sheltered in a camp for Cuban children awaiting their parents, where they find their neighbors Angelita and Pepe Garcia as well as a bully from home, Caballo. Despite their longing to stay together, Julian’s brothers are sent away to orphanages while Pepe is taken in by a foster family, leaving Julian and Angelita behind at the camp. When the sadness and fear of camp life become too much for Julian, he escapes to take up residence with Tomás, a boy planning a return trip to Havana to rescue his parents and a dozen others. Julian vows to help Tomás with this mission, even sacrificing a family treasure to ensure that the trip is carried out, incurring the wrath of his mother when he is reunited with her and his brothers at last in Connecticut.


Twelve-year-old Sadie Wynn and her family are forced to leave their Missouri home when drought and the Great Depression make it impossible for her father to earn a living there. They relocate to South Texas, setting up a new home in a community of tar-paper shacks with other families experiencing the same difficulties and losses. Away from the only home she’s ever known, Sadie struggles with losing her lifelong best friend Wilma and with accepting the new friendship of Dollie Mae Gillem, and she worries for the safety of a man she knows only as Mr. Sparrow, a man who, like her own family, has lost a home and loved ones. Sadie is faced with building a new life and striving to define who she is in this new and unfamiliar place.

During the summer of 1935 in his Florida Keys home, 13-year-old Jake Pitney befriends local war veteran and curmudgeon Sharkey, helping him with errands and household chores, including building a pen for Sharkey’s newly acquired mule Jewel and her beloved companion dog Rudy. Jake also meets Mara Kraynanski, an orphaned girl who moves to Islamorada to live with her elderly aunt and who comes to feel a deep bond with Jake’s family—his mother, father, and young sister Star. As summer draws to a close, a devastating hurricane bears down on the Keys, gravely injuring both Star and Jake’s mother and killing Mara and her aunt, along with neighbor Roy Ashburn. The Red Cross takes Jake’s family to seek medical care on the mainland, but the helicopter is not large enough for Jake to ride with them, leaving him on Islamorada with Sharkey in the aftermath of the storm until months later, when his family is finally able to be together again.


When drought drives his family from their Turkish farm village to the capital city of Anakara, 12-year-old Mehmet, his parents, his sisters Hatice and Ayşe, his uncle Osman and aunt Elif are offered shelter by another uncle, Yusuf Amca, in an unfinished apartment building he owns. Despite the implication of kindness, Yusuf Amca, his wife Fatma Teyze, and their son Hakan are anything but welcoming to Mehmet’s family; the apartment building has no windows, leaving them exposed to rain, heat, and cold, and their city-dwelling relatives look down on these country people with disdain. Mehmet finds friendship with local peddler Muhlis, while Ayşe finds love with Muhlis’s older brother Ramazan. Together, Mehmet and Muhlis find work tending the garden of the wealthy Zekiye Hanım, who ultimately offers a home to Mehmet’s orphaned childhood friend Hayri, an intelligent but fragile boy who has been devastated by the
city. When Muhlis is killed in an accident, Mehmet puts into action his plan to leave the city that has brought nothing but unhappiness and sets off to return alone to his village.

Karwoski, Gail Langer. (2004). *Quake! Disaster in San Francisco, 1906*. Atlanta: Peachtree. Thirteen-year-old Jacob Kaufman, a Jewish boy who lives in a boardinghouse with his father and younger sister Sophie after the death of his mother, is on his way to return a stray dog to his uncle across town when the San Francisco earthquake strikes in 1906. Finding their building collapsed, Jacob sets out to traverse the city in search of them, along the way befriending a Chinese boy named San Wei Chang, who is seeking his own father. The two boys, along with the dog now christened Quake, spend days walking—to Union Square, where refugees mill around, back to their neighborhoods, and ultimately to Golden Gate Park, which has become a temporary home to thousands who have set up tents and taken shelter from the fires that rage throughout San Francisco. In the park, they are taken in by Annie and Kevin Flanagan, an Irish couple who welcome the boys into their family’s tent while they continue to look for their loved ones.

Pignat, Caroline. (2008). *Greener grass*. Calgary, Alberta: Red Deer Press. With blight and famine descending upon Ireland in 1847, 14-year-old Kit Byrnes’s family—Mam, Da, brother Jack, and sister Annie—are among the many who are in danger of starvation, eviction, and death from fever. On the land owned by Lord Fraser, where Kit’s family lives and works, middle-man Lynch and his sons readily burn down the cottages of any who are unable to pay rent when their potato crops fail. By assisting old Lizzie Plunkett, the local healer, Kit and Jack bring home eggs that allow their family to subsist while Da finds any work he can. When the struggle to make a living causes her father’s death and her mother’s ensuing breakdown, Kit vows to do whatever it takes to protect her family, even if that means killing Lynch. Like her
neighbor and good friend Mick O’Toole, whose own family has suffered losses and eviction, Kit sets out to secure a way for her loved ones to leave Ireland for safety in America, with or without her.


When a tsunami devastates an island chain, Mau, a boy on the verge of manhood in his culture, is the lone survivor of his Nation. Ermintrude, an aristocratic 13-year-old girl stranded on Mau’s island, is likewise the only person left alive on the ship on which she is traveling. Seizing the opportunity to shed the trappings of the sheltered, controlled life she led in England, Ermintrude renames herself Daphne and reaches out to Mau. As the two learn to communicate and survive together, they welcome stragglers to the island and begin to rebuild a sense of community while making remarkable discoveries about the history of Mau’s Nation and its contribution to science and exploration.


When the 1906 San Francisco earthquake strikes, Kate Keely is a 14-year-old orphan living with her Aunt Grace in a boardinghouse South of Market Street, while 16-year-old Jolie Logan is the daughter of a wealthy doctor and a mother who is killed during the early-morning quake. Having contracted scarlet fever several months before the quake, Jolie is still a sickly girl who requires assistance, leading her father to hire Kate as her companion a year after the disaster. In a bid to separate Jolie from her obsession with restoring their house to the condition it was in when her mother lived, Dr. Logan sends the two girls to Jolie’s Aunt Elizabeth in Ireland—the birthplace of Kate’s mother and a land to which Kate feels deeply connected. Kate’s dreams of
remaining in Ireland and Jolie’s steadily worsening illness call into question their eventual return to San Francisco.


In the months before World War II, Sophie Mandel is sent away at age seven from her parents in Germany to safety with their friend in England. Sophie spends seven years living with “Aunt Em” and comes to feel as though with her is where she belongs. Aunt Em is the family she knows; her mother and father are strangers to her. She has best friends, twins Mandy and Nigel, and she speaks only English, having forgotten the German she once knew. When she learns that her father has survived imprisonment in the Dachau concentration camp and is now recovering, Sophie fears that she will be sent back to Germany to live with him, losing Aunt Em, her friends, and the country she has come to regard as hers.


In 1986 Ukraine, Katya Dubko is the 11-year-old daughter of a father who works at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Station. Living in the tiny country village of Yanov and attending school in nearby Pripyat, Katya’s world consists of family, friends, her beloved cottage, and the nearby woods where she spends her free time. When a reactor explodes at the power station, Katya’s entire life changes. The area where she lives is contaminated with radioactivity and declared a Dead Zone, and all its inhabitants are bused to safer locations to live. Indeed, entire towns, including Yanov, are buried underground in efforts to contain the radioactive threat. The Dubkos move first to Kiev, where their hair is shaved and they are easily identifiable as Chernobyl victims as they begin their new lives. Two years later, a new city called Slavutich is built for Chernobyl workers, and it is here that Katya’s family settles despite their fear of the
power station. As her father continues as a Chernobyl employee (eventually diagnosed with the cancer that afflicts so many who work there), Katya is reunited with childhood classmates Angelika, Sergei, and Lyudmila, and on a class field trip, is brought back to the Dead Zone for the first time since the explosion four years prior. Here she walks through the abandoned Pripyat and sneaks away with Sergei to visit her woods and the site of her buried cottage, compelled to see for herself the place that was once her home.
## Appendix D – Components of Home in Each Novel

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<td>Pratchett</td>
<td><em>Nation</em></td>
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<td>Thesman</td>
<td><em>Sea so Far</em></td>
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<td>Watts</td>
<td><em>Finding Sophie</em></td>
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<td>White</td>
<td><em>Radiant Girl</em></td>
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</table>
Vita

Charity Cantey began her teaching career as a librarian in an East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana, elementary school in 1998. After three years at the elementary level, she moved on to work with young adults as a middle and high school librarian, first in Iberville Parish, Louisiana, and, since 2005, at the Louisiana State University Laboratory School in Baton Rouge. She obtained her bachelor’s degree in elementary education from the University of Southwestern Louisiana (now the University of Louisiana-Lafayette) in 1996, her Master of Library and Information Science from Louisiana State University in 1998, and her Certificate of Education Specialist from Louisiana State University in 2003. She has also taught a course in young adult literature to graduate students in Louisiana State University’s School of Library and Information Science. Her teaching and research interests center around the connections between adolescents and literature.