

The Places we call home

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The term “walkman” refers to a portable audio cassette player, which was immensely popular in the 1980s. Though now considered a relic and inferior by modern day standards, at the time it allowed music lovers to enjoy their favorite tunes just about anywhere you traveled — as long as your AA batteries were fully charged.

An avid music lover myself, I prolonged purchasing the latest portable audio technology for several years, while I tried to justify the cost versus the need. But eventually I succumbed to desire — aided greatly by a gift card I received for Christmas, which thankfully covered much of the financial burden.

Within days of the purchase, I found myself in musical wonderland. With storage rated at a staggering 1,000 songs, I had little trouble transferring hundreds of tracks into the tiny computer no bigger than a pack of chewing gum.

But even with so many songs available at one’s fingertips, I still sometimes find myself listening to the same track over and over again commuting back and forth to work.

“Home” by singer/songwriter Vanessa Carlton was one of those songs I just couldn’t stop listening to when I first heard it. I played it relentlessly. But as with anything else, repetition eventually breeds boredom and before long I found a new tune to listen to.

I would say the better part of a year had elapsed since the last time I played that song. But when I stumbled upon it again quite by accident, I was reminded of why I first fell in love with the haunting lyrics to begin with.

“Some people live in a house on the hill, and wish they were someplace else. There’s nobody there when the evening is still, secrets with no one to tell. Some I have known have a ship where they sleep, with sounds of rocks on the coast. They sail over oceans five fathoms deep, but can’t find what they want the most. Even now, when I’m alone, I’ve always known with you I am home.”

The places we call “home” cover a wide spectrum. There was a time when homes were more about the relationships we fostered inside of them, rather than socially defining the people who lived there. Houses have become showplaces and today many find living without such amenities as gourmet kitchens, home theatres or “man caves” and master bedrooms with walk-in-closets undesirable living conditions.

Take my 1930s side-hall colonial, which was constructed in the same decade that the Empire State Building was completed, Parker Brothers released the now famous “Monopoly” board game and Amelia Earhart made her historic flight across the Atlantic Ocean.

At almost 80 years old, the structure has held up miraculously well for its age, though not without its share of necessary improvements and repairs. But one thing has remained unaltered since its inception and that’s its ability to provide shelter from the elements and refuge from the problems outside your front door. And yet some feel their dwelling is not complete without more square footage, granite countertops and 60-inch flat screen televisions — materials that will never make a house truly a home.

Many years ago I had a conversation with my grandmother regarding the smaller room size and lack of closet space many older homes such as mine share in common. She looked at me funny for a moment before saying, “You forget, we didn’t have as many things as you kids have today and we were better off for it. You went to your bedroom to sleep, your kitchen was just for preparing food and with only a handful of dresses, your closet never needed to be that big.”

My grandmother and many others from her generation lived their lives with far less than many of us could ever imagine — in a word “simplicity.” They worked harder for what little they had and therefore developed a greater appreciation for the possessions we often take for granted. For them, a house was just a place you lived, but it was those who lived there who made it feel like home.

Carlton’s song closes with the following stanza: “For me it’s a glance and the smile on your face. The touch of your hands and an honest embrace. For where I lay it’s you I keep, this changing world I fall asleep. With you all I know is I’m coming home.”