

## What is home?



This past year, as we go in and out of lockdowns, working from home (wfh), we have certainly become more acquainted with our dwellings and their newly identified functions. Home is usually defined as a safe haven, a comfort zone, a place to live with families and pets, and a place we can truly be ourselves. But during this past year, home has also become an office, perhaps a classroom, an artist studio, a gym, a movie theatre.... We asked a few of our colleagues to tell us of what home has meant for them during this past year and this is what they have to say.

### Alex

Home.

What a wonderful word.

Doesn't it sounds as if it had been patiently, painstakingly sculpted by countless waves of vocal cords since the very birth of language?

It resonates, as if it had been silently exhaled. Secretly invoked. Sincerely hoped. Seriously honed.

Home.

The nest. The rest. The balance. All in one, single, simple syllable.

Then today happened.

Home has become quite worrisome for some, it'd seem. Me included, indeed.

So I turned to the people I knew, who had ploughed through this mess. I turned to my mother, whose family grew up crammed up in one, single, simple room in a soviet 'kommunalka' alongside six other families. I turned to my father, who spent ten years in the gulag, including one and a half in solitary confinement.

Then, out of nowhere, I stumbled upon the story of Jacques Rossi. A French man who had spent 24 years in the gulag. Just for being a different breed of communist. Here is one of the gems that he brought back from his trip to the abyss:

‘... Life was never interrupted, no. I've met people in the gulag who used to say: those were lost years ... But I would not say that my life started anew when I got out, no. As long as you hold something dear, something clear, you live, no matter what.’

I started breathing lighter that day. Thinking about the irony of it all- for things to look up, it took a lockdown.

## Emily

I moved heaps growing up. Although always in the same city, I had moved in and out more than 20 houses by the time I was 17. One year, we even moved 5 times (twice in the same street!). For many years, I continued this upward trend, enjoying the change and relishing in the opportunity to get rid of unnecessary stuff each time we moved. A house was just four walls, whereas home was an undefined space where I felt safe, loved, happy and in good company. This definition has not changed and perhaps has only been reinforced by the recent pandemic. Upon moving to Paris to join the OIE, I have almost lived all ten years in the same small apartment. When I moved in, I was alone and now we are three (including our cat Milo) plus a long list of noisy and large musical instruments (my husband is a musician). Spending almost all my time at home last year was a unique experience, but it was a protected and warm space with very good company. Of course, I am very glad that the OIE HQ is currently open to staff who want to come to the office... although it was a rich and pleasant experience being at home, not sure my marriage or my ears could survive another year of music vs OIE zoom chats.

## Tamara

Without a doubt, home during this pandemic year has become synonymous to lounge pants, tea and slippers. There is a certain level of calmness when I am wfh in my lounge pants and can see my cup of Assam tea next to my computer monitor. But my slippers play a rather omnipresent role in my home. I have literally become what the French call a ‘pantouflard’, derived from the word ‘pantoufle’ (slipper), which means a stay-at-home person.



Not too long ago on French news, when I heard that the last factory of the ancestral Charentaise slippers- made in the eponymous region of Charente- was threatened by liquidation, I, like thousands of others, bought a pair. Since then, there has been a rebirth of French manufacturers and apparently Charentaises have become THE lockdown slipper. I fully understand why. They are well-made, sturdy, warm and so comfortable. Too comfortable. I have unintentionally left my home to go to the outdoor street market, more often than I care to admit, in my Charentaises. Home is where the heart and feet are.

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