

Defining Home

Home stems from where your heart is more than the geographical place you're from.

When you find a piece of land that shares your values and your traits, you can rest assured that you've found your home. Raised by an airline pilot, I have lived and traveled over this globe, but I have only ever had one home and that is Sandpoint, Idaho. Sally Tisdale explained that "when we join ourselves to a place, we join air and land as though they were clothes to wear."

Interestingly, I "wore" Sandpoint as my home even before I ever lived there. People say home is where you're born. They say home is where you've spent most of your life. I beg to differ.

Despite what family and friends told me, despite that I wasn't born there and that most of my life has been lived elsewhere, I still claim Sandpoint, Idaho as my home. The town here calls to me. Like me, this land values family and tradition. Like me, it is tenacious. It celebrates nature. It seeks adventure. Love for the community is more important than self here. This land runs through me. It speaks to my values and my beliefs and seems to see the world the same way I do. If I could bottle up and package my memories, my traditions, and myself it would look an awful lot like Sandpoint, Idaho.

I spent many childhood summers experiencing the mountains and lake and trails of Sandpoint. No matter where we were living in the world, my family always made our way back for at least a week or two each summer to visit my grandparents and take in the small-town life. A few years ago, we finally just realized nowhere else would truly be home to us and we made the leap to move here. After all, when you've seen the whole world and yet all your fondest memories reside in one small town, you know that place is your home. All the trails of life seemed to lead us right back.

The town has actual tracks and trails that run right through it, but all those trails in my mind lead into this place and never out. Who would want to leave? Some say small towns have little to offer, but even the small and simple family traditions we built felt like a grand offering indeed. About half a mile from Grandma's house are winding railroad tracks that emerge out of the woods along the lake's shore and then curve along the train bridge into the town of Sandpoint. Even now when I visit, I love to go out on the boat with my family and signal the train conductor to blow the whistle, then wave to the train as it keeps chugging along, just as I have done every summer since I was a tiny boy. When we weren't on the boat, we walked down to those same tracks near the shore and laid out our pennies on the metal rails before wandering back to Grandma's house. At the sound of the whistle, the cousins all ran back to the tracks to collect the smashed pennies. As the train chugged off into the distance we scrambled up and down the rails, searching the rocks for our small pieces of flattened copper. Without a big city, you begin to revel in simple pleasures. Small traditions weasel their way into your heart and make life richer. I still have one of those pennies I collected many years ago, worth millions in sentiment and teeming with tradition. Tradition feels like home.

Tenacity is something Sandpoint and I have in common. The quiet resolve of the trees and the resoluteness of the mountains speaks to me. I admired the treed slopes many a time as I drove up an icy Mt. Schweitzer with my dad and sister, singing along to the Everly Brothers soundtrack on our way to Schweitzer Ski Resort. Nothing is easy about a mountain, but the twists and turns of the steep road and the breathtaking views of the lake and valley below are a reminder that some of the hardest climbs yield the greatest rewards. I have always loved the feeling of speed on a waxed pair of skis as pine tree branches fly past my face whipping the

smell of pine into every breath. Tenacity in its physical form looks like the untamed trails of fresh powder and getting stuck in the snow, then digging my way out just to do it again. I have always loved catching glimpses of the view of the lake while racing my dad down the mountain and the inevitable victory speech given by the winner on the long chairlift ride back up. The end of the day was filled with steaming hot cocoa and knowing that tomorrow would be full of stiff muscles. Tenacity and striving are built into Sandpoint and they're built into me. Tenacity feels like home.

If you ask a resident what brought them to Sandpoint, they'll probably tell you they drove across the Long Bridge, took in the view of the lake, the trees, and the sandy beach all framed by the mountain peaks and decided they never wanted to leave. A closeness to nature resides within me and within this place. The Long Bridge is long indeed, at 1.76 miles, and provides a perfect vantage point for taking in the natural beauty of this place. Every year on the first Saturday in August, hundreds of people swim from one side of the lake to the other, following the path of the bridge. Through my childhood, I have watched swim take place nearly every year while sitting on the edge of Grandpa's boat. Then, one year, I joined in the hundreds and swam the lake. When you immerse yourself in nature with that depth of commitment, the land becomes, even more, a part of you. That first year I saw there was an enormous crowd of people climbing out of busses at the far end of the bridge. When the blast of the horn signaled the start of the open water swim, everyone piled into the water. Cold bit me as I jumped in. It was a long hour and a half before I reached the end, but despite my jelly legs at the end, I came back the next year. Swimming the lake, hiking a trail, paddling a shoreline – these are the things that bring nature into you in a way that can't be removed. Nature feels like home.

Another quality this town and I share is a sense of adventure. Summers on my mountain bike took me on almost every trail and road the town offers. It all started during our family reunion one year. My uncle took my cousin and me to a small trail up Gold Hill. The trail was steep and enclosed by trees on either side of us. After about a mile of riding, we stopped and filled our hats with water from the stream, then dumped the water on our heads. The joyful feeling of cool water pouring on our heads was just the encouragement we needed to keep going. After another mile or so, we stopped, turned around, and then came the best part. The steep mountain trail provided the speed and action that we had been looking forward to all day. With a couple of close calls and lots of split-second decisions, we managed to make some fantastic memories. That day my uncle made two boys fall in love with mountain biking. Soon our mountain bikes led to adventure upon adventure, never sure where we were going, but always glad we had gone. Adventure feels like home.

One of the many things that I love about Sandpoint is the bond that is created by living in a small town. The people in small towns develop a love and sense of pride in their community. With that love and pride comes a desire to give back, to make a difference. The pirate ship captain on the lake gives his time and free rides, the artists have made a free art workshop space for kids, and locals clean up the roads and campgrounds. I gave back to Sandpoint when I built log benches for my Eagle Scout project along the shores of the lake. It was a long process with many hours of hard work, but the sense of pride that comes from a worthwhile endeavor for a place you love stays with you. I still go sit on the benches and sit to take in the beauty of this community that I call home. The sense of community feels like home.

This land is a postcard of my values. It is home because Sandpoint and I care about the same things. Both of my sets of grandparents moved to Idaho long before I was ever a thought when my parents were young and wouldn't meet each other for many years. Both sets of grandparents fell in love with the open space, the trees, Lake Pend Oreille, and the mountains of Idaho. I wasn't born here and I'm not from here, but the connection I have is real nonetheless. Every time I go to Sandpoint the same connection is made, and every time I leave I can feel the mental magnet drawing me back to the wonderful place I call home. A.B. Guthrie's description of Idaho gave words to my story. "Throughout Idaho are men who have settled in the state and natives who refuse to leave simply because the side rewards of living there are greater than the greater money they might make outside. They like small-town and small-city associations, and they like free space, and they fill their eyes with grandeur and their ears with the great silence of the mountains." The woods, mountains, and lakes of North Idaho have always drawn me in and living in this wonderful place is more rewarding than any payment will ever be. Its tradition, tenacity, nature, adventure, and community are my home. Out of all the many places that I have lived and traveled, I have always found that Sandpoint is the only place that calls to me. Sandpoint, Idaho is my home.