

English 1102
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Forty-five Misfits Can Fit Perfectly into One Home

I have lived in many houses over the last twenty-six years. There was the house of my childhood that I shared with my parents and brother. Later there was my room in the barracks that I shared with two other soldiers. After that I wound up with a private dorm room (the advantage of being a twenty-one year old freshmen just out of the U.S. Army). Following that, I lived in an old run down farmhouse a few miles from the Georgia Southern campus where I attended school. All of these places were homes by the old "hang your hat" definition. By the "home is where your heart is" definition, I never had a home.

I don't want to give the wrong impression. Both my parents and their home were and still are, open and full of love. My family had an infinite amount of love and respect for me, but try though they might, I'm afraid understanding me slipped their grasp. I didn't realize it until recently, but I spent almost fifteen years looking for a home rather than a house. I have found that houses are easy to come by. They only have to keep the rain off your head and protect your stuff. I have made houses in the bottoms of holes, and on massive vehicles. I have lived in some very fine houses in some very fine neighborhoods, but they were no more home, than my foxhole from years before. Homes are an altogether different thing. I have found two in my life, and consider myself very

lucky. My second home I found about a year and a half ago and now share with my wife Beth. My first home, which is the subject of this essay, I found in the spring of nineteen ninety-six.

Looking back on things, I now realize that finding my first home was probably one of the happiest times for me, and I think the second greatest thing that ever happened to me (the first being when I married my wife, of course). As I have said, I've lived in many houses, some of wood and some of stone, but none of them were homes. I think that my strong opinion on the subject of house vs. home might make more sense if I were to start from the beginning. You see, I have always been a bit of a misfit. I was neither the scary "talks to himself and blows up buildings type," nor was I the kid in kindergarten who ate paste. I was, however, the kid who played chess, but also had trouble with his alphabet.

Until the third grade, I was a normal kid with a few idiosyncrasies. All of that changed after it was discovered that I am dyslexic. I am sure that there was some form of testing that I went through, but all I remember is one morning I showed up to class and my teacher told me to go to another classroom. So as it was done in those days, I spent half my day in the special education class (sped), and half in "normal" classes. So half my day was spent trying to keep up with the normal kids and the other half was spent trying to avoid the "behaviorally challenged children" with whom I shared a sped classroom. The only place that I fit in was recess, and that was because I played alone, which seemed to bother almost everyone except for me. I spent my days in three worlds, and I didn't

really belong in any of them. I was welcome in each world, but especially on the playground because I had a tendency to play “rough” with the bullies. But everyone knew I didn’t really belong, especially me.

I continued to live like this until the fifth grade when I went to a private school for children who had learning “disabilities.” We were all “speds.” As it sometimes happens when one gets the top of a box to close, the bottom falls out. And so it was with me, just as one gap closed, another opened. We were all speds, but not all speds are created equal. My father didn’t drive a Porsche, and my mother didn’t “lunch at the club.” In all fairness to my classmates, not everyone thought this was important but, we still had little in common. I was however, well mannered and somewhat well rounded, so I made friends, but again, I lived in three worlds not fitting into any other. About this time I found that I had a knack for sports and this time I seemed to fit in. It took and takes a great deal of concentration and focus for me to read or write, so focusing on say a ball without becoming distracted took little effort. I also had a lot of frustration and aggression to vent, so collision sports like football and the like came naturally to me, almost as naturally as seeing things backwards. I excelled in this new world.

It didn’t take long for me to fall in with the “jock” crowd. After all I had the credentials for it. Sports came naturally to me and I didn’t seem particularly bright, but I still had a few jagged edges that didn’t quite fit into this new group. For instance, I

seemed to be the only one with an interest in Eastern philosophy and none of the “jocks” had any interest in reading Omar Kyam’s Rubiyat, so I would also hang out in other groups, none of which really accepted the “jock” in a letter jacket . Then came a little situation that the county would not and will not comment on. I call it the “little mistake.” In Cobb County, “speds” have to be reevaluated every four years just in case someone miraculously cures themselves of what ever “disability” they might be afflicted with and have to return to normal class . During one of these test sessions, one of my teachers noticed an inconsistency in the test scores. Rather than just log them in and move on, as the other testers had done for the last nine years, she started asking some questions. That is when it was determined that all though I was dyslexic I was “gifted” as well. So in my junior year of high school, I entered the gifted program with a fifth or sixth grade reading level. I quickly made friends in my new environment, but I was a jock sped in a gifted class. I had some interesting ideas and interpretations, but I certainly did not fit into the clique and in their defense, I was not all that interested in doing so. I had tried every clique there was from birth through high school, and had made a lot of friends along the way, but I just didn’t click. It was the same way in the Army. “He’s a nice guy and I’m glad he is on our side but, he is a little weird” Fortunately by this time I had accepted the fact that I was different and found it liberating. I could dance when there was no music, could tell jokes that no one understood and it was all o.k. It was also pretty lonely. I lived in a society of almost complete freedom, but it was a society of one. I was a “people” with no homeland.

That is, until the spring of nineteen ninety-six. That was the year I met the Georgia Southern University Rugby Football club. I had only thought I was a misfit. These guys brought being a misfit to a previously unheard of level. They played rugby for a school that refused to admit that it had a rugby team. The school didn't want to be associated with the type of person that would be on a rugby team. So the guys played anyway without the school's support and without the school's mascot and without the school's money. They scheduled games with other schools and would play on any field they could find. The school did finally recognize them, but only after they became the first team at Georgia Southern to beat U.G.A. Even to this day the team is not terribly concerned with what the school or any one else thinks of them not even their Alumni. They just play rugby, throw parties, and let the rest of the world worry what about what the rest of the world is doing.

The team as a whole seemed normal when compared to its parts. There was an extreme of almost every imaginable stereotype, which is not unusual in a large organization. What made this team so unusual was that most members were examples of at least two stereotypes, and they usually conflicted with each other. For example, there was Joseph "Jojo the troll" Kusnitz, the team treasurer who was a Jewish redneck from North Georgia. He had a massive afro and drove an old Honda motorcycle. The night I met him, he was walking around a bar in an open-faced motorcycle helmet while his teammates broke empty beer bottles over his head. There was also Big Rob who was a three hundred- forty pound brawler, who was known to chug his beer from a pitcher and

would sometimes show up to parties in a pink tutu. He was studying early childhood development so he could become a kindergarten teacher. These people were offset by guys like Ed also known as "Just Ed" who didn't believe in drinking, but would go get the kegs for parties after prayer meetings on Saturdays. He also thanked the Lord for the opportunity to bring "butt stomping and humiliation to the nonbelieving heathens." There were many other oddballs making up this human menagerie; about forty-five in all. Some I won't even mention for fear that no one would ever believe that they existed outside of my imagination, but there they were, dressed in everything from Hawaiian print shirts and work boots to pinpoint shirts and wingtips.

There they were, a tight fitting family of oddballs and misfits who had fashioned a homeland from thin air for the misunderstood and those that were just different. All were welcome to visit and any could stay. You only had to want to. With these guys I made my first home. It was nowhere I could "hang my hat" but it was certainly where my heart was. Now six years later, that home still stands and there is nothing that Mother Nature nor man has ever created which could destroy it.

In a few weeks I will be going back to Statesboro the home of Georgia Southern University. I will be joined by more than fifty of my old homemates. Some moved away before I came to Southern, others are new. I find myself wondering "can you ever really go home again?" I think the answer is yes, because every time I watch a rugby match or see an old friend, I am taken back not in time, but to home. My first home changes, I am aware of that, and it will never be the way I remember and probably never was. As people

look back on the great or not so great times in there life, we have a tendency to view things as we want them to be not necessarily as they were. For this reason things are rarely the way we remember and the longer, we are away the more that changes. One thing will always be same. We will always be bound together by that which makes us different. As long as that lasts, then home will always be wherever our team is.