

A home can be many things. Some would argue it is a physical place, like a base that you always return to. Others would say it's a group of people whom you care for. Still others would say it's a state of mind, close to contentment. I, personally, have come to believe that while a home can be any of these things, it is never just that forever. It shifts, evolves, and refuses to be static as we move through our lives.

For the longest time, I *searched* (the namesake of this essay) for a home that would be permanent. It would be a place that I would fit into, without question, as naturally as could be. I measured belonging by how easily I blended in and could match the people around me. As situations changed and I felt less "at home", I assumed that I simply hadn't found the place for me. So I flit from group to group, lingering as long as I felt comfortable and running away whenever things became difficult. Over time, that idea began to fall apart. The places I thought would define me changed. The people I was with changed. Even I changed.

A core part of the St. Benedict's curriculum is dealing with and overcoming adversity. This is presented to the students in a variety of ways. There is, specifically, a 55-mile hike on the Appalachian Trail where students, in their teams of 8, all with specialized jobs, will walk the New Jersey section together. This was my first real experience where I needed to toughen up and get the job done, even if I didn't particularly want to. I was the head navigator of my team, and any slip of concentration on my part would leave our team possibly miles away from the trail we were meant to be on, and there was no way back except to retrace our steps. My time there truly changed me. I learned to be at home in a struggle.

We have a saying at SBP, "You must learn to be comfortable in the uncomfortable." This perfectly describes my transformation. It was not instant, of course, but somehow, it was possible that the young 14-year-old who returned from that 5-day hike was not the same as when he left. I kept a journal during the hike, and the following is taken directly from there: "I

think I've learned . . . if I believe in myself and my own abilities, I can do it." That thought was impossible for me to have come up with before the trail.

As I returned to my normal life, I continued with newfound courage that allowed me to challenge both myself and other people's views of me. The groups that I would have called "home" before suddenly seemed stale, and the people I had rejected were dynamic, deep relationships waiting to grow once I let them. I joined the fencing team, something I never would have considered for fear of rejection, and found myself not terrible. I competed at meets and went to state championships as first sub in my first year. I played guitar and sang for my school community, almost 900 people, when all together, during celebrations of the Eucharist.

Since all of this, my understanding of what it means to find a home has changed. I no longer think of it as something fixed, or something that must be discovered and held onto forever. Instead, I like to think of it as something that moves within me. A home is not just where you are or who you are with, but how willing you are to stand firm in who you are, even when things get uncertain. The goal is not to arrive at someplace and stay there; the goal now for me is to stand firm when it seems everything is shifting around me. I know I will continue to work on this for the rest of my life, in the hope that I can become someone who does not need perfect comfort to feel like they belong. Maybe, after all, that's what a home really is, not a place that is found or reached, but something that is carried in you, wherever you may go.