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There are so many places like home

*By JoANN BALINGIT
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What is home? Where is home? I ask myself this all the time.

My idea of "home" has often changed. First of all, I grew up in a family that moved eight times in ten years. By the age of seventeen, I was on my own; making my own ... home.

I am a first-generation American, child of an immigrant-one who leaves home to find home.

While I lived abroad, I had one daughter in Tangier and one daughter in Lisbon. I miss both those homes dearly.

Like many in this country, I am of mixed cultural and racial heritage. People have often asked me, "Where do you come from?" The PC-ness of their wording varies. In any case, I don't have a ready answer to this question -- I have too many personal Homes to choose from. I suspect we all do.

No place like home. Homepage. Homey. Home is where the heart is. Wherever I hang my hat ...

Lately, thinking of home, I think of refugees. Millions of people flee homes and families to escape war, natural disasters, political or economic strife. Many made homeless by the same catastrophes are unable to flee.

I think Americans are fortunate in their wealth of definitions for home. Mostly, my homes have been the result of choices I made and had the power to enact. Delaware, for one.

In the dictionary, home is 1. the place a person lives, 2. the place one was born or reared, 3. the place thought of as home ...

The dictionary goes on to list "3a. a place where one likes to be" and, "3b. the grave." Oh yes.

For now, take 3a. Here, the 13th century Persian poet Rumi describes home, as in "a place where one likes to be":

where we know what everyone really intends,

where we can walk around without clothes on

("Time to Go Home," *Open Secret*, trans. by Coleman Barks)

And here, Delaware poet Piotr Florczyk describes home in a poem that moves from real concrete steps to steps his memory takes-steps no less real. Florczyk, of Newark, is a poet and translator teaching at the University of Delaware and Cecil College. His book of translations of poems by Julian

Kornhauser, an acclaimed Polish poet and critic, is called *Been and Gone* (Marick Press, 2009).

BAREFOOT

*And just when you think this will be
a Monday like any other, with shadows and lights
united in speechless collage, moving
conspicuously across your face, hands, feet,

while you go barefoot down the twenty concrete steps
to the mailbox, to check on
your old car, neighbors with problems and sons,
to pick up the morning newspaper from

under the palm tree with a hair-sprayed crown --
it's now that you suddenly remember,
unsure why, the creased voices of Mother
and Father, asking you not to forget

to take off your shoes and feel the cold ground
in every place you'd like to call Home.*

-- Piotr Florczyk

State Poet Laureate Joann Balingit will write a column each Sunday April to celebrate National Poetry Month. After this month, she will write an occasional column looking at verse and First State poets.