

Home Free

I'VE SUNK DEEPER into our home lately. Being home can be like sinking into the heavy, wet sand of a bog or like sinking into the warm, light sand of a beach.

I started a “parental leave” this past March to be the primary caregiver for our two small children. At the same time my wife, Joy, returned to work after being home for seven months to tend our new baby daughter, Petra. Now it’s my turn. You might call it a parental sabbatical. A new “home” mission.

It’s been mostly an amiable transition. In previous days I roamed the continent, crisscrossing the U.S. and Canada to bolster the Christian Reformed Church’s campus ministry movement. Now my territory stretches a block from the local Price Chopper to Riverside Park.

I’ve heard people describe “cabin fever” and going “stir-crazy” in their home with kids. Part of me empathizes with this. Life really slows down. Just crossing the threshold to the outdoors takes a good 15 minutes.

Sleep has been spotty. I have fallen asleep reading children’s books to my 2-year-old son, Joseph. During his bedtime.

I’m more easily distracted: when chatting with a friend my attention suddenly darts to a lamp that may be threatened by an unwary child. When supposedly playing “train” I’m thinking of ideas for this article.

That is the bog.

There is also the beach. I left behind stimulating binational work and kind, cheerful colleagues. But I also said goodbye to a stale world of long drives, airports, hotels, and fast food, not to mention an undying flood of e-mail. Because I live in Canada, this doesn’t mean I lose my salary, either. I get paid 60 percent of my wages in order to care for my kids. Privilege through policy, grace through government.

G.K. Chesterton once said, “The real habitation of Liberty is in the home.” That

is the opposite of what many of us have been told. But think about it. Few jobs permit you to saunter around in your underwear all morning, fry up pancakes with bacon for lunch, and spend the afternoon playing in the park.

Sure you have to change putrid diapers, haul out the garbage, and put up with some ear-piercing tantrums. But being in the home can be as freeing as being on the open beach, with the only limit our imagination. We have gone to the library, petting zoos, and swimming lessons. We’ve zipped down a neighbor’s inflatable water slide. We eat fresh foods. We take afternoon naps.

This past winter a snow cow, snow turtle, and snow lizard graced our front lawn. I wouldn’t have sculpted them for myself. Children are an easy excuse for playfulness and creativity.

Children are also great entertainment as they discover the world for the first time. My son squeals when I roll my eyes up and around. He is fascinated by the garbage truck, enthralled by the mail carrier, and mysteriously silenced by strangers. He jumps around maniacally when he hears a favorite tune (or if you just yell “Dance!”).

This transitional experience can be spiritual practice: giving up, letting go, embracing the new moment. I naturally gravitate to ideas and crave constant intellectual input. To be attentive to the practical, to put a small child first, and to try seeing the familiar with them as “new every morning” are happy disciplines. God is truly in the details. I want to savor this time of simplicity, for it will slip away like a summer day on the beach. ■



Peter Schuurman has formally left his position with Christian Reformed Home Missions to care for his two children at home in Guelph, Ontario. He teaches world religions part-time at Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ontario. What he will do in September remains uncertain.



The miraculous
is not extraordinary
but the common
mode of existence.
It is our daily bread.

— WENDELL BERRY