

# Overcoming the fear of owning

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You've heard of buyer's remorse? Well I experienced the opposite — buyer's not-remorse— when my husband and I bought our first house in what we call SoSo (South-South Austin) a couple of years ago. We'd been browsing for several years, me teetering on the fence, but with the inaugural sound of our key turning in our lock in winter 2007, it hit me: Why had I not done this years before? Why hadn't I listened to my husband when he'd said it would be a snap?

All that first week, I grew increasingly delighted by this new development. And I felt increasingly stupid, too, given that Andy is a real estate agent and has been for the past five years. My better half could buy and sell other people's homes, but he couldn't seem to convince me that. . . . What? What couldn't he convince me of?

I began to wonder about that as we unpacked our things. I'd only thought I understood the meaning of a house, a home — a first home. It meant safety, security, stability, comfort, Christmas-decked mantles and kitchens scented with Thanksgiving turkey. All those idyllic symbols conjured by the Waltons and the Cleavers of my imagination.

But once we were ensconced in our place — a quaint gray brick, three-bedroom, two-bath off William Cannon Drive and West Gate Boulevard — I started to realize a few things. For some of us who feel more comfortable with one foot in the road and no idea what the future holds, the idea of owning a home can be (we think) a threat to our individuality and freedom, the end of our ability to up and leave the country for a few weeks. Being a travel writer and having been brought up with severe wanderlust, I thought owning a house would impede my true nature. I thought it would fence me in. I thought it would cost a lot more to own than to rent — at least on a monthly basis.

It turns out that none of those things is true. Our mortgage is only nominally more expensive than rent for the Clarksville cottage where I'd lived for years before meeting Andy. And in fact, owning our house makes me feel better when I have to leave for work trips because it'll be there, along with Andy and the cat and our wonderful copse of oaks, when I get back. What I've discovered is that for the first time in my life I actually don't want to leave town, leave the country, disappear selfishly into the distance. I love our place so much I don't even like to go "out" anymore.

This has a lot to do with the house and yard itself, and the magic they hold for me. When I was finally convinced that the time had come and that Andy could no longer abide living in a cottage he didn't own, we picked a few areas and combed them.

It just so happened that one day when he was with a client and I was tooling around by myself, I turned off Whispering Oaks Drive near West Gate and meandered down the "Oaks" streets. I rounded a corner and glanced down one particular street, letting my eye follow the line of huge oaks connecting the backyards, and it lighted on the biggest stand of them. I started driving toward those trees.

As fate would have it, the house that belonged to those trees was for sale.

Immediately I called Andy. "I think I've found it! Yes, I'm sure I've found it." Because we'd only seriously been looking for a week, I was persuaded to look at a few more places, but nothing swayed me. My mind was as made up about this house as it had been only months before about NO house. This house was my destiny as much as "the road" had been before.

So we bought the place and moved in, and suddenly, you couldn't get me outta there. Friends would call for dinner or to go see a movie or a rock show, and I'd find myself making excuses, or cajoling them to come to our house instead. Suddenly, I felt I belonged somewhere. I felt like the people in that song, "our house is a very, very, very fine house – with two cats in the yard, life used to be so hard. . . ."

Buying your first house is the most adult thing you'll ever do. It also can be like a coming home of the soul – like, after deliberately keeping yourself on the road, off balance, in the path of constant stimulation and change and adventure, you suddenly understand that all of that got-to-be-free nonsense was just a way of avoiding comfort and security and something more.

As a kid I loved "The Waltons," "Leave it to Beaver" reruns and all those other feel-good family shows, but as an adult I'd come to the conclusion that those families and their predictability scared the heck out of me. And I suppose along with that fear, I made the assumption that owning a house, setting down roots, having a hearth would make me one of them, one of the suburbans with "no sense of adventure" and no future of unknown possibilities.

Of course, I now see how absurd that was. We've lived in our house in SoSo almost two years now, and I've come to understand that you don't have to feel "adult" enough to buy a house, whether you're 20 or 40. By its nature, homeownership will make an adult out of you, which it has fully and finally done and in the best way.

And guess what? We haven't turned into the Waltons.

**Courtesy of JB Goodwin**