

Whether Dust and Debris, or the Lost and Alone, All Are Former Parts Meant to Form a New Whole

By Margaret Wang

I'm a huge proponent of sincerity. It is one of the biggest signs of disrespect, in my opinion, to speak disingenuous words, to make disingenuous acts. I'd rather one hate me and offend me with some conviction! At least then I'd be able to respect the person for their honesty in words and behavior.

In each instance in my life where I've identified true, sincere, and most memorable interactions, there has always been a pattern—a pattern of words. Upon hearing these words, an immediate understanding follows; a recognition on both parts, an acceptance, and a surrender of sorts, where both parties involved silently agree to see each other as they are and accept one another as they've come.

And, further to the importance of words, I dare to wager that there are a few more combinations of words in this world that are more powerful than the three that so many ears yearn to hear. To many, the three syllables in the phrase, *"I love you,"* symbolize so much; a whole world created, and more tragically for some, the lack of these words in their lives may mean a whole world destroyed.

For me, personally, I do understand the importance of this, of course. To hear and to know that there are other beings around you in life who hold you so dear—that, without a doubt, gives one the will to go on, it gives one light when they are lost in their own darkness, and it places hope in front of us as a stepping-stone for those times when we've fallen and find ourselves laying in a heap atop the ashes of all that we've lost.

But, even with this understanding of how deeply and powerfully those three little words can impact a human being, I argue there is yet another combination of words—of two words, to be exact—that evokes an even mightier emotional response from within.

On May 20, 2019, amidst the business of a typical hectic work day, I received my first email from Middle Collegiate Church, a community I somewhat haphazardly (or perhaps serendipitously?) stumbled upon during my journey towards my highest self. The message began with two words enlarged, written in bold. Upon sight of these words, my shoulders immediately relaxed and I found a smile forming. I was completely disarmed in the moment and it felt as though I had just received a virtual hug via email. Those two words read: *"Welcome home."*

Speaking solely for myself, there are no words more comforting for me to hear than *"welcome home."* For me, hearing this either as a form of greeting, or in other times as consolation, far surpasses hearing *"I love you,"* as the latter can all too often be a lie. Of all the times in my life when people—strangers, actually—have offered *"welcome home"* to me in salutation or even in passing, they have always been the sincerest words spoken to me.

Within minutes of my first setting foot on foreign soil during a pilgrimage to my ancestral country in Asia; another time as I blindly walked into a community of holistic healers; again as I spontaneously joined a group of international hikers exploring Yosemite National Park—these are all examples of moments in time when strangers spoke these words to me. And when strangers speak these words to each other, there's an incomparable level of quiet, inner joy upon hearing these words because this means simply—but very powerfully—that you've been *recognized*, you've been *understood*, you've been *accepted* in all of your glory. This feeling is a true and lasting gift given from one person or group to another.

The power behind these words lies in the fact that the act of welcoming someone means to greet, salute and embrace a person, and this can be done in any sense, at any time, in any part of the world, in any way. And, the experience of actually feeling at home: the beauty there is that there does not need to be anything tangible at all whatsoever. With or without any physical structure above or around you, you can still feel at home, especially when home is a banding of souls, a uniting of the like-minded, a *community*.

In this way, “home” transcends what we see and what we touch. Home is in the connection between community members, in the coordinated efforts behind a group of individuals perpetuating a common cause. Home, as we all obviously know, is in our hearts, our heads, our spirits. While we, as a congregation, cannot physically gather together at this moment due to both our community's tragic loss from an unexpected fire as well as the ongoing global pandemic, we all still know who to turn to, and how, and when, if there is a need.

So, in the spirit of gratitude, from a place of abundance, during a time in this world where light and hope and love are equally as significant as all of our pandemic-battling frontline heroes, as the losses we've sustained, as the growth we've gained and the lessons we've learned, I proudly say to all of you who are reading, sharing, creating and contributing to our *Sunday* literary magazine: “Welcome home.”