

Claiming a place of one's own

Dionisia Morales was born and raised in New York City, but now calls Corvallis home.

In “Homing Instincts,” her new essay collection just out from Oregon State University Press, Morales contemplates how moving and finding a place to resettle, and then repeating the process a few times more, has affected her sense of home and community and belonging.

These essays are based on her own experience, but her gaze is capacious, and she touches on everything from bee colony collapse disorder, rock climbing, dementia, canning fruit, dealing with insurance adjusters, and a wedding in Montana.

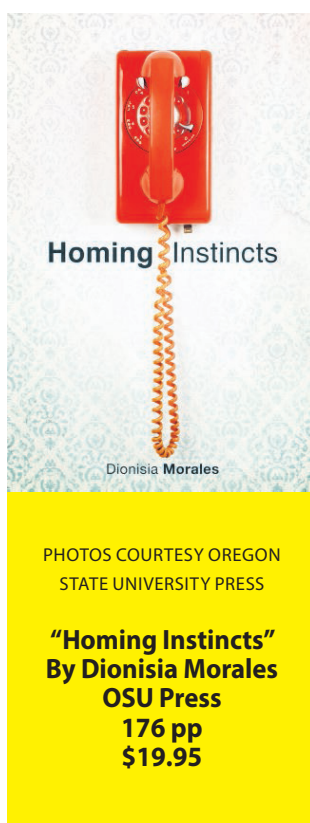
Morales considers many definitions of home.

When she was a child, it meant playing competitive Scrabble in the apartment she lived in with her parents in lower Manhattan.

As a young woman, she felt that buying a piece of furniture — a bed or a television set — signified a solemn commitment to place.

Still later, she came to believe that it isn't realistic to think she could “memorize, purchase or fabricate” home. Much more than a street address, the concept of home is intangible, personal and subjective — it's “about how ingrained people's impulses can be about the nature and purpose of shelter.”

It could be the tang of the air, the view out the window, or the piano in the corner of the room. It might be about the feeling of independence, or the security of belonging. It is often about the people, and the memories.



But when Morales' dad develops dementia, and those memories vanish, what takes their place then? As her father gradually disappears inside himself, and Morales helps her mother cope, she learns that a home can contain not only memories, but new possibilities.

The author offers a multitude of viewpoints in these essays. She shares experiences she's had as a daughter, wife, daughter-in-law, mother, aunt and friend.

When complications arise during her pregnancy, she weighs whether it would be better to give birth in the place where she grew up, or in the place she more recently moved to, which is 3,000 miles away. And, at the other end of the spectrum, if she can't yet envision where she'd choose to expire, she does



Author Dionisia Morales

know where she *doesn't* want to die.

She ponders the powerful motivations that drive some of her friends to return to their war-ravaged homeland. Or that cause others to stay put despite the violence.

And in this country, in our current fraught time, where issues of homelessness, immigration and incivility have all become part of a contentious debate about who really belongs, Morales comes from a family that from generation to generation has blended ethnicities, cultures and traditions. But isn't that the quintessentially human way, sustaining “a cycle that is so immense it can scarcely be imagined”?

In “Homing Instincts,” Morales offers these reflective and generous pieces to remind us that we can make opportunities to break bread and make community no matter where we land.

The Bookmonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at bkmonger@nwlk.com

word nerd

By RYAN HUME
FOR COAST WEEKEND

TSUNAMI [(T)SŪ•NÄ•MĒ]

noun

1. a large sea wave, often a series of long and high waves, produced by violent undersea activity such as a seaquake, volcanic eruption or underwater landslide. Tsunamis can travel over hundreds of miles, moving about as fast as an airplane, and can create terrible devastation when they touch land, wiping across coastal areas in a matter of minutes.

2. an overwhelming amount of something, such as information, arriving all at once.

Origin

The term is relatively new, entering English only in 1896. From the Japanese kanji 津, *tsu*, meaning “harbor,” and 波, *nami*, meaning “wave.” The literal translation of the term as “harbor wave” shows that the emphasis has always been on the impact of the waves upon land and communities, not the waves themselves.



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The ocean surges over the Scenic Surf Motel in Cannon Beach following the 1964 Alaskan earthquake, which spurred a tsunami along the West Coast.


According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the islands of Japan have been hit by 367 tsunamis since the first record of a tidal disaster was made in the year 684.

“On the evening of June 15, 1896, the northeast coast of Hondo, the main island of Japan, was struck by a great earthquake wave (tsunami), which was more destructive of life and property than any earthquake convulsion of this century in that empire.”

—Eliza Ruhama Scidmore, “The Recent Earthquake Wave in Japan,” *The National Geographic*

Magazine, September 1896

“With years of preparation for the Big One — a Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake and tsunami — Seaside kids are well-versed in evacuation and shelter aspects of the plan. Students’ “You can't stop this wave” campaign helped raise tsunami awareness throughout the community and spurred passage of the 2015 bond for a new campus in the Southeast Hills out of the inundation zone.”

—R.J. Marx, “Southern Exposure: A too-timely presentation on school safety,” *The Daily Astorian*, May 28, 2018 

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