

I've come to embrace my new home, alley view and all

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My search for Home begins when I'm evicted. I love saying "evicted" because it evokes a wild and woolly me, as if I were slaughtering and roasting pigs in the front yard. The truth is, I edge the grass with scissors and pay my rent early, but the owners are selling the house to their daughter.

I'm not happy to leave, but interest rates are low and, by everyone's estimation but mine, now is a good time to buy.

Neighbourhood profiles, open houses, new, used, detached, four-plexed, side-by-side and "are you working with anyone?" The real estate market is unfamiliar territory, but as the stacks of paper and details grow, it becomes clear I need to hire a real estate agent.

I swallow hard as I sign a three-month agreement, complete with a caveat that I will still pay commission after the agreement expires if I buy within the next three-month period.

The real estate racket begins. My agent is an energetic yet down-to-earth woman who can methodically arrange back-to-back walk-throughs over consecutive days. In the evenings, I peruse [Realtor.ca](https://www.realtor.ca) and virtual-walk through hundreds of homes.

The descriptions are perplexing: “lots of class”; “storage with style”; “welcomed by exotic floors.” Not only are the countertops “stunning,” but I “deserve” them; “new twists on a traditional floor plan” (the kitchen is in the living room); “intimate elegance” (how does that even make sense?). And what exactly denotes a fantastic kitchen island? Does a serving wench or, better yet, Jamie Oliver reside inside it? “Phenomenal”; “superior”; “innovative.”

At the tail end of every info sheet is the same disclaimer: Information herein deemed reliable but not guaranteed. How about information herein deemed highly hyperbolic?

But I persevere and find a place, “a very special property in a very special location” that ticks my three boxes – a home office, room for my university-aged children and their stuff, and situated not too far from my neighbourhood of 30 years.

After moving in, Day One reveals The Truth – I have bought a garage with an attached house. The best sun of the day streams through plastic panes in the garage’s overhead door, filling the space with ambient warmth.

Yet, when I lift the venetian blinds in the kitchen on the counter-to-ceiling windows, I find a perfect view of an alley; an uphill view of garbage and recycling bins, and double-car garages as far as the eye can see.

I can hear you: Who buys a home without lifting the blinds? Well, maybe they were tilted just so, mood lighting for my real estate agent crooning, “It’s perfect for you.”

That evening, out front, an architectural feature lamp with an orb the size of the sun shines directly into my living room, flooding it in orange splendour. Heading upstairs, I find that the same light fills my bedroom, the lamp directly at eye level once my head hits the pillow. The sodium light creates a mood akin to a cheap motel ablaze in debauchery.

I sit on my sofa amid the boxes and soul-sucking beige walls, feeling the albatross of a mortgage around my neck and asking myself what I’ve done. Solid southwest-facing garage, teeming with natural light, centred inside a beige concrete cave with views of similar garages. Where was this description on [Realtor.ca](https://www.realtor.ca)? But if it had been there, I wouldn’t have seen it – I was tired of looking, and ready to sign.

My real estate agent intuitively shows up with a bottle of wine. Paint seems to be one solution. I scrape the bottom of the barrel of my moving budget and hire Travis. Buckets of white later, every lick of beige is gone. Travis pulls up the blinds and tells me to embrace the alley. Yeah, whatever, I think.

But one day, through my kitchen window, I spy a beautiful golden retriever sitting stock still, waiting for a command from his owner to jump, which he does gracefully, into the back of a pick-up truck. Later, a gate is accidentally left open, and I see Golden Dog go walkabout, and know where to return him.

As I wait for the kettle to boil, I see a small boy with a stegosaurus backpack carom his way home. When a bottle picker heads up my alley, I am able to call to him and hand him my empties from the sunny garage.

Working from home, I am getting to know the life of the alley. I've become addicted to the big bluebird sky that fills the upper half of the kitchen windows.

I call David, a friend who is a high-rise window washer, who climbs my lamp pole and blacks out two panes of the lantern. The difference is day and night, which is to say I no longer sleep in the land of midnight sun.

And then another light – the light at the end of the tunnel. My daughter moves back to Calgary to teach, and sets herself up in a spare bedroom, declaring that Home is wherever the Mom is.

With no risk of eviction, I host a rocking New Year's Party. My neighbour says she didn't hear a thing – thank you, concrete walls. I'm embracing four walls of my own, a Home at the end of the alley.

Donna Williams lives in Calgary.