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# A Positive and Negative Perspective of Homelessness in The Walking Dead and Jon Krakauer's Into the Wild

## The Power of (no) Home

Home is a place that offers much more than just physical shelter, it offers emotional stability and security. Home is place that people can come back to without feeling as if they're unwanted; they're treated as if they are important, it gifts them with a sense of purpose and meaning. College is a crucially important time in many young people's lives where they have to say goodbye to their home and then create a home of their own. It's not easy to be independent, but it will build a persons character and their self-worth if they show themselves that they can achieve the goals that life has set out for them. Being away from home/homelessness is a growing and mature experience and is a positive thing. On the flip side, a zombie apocalypse might be the one exception. The Walking Dead is a tv show that portrays the power of both homelessness and home, while showing the characters having to fight for their lives.

A home does not necessarily have to be a household. A home could just be a community of people. Season 4 episode 1 of The Walking Dead is a testament to this. They make their living space a prison, but the community of people is what truly made it a home. Just like a regular house, the prison offered an extensive amount of security and protection for the community. Without the prison's tall chain fences they would be devoured by zombies within a blink of an eye. Even as crisis strikes the people, they still manage to maintain a level of normality. For example, in the midst of a terrible tragedy, Michonne makes a joke to Rick about how his beard is getting way too big and then she proceeds to give him a razor as a gift. In a situation like this, maintaining a level of normality is a key factor for staying sane. This is also true in everyday life, with or without zombies. When someone is going through a rough time, sometimes they need to reevaluate the situation and live in the moment.

In that same episode of The Walking Dead, a mentally unstable nomadic woman, who had no home in the physical sense and emotional sense, attempted to trick and murder Rick while he was trying to help bring her and her husband back to the prison for safety. Easily enough, Rick managed to disarm her of her blade, and then she proceeded to commit suicide. This woman's psychological thought process and behaviors show a lot about how not having a home or failing to attempt to build a community with others will only lead to detriment. Home is a mindset. If nowhere is home, then a feeling of insecurity will haunt a man like a ghost. This woman's skewed and bizarre tendencies not only stem from her traumatic experiences during the crisis, but also stems from her lack of security. She had no real home, and she never attempted to

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build one by creating a community. A community of people definitely would have gotten her the type of security she was looking for. gotten She preferred to trick innocent, helpful people for her own twisted personal gain.

Shockingly enough, there is also a positive perspective on homelessness, as opposed to in *The Walking Dead*. A passage from Jon Krakauer's novel "Into the Wild" depicts an incredibly interesting and rather thought provoking perspective on homelessness. In the passage, a young man named Alex attempts to show an eighty-one-year-old man, Ron, the joys of being one with nature, and nomadic. Alex emphasizes the importance of brand new experiences when he says, "The very basic core of a man's living spirit is his passion for adventure. The joy of life comes from our encounters with new experiences, and hence there is no greater joy than to have an endlessly changing horizon, for each day to have a new and different sun." Not only is Alex suggesting for a couple of new experiences to be had, he insists that "there is no greater joy than to have an endlessly changing horizon". That is a very big leap from a life of normality. According to Alex, living the same life with the same situations each and every day is not only monotonous, but it hinders "the opportunity to revolutionize your life and move into an entirely new realm of experience". In contrast with *The Walking Dead*, Alex says that, "you are wrong if you think Joy emanates only or principally from human relationships...My point is that you do not need me or anyone else around to bring this new kind of light in your life. It is simply there for you to grasp it, and all you have to do is reach for it." In a way, this quote majorly oversimplifies what it takes to reach a state of enlightenment. Alex's tone in the passage is very preachy. His oversimplification makes it difficult to truly understand how to reach that level of life experience by going nomadic. To leave your home and all your things behind, it sounds preposterous. The most shocking thing about it is that the eighty-one-year-old man "took the brash twenty-four-year-old vagabond's advice to heart". Ron, the old man, then immediately packed his bags and just left. This is a testament to the fact that for some people, a monotonous, heavily busy lifestyle in modern day society just isn't cut out for them. This elderly man who has lived the same way his whole life just decided to be gone with the wind. According to Alex, his own lifestyle is the way to go; mystery around every corner. Experiencing new things not only builds character, but it also invites further new experiences to occur, therefore a never ending cycle of new experiences come their way. When the door to civilization and society is closed, the door to nature, adventure, and inner peace is opened.

On a smaller scale, the new world that Alex is discovering can be compared to a high school graduate leaving home and attending a university many miles away. The new college student is often enlightened by their new experiences. Not to say they are without struggle or emotional turmoil, because they certainly are. Being away from home can be a terrifying experience because the security that you once felt is no longer there. It is the student's responsibility to create a home somewhere in their new area, and find a community that accepts them and makes them feel secure again. At the end of the day, after all the hardships, the college student

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is better off because they have built a strong foundation of character as well as an independent personality, no longer having to answer to Mom and Dad all the time.

With regards to home, there's a certain unspoken truth that the owner of the home has power within it. The people that visit the home are completely governed by the homeowner. What they says goes under their household. In a Ted Talk called "How to Understand Power", Eric Liu puts the mystical essences and nuances of power into understandable words. Power is accumulated in six different ways. These methods for power accumulation are as follows: Physical force, wealth, state action, social norms, ideas, and last but not least, numbers. For example, in the previously mentioned The Walking Dead episode, the community in the prison has power over the zombies through the method of physical force. The zombies, pushed up against the sturdy chain link fence, are no match to the blades stabbed into their brains. Also, the community gains power through the method of having numbers. Instead of going it alone, they decided to team up, and that gives them a significant amount of power. When you have more manpower, supplies, healthcare, weaponry, and food are made more readily available. The community also gains powers from ideas, namely the idea that one day the world will be clean of zombies again and that they will survive. The idea gives the prison community power because it motivates them to fight for it. An idea can go a long way, especially if the people who support that idea has already gained power from sheer numbers.

Power coming from an idea can also be linked back to the passage from Into The Wild. The idea of freedom and living off the land entrusts Alex with a certain amount of power. Such power, in fact, that he convinced old man Ron to do the same exact thing. That's exactly what Ted Liu means when he refers to the power of an idea. An example of the power of an idea lies in political movements such as the Civil Rights movement, or for a more modern example, gay marriage, or the legalization of marijuana. These ideas started with one voice, and that started a powerful domino effect. Eventually, there are so many people fighting for a certain cause or set of principles that the governing body will hear what the people have to say and, ideally, will create laws accordingly.

According to Ted Liu, there are three laws of power. First, power is never static; it's always taking action. Second, power is like water; it's always flowing. Politics can help organize the flow of "water" and distribute power. Lastly, power compounds. Power begets power, and so on and so forth. In reference to The Walking Dead, these laws of power can really be seen in action. In a zombie apocalypse, the people tragically involved expect the unexpected. Things may not always go as they seem. Any second, a tragedy could be waiting to happen around every zombie infested corner of the earth. You win some battles, and you lose some battles; that's where the first law of power comes in. The flow of power is ever changing, there is nothing that could ever slow it down. As time passes, power shifts. Among the community, power is distributed through specific jobs or duties around the prison. This is where law two

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applies. They use a form of small scale politics in order to distribute power in an effective and meaningful way.

There is a lot of power that comes with a place call home. On the other hand, there's a lot of power to the idea of making your home nowhere. This is where The Walking Dead episode and the Into The Wild passage differ. One emphasizes the importance of a home while the other emphasizes the importance of no home. Home is not just a physical construct. It's a place where a person feels comfortable, safe, secure, and loved. Leaving home is definitely not easy, but it builds character and a sense of independence. Being away from home helps a person identify who they are, what they want to be, and what they want to do in life. Homelessness can also be a positive thing when you look through the same eyes as Alex in Into The Wild. Both being homeless and being away from home can be positive experiences.

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