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Changes: Understanding the Place Relationship Over Time



Photo courtesy of Katherine Loflin.

Changes: Understanding the Place Relationship Over Time
Thursday, November 5, 2015 -- Katherine Loflin

Curator's Note: *This blog is Part 4 in a five-part series by Dr. Katherine Loflin in anticipation of the release of her book, *Place Match: The City Doctor's Guide to Finding Where You Belong*, later this year. To enjoy the earlier blogs, click the links below.*

All relationships change over time. Our goal with relationships, whether with partners or with places, should not be perfection, but resilience. A resilient marriage is one that can withstand conflict, job changes, children, financial stress and other hardships that will inevitably happen. You stay focused on the common ground and the love that brought you together in the first place to build strategies to overcome what life throws your way.

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Resilience in places is similar. It's the ability for residents and their places to respond to hardships and hurdles with resolution through effective problem-solving, leadership and resident engagement. It's also our ability to bounce back with our place after bad times or our changing needs as a resident.

What are the options when you feel the relationship with your place changing?

You must investigate why you feel differently about your place. I often suggest the "Is it true?" strategy as a first step. "Is it true" that there are actual changes in the place that cause you to feel differently about it, is it a false perception, or perhaps even a change in you?

I remember needing to get used to single-mom life and feeling surrounded in my place by nuclear families. Concurrently, I was feeling less of a connection to my place. But it wasn't that my place had really changed. It was that my life had

changed. I needed to give my place a chance as I made the adjustment and try to find new connections to my place that suited my new role as a single mom.

Sometimes your bond to place will temporarily weaken. You will have bad days in your place, even in your Place Match (My term for the city, town, or area where you feel the most compatibility, belonging and fit with your environment.) But one bad week in a place doesn't mean it's over, just like one fight doesn't equal divorce. If the match is sustainable — much like a marriage — it'll bounce back. But you may have to be reminded why this is where you belong, why you fell in love with the place initially.

One way to reignite that love is to have a staycation, or go back to the dating stage (as I discussed in my last blog) to try to rediscover your place all over again. It's not unlike the "date nights" people go on with their spouses. It's a means of reconnecting, enjoying a place (or a person), and maybe learning something new about them or remembering something you may have forgotten.

However, in some cases, love of place has been gone for a while and can't be reestablished. Many decide to leave their place at that point. Still others won't or simply can't leave even if they've fallen out of love with the place. Divorce just isn't an option for whatever reason. So they continue to feel a low attachment to place, may even complain about it, but will stay put and "stuck in place," which can take its toll on residents and the place.

In other cases, a place may have never lived up to what you wanted or hoped from it. This can happen for a lot of reasons. Maybe this discovery was made during the "dating phase" with the place. Maybe you discovered the hard way that vacationing in a place really is different than living there. Maybe it just took too long for you to feel you belong — to not feel like an outsider in that place, but to feel at home. While people will give the place a chance, most people won't wait forever for the place to fulfill its promise.

Just like I personally believe there is not just one "soul mate" for us, I also believe you can have more than one Place Match over the course of your life as your needs and realities change.

Sometimes a place can still be that match for you through all the phases of your life.

You and your place can bounce back and develop the resilience that is key to a lifelong relationship. But often not. And you have to be willing to say goodbye to your place to find your [next] best match.

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