



Home Away from

Home

CHICAGO



The Chicago River

For more than two decades, I have called Colorado my home. However, each time I return to Chicago, memories of my youth along with recollections from adult living in the city and suburbia resurface. No matter how long I reside elsewhere, Chicago will remain my home away from home. It is impossible to detach from the comfort level associated with one's first few decades of life.

When the plane's landing pattern reveals the magnificent Chicago skyline, I often recall the plethora of notable places that no longer exist, along with the locations that have withstood the test of time. While Riverview Amusement Park, Fritzel's, the Pickle Barrel restaurant and Second City in Old Town, Marshall Fields, and the Chicago Stadium have disappeared, most of the city's major landmarks and attractions have endured. While some of these staples of Chicago remain vibrant, the neighborhoods surrounding these edifices have in most instances changed over time. This mixture of old and new reminds me that Chicago and its suburbs continued to evolve long after my family relocated.

When my husband and I have returned to Chicago to celebrate family milestones, we have traveled with our adult children and our grandchildren. These multi-generational gatherings have allowed us to see Chicago through the next generation's eyes. Their experience as *Denverites* traveling by airplane to visit a major American city is very different from my experience commuting by car or train into the city. Even though the 45-60 minute commute felt like an eternity as a child, I remember visits to the Art Institute, the Lincoln Park Zoo, the Shedd Aquarium, the Museum of Science and Industry, Grant Park, the Magnificent Mile, and the Field Museum. As young parents, we passed down these experiences to our four sons. As non-residents, our sons will slowly introduce these places to their children.

Chicago's towering skyscrapers are in a totally different league compared to Denver's less impressive skyline. Growing up in suburban Chicago, I assumed that all cities had mega downtown areas filled with state-of-the-art museums, major sporting teams, and culinary treasures.

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Grandchildren enjoying the fish at Shedd Aquarium



Chicago Lincoln Park Zoo



Shedd Aquarium in Chicago

As a child growing up in the Chicago metro area, I never imagined the possibility of living elsewhere. Back in the 1960s, travel opportunities tended to be expensive and limited. When I attended the University of Colorado in the 1970s, most of my peers attended college in Illinois. College students often returned to their hometowns after graduation. Without the advantages of modern technology, letter writing and landlines were the main ways to keep in touch with relatives and friends. People were less inclined to sever family ties.

Life in 2022 favors a mobile society where people have more chances to relocate and to travel. Home bodies continue to relish the safe confines of their familiar turf, while avid travelers are more open to stepping outside their comfort zones to explore distant places. But most would agree that if they return to a place where they once lived for an extended period,

there is a sense of security that does not evaporate. This inseparable attachment is rooted in the memories associated with the location along with the ability of going from place to place with minimal fear of getting lost. When travel involves negligible effort, you naturally feel at home with your situation.

Disappointingly, the pandemic constrained our ability to visit Chicago as often as before. When we returned last spring, we spent most of the time catching up with family and friends. To accomplish this, we remained in the suburbs. The rekindling of in-person encounters added another layer to the home away from home feeling. It's hard not to feel at home when surrounded by people who you have known for decades.

The remainder of our time was spent walking around Highland Park, my childhood home, and driving in Northbrook,

the city where our children attended public school. While retracing steps, my thoughts were consumed by a constant barrage of past events and experiences. Each place was tied to a series of memories.

After a week, I was ready to return to Colorado. On the way to O'Hare International Airport, the words from *My Kind of Town* popped into my mind. Frank Sinatra's voice was singing the verse, "Each time I leave, Chicago is tugging at my sleeve." Instead of agreeing with this outlook, I shook my head. Immediately, I recalled John Denver's song, "I Guess He'd Rather Be in Colorado." Like the subject of that song, I prefer Colorado. More than two decades after discarding my suburban Chicago existence for a life filled with Colorado sunshine and outdoor adventures, Chicago may be my home away from home but not where I call home.

