

Home Is Where We Make It:

RESISTING THE LURE OF NOSTALGIA AMID CLIMATE GRIEF

by HOPE MOON /// EAC Volunteer

I have a recurring dream where I walk through my childhood home. It no longer exists – at least as I knew it. I wade through my fluid subconscious memories, room by room, meeting my past in my present slumber. When my dad sold the house, these dreams would often greet me with granted passage back in time. Seven years later, the house appears to me less often. But it always returns at some point, as grief tends to do. After reading about the fires in Los Angeles, I thought, how many more people may begin to have dreams like mine? How many are haunted by a desire to return to a home that is lost? As the climate crisis continues to worsen, and our present and future look increasingly unrecognizable, we turn toward the one thing that holds a degree of certainty and stability: the past.

Nostalgia comes from the Greek Homeric word for homecoming and describes a sentimentality for the past. Stemming from Odysseus' long journey homeward after the Trojan War, he and his crew feel nostalgic as they yearn for their homes and pasts alike. Tackling the climate crisis today can feel like a contemporary Greek Odyssey of sorts – a decades-long journey filled with monsters and villains set on delaying our progress. But unlike Odysseus, as we rattle towards twinning social and environmental crises, it hardly feels like we are heading towards anything looking like home. So often we settle instead for substitutes that remind us of the home that once was, of who we once were, in the form of nostalgic products.

Within the last 10 years, the nostalgia industry has risen to prominence. From superhero mega-franchises, to beloved '90s and 2000s reboots, the return of Y2K fashion and toys and stuffed animals bought up by adults, these trends reveal a consumer base that is desperately seeking comfort in familiarity. These products try to make us feel like we're wandering through familiar territory and promise a kind of predictable stability. As our changing climate departs from memories of simpler times, nostalgic products offer a temporary return.

Nostalgic commodities lull us back through time to carefully fabricated realities that hook us and make us want more. Sitcoms boast of times of impossibly affordable housing. Vintage clothing reminds us that natural fibres once dominated over petrochemical-based synthetics. Stuffed animals bring us back to our childhood, when we could still wake up from our nightmares. The past is sold to us as a romantic product, convincing us that the more we buy, the more we can return. But it is this very urge to consume that is at the root of our dread. We cannot buy ourselves out of our social and climate crises. Those who claim that we can are those who wish to profit off our grief.

The production of nostalgia has become financially and politically advantageous as corporations and politicians create products and ideologies that offer salvation, if only we buy and follow. A “positive feedback loop” develops, where the more nostalgic we become, the more vulnerable we are to manipulation, and the more likely we will be to consume products or buy into rhetoric that promises some sort of comfort. We become increasingly dependent upon

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TAKE ACTION

Resist the lulling of nostalgia and soothe your fears instead by getting more involved in your community! Start or join a regular club, or volunteer with an initiative or a working group through the EAC. Don't get lost in the past. Honour your climate grief by cultivating your community now and for the future.

consuming the past to feel even the slightest degree of ease in the present. The commercial and political production of nostalgia further destabilizes our sense of the present and future, willing us to keep our gaze firmly on the past. But the longer we are stuck in the past, the more we cement a worse future.

Nostalgic consumption makes us idle beings. We are pacified from our reality only long enough before the next hit. But the root of our grief remains. The loss of a livable future looms ahead, and this loss is what we are so desperately trying to escape. But what if we were to no longer try to flee it, and instead actively work to fix it? If nostalgia is truly about returning home, it is up to us to ensure there is a home to return to, now and for generations to come. The Odyssey reminds us there is no saviour that exists that will help us home. It is neither romanticizing his past nor giving into temptations of comfort that facilitate Odysseus' return home, but rather his steadfast love and dedication to his family and community. While nostalgic consumption slows us down, nostalgia-induced community building can push us towards the home we want, and that we can reach together.

Unlike manufactured nostalgia, home does not live exclusively in the past, nor is it purely physical or ideological. Home is rooted within us and our communities that grow and adapt into resilient legacies of love and care. Even though I grieve the loss of my childhood house – the lilac bushes, the stained-glass rainbows I would dance my hands through, the creaking floorboards – my home lives on through my memories I share with my family, and the ways we continue to build our relationships forward. Where our grief may be tethered to the physical, our love is grounded in each other.

As we lose our sense of home to many social and environmental changes, nostalgia can be quick to settle in. But as hard as it can be to witness such degradation, we must resist the temptation of the past that pacifies us into stagnancy and passive consumption – it will only be a band-aid solution. Taking action to strengthen your relationships in community and to get involved in building a livable future for all will fulfill you more than a new outfit, or stuffed animal or binge watching a TV show ever will. You can still enjoy these things, just don't get stuck there! May we channel the hero's journey homeward within us, fighting the will of wannabe gods and profit-seeking monsters with a steadfast commitment to our communities, environments and futures.



Connecting with community at a town hall in February 2025.
PHOTO: Hannah Minzloff

