

On the meaning of home and belonging

What I love about writing this home and lifestyle column is not having the chance to tell you what I know, which wouldn't take us very far, but rather the chance to learn and share what I didn't know I didn't know.

While most of my interviews with experts start with my having a grasp of my column's direction and a relevant list of questions, my favorite interviews jettison off to lands unimagined, unexpected, and as yet unexplored.

Such was my conversation with Edward Leaman, chief brand officer for California Closets, and a continuing studies instructor of brand building at Stanford University.

Here I thought Leaman and I would talk generally about, oh, the ways the world of organizing have changed since California Closets came on the scene in the late 1970s, and a bit about the brand's five-year-old annual magazine "Ideas of Order," which just published "The Belonging Issue."

Instead, Leaman, opened the interview with a monologue about, what else? Love.

"Do you know what standing in love means?" he asks, which dumbfounded me. "We all know what falling in love means and what being in love means, but standing in love is when you stand with the person, for them, as they go through their life."

I have no earthly notion what this has to do with home organizing, but I'm interested, so I let Leaman take the reins.

Somehow his commentary on love segues to a discussion of the feeling of belonging, how we are supposed to feel at home. And that



AT HOME WITH
Marni Jameson

morphs imperceptibly into our relationship with our belongings, what we surround ourselves with, which loosely, though not overtly, ties to systems to store and display these belongings.

Ahh, I get it.

"That feeling of belonging starts with making sure you live with loved ones who make you feel seen and heard," Leaman says, getting back to love, and a realm well outside the scope of this column. "If you don't feel seen and heard, you don't belong."

Or they don't.

"Next, it involves making space

for our stories, which we share through our belongings," he said.

At this point, my eyes must have been making little pinwheels, because the publicist who had coordinated the Zoom call for the three of us, said: "He speaks in fortune cookie."

"The fundamental question," he continued, "is how do you make space for what belongs? When you ask that societal question, you open up the deeper feeling of belonging and the important emotions you feel with your belongings. These are the treasures of your life."

Here I thought I gave the concept of home a lot of contemplation. This guy makes me feel like I'm in the kiddie pool, while he's on the Olympic swim team.

"We don't define ourselves as a brand about organization and storage," he says, referring to California Closets, where he's played a leading role since 1994, "but rather as helping customers increase their feeling of belonging."

Well, when you put it that way.

So just how can we create that longed-for feeling of greater belonging at home? Here's how, according to Leaman:

- Honor the rituals of self-care

Everyone has small, daily rituals, such as making the bed, brewing coffee or tea in the morning, walking the dog, getting the kids to school or to bed. "You can't live an ideal life if you're not connected to your rhythms," Leaman says. "It's

these little habits that make a home home."

- Practice gratitude

Leaman and I have both gone through divorces and know the foundation-shaking loss that comes with that, as well as the subsequent appreciation for having another chance. The deep gratitude I know I feel for my life and home

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