

OURS has been a fissured, fractured family for nigh on decades now. The paternal and maternal family homes have long since vanished, and in one instance was bitterly torn apart.

THE HOME PLACE.

Family members, those left alive, have

been scattered to the winds. And our branch of it has never had anything remotely resembling what can be called a home place, the place where we truly belong. That's a loss I feel keenly every so often, but it's simply part of the malaise of modern man.

My appointment the afternoon of the day before was in East Perth, and when it was over I chose to walk home by taking a long detour past the triangle of streets where I used to live in three different houses, then into the city along my most commonly followed path back then.

It was just after 5PM, and when I was part of my first couple we would most often take the walk into Perth's CBD just as the last of the dayworkers were abandoning it via car, bus and train for the suburbs. The East Perth streets would be coming alive with boatpeople immigrants conducting their noisy family lives out front of their houses, and the city streets would be going dead in step with the lowering sunlight.

There was a gentle breeze this time as there always was one wafting across my forearms and fingertips, it seemed, in those days over fifteen years ago. The light was amber and soft as the sun fluttered to its rest somewhere over West Perth. As soon as I passed the first site of a former home, a now decaying heap of ugly apartments that had replaced my beloved old Bunnings mansion, a wall sprang up between me and the places flashing past me barely inches away.

The wall had the colour of a nicotine-stained English pub ceiling and the surface and consistency of gelatine, with an uncertain boundary between it and the world. As I passed by each insignificant little landmark, staring hard through the translucent wall at it, the view as it was then superimposed itself over the sight of the landmark now.

It's as if I was walking through two times zones simultaneously, and the greasy brown wall was a barrier and a temptation, keeping me in this time but luring me into the other. I imagined touching its surface and feeling a cool, soft resistance on my palms, then pressing a little harder with both hands until the wall suddenly sucked me in to the world of a decade and a half ago.

Reassuring thought, that. Back then I was happy enough, and things seemed as if they would never change. East Perth would go on being the closest thing to my home place, until I chose to will it not to be so. But I had no idea that the developers would persuade all three of my landlords to sell up for the sake of a tragically ugly and sprawling block of flats and a half-deserted carpark.

Then I could not find work enough during the most desperate part of a long cycle of booms and busts, and went off into the southeastern unknown to see if a life could be made there for us. On my return from that brief foray everything had changed and I was alone, for the very first time. The winds blew hollow down the streets of East Perth, and it no longer bore any resemblance to home. 🌪