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Women's Voices
Ms. Bates
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A Home Is...

What makes a home? Is it the environment surrounding it? Could it be the furniture inside of it? Or is it the people living with you the place you call "home"? Think about it, What is "HOME"? Generally home is defined as "a place where one lives permanently", but is it truly that or is there a further meaning to it? Home to me is not a set place, but it is my family. Home to Miss Etta Mae Johnson of Brewster Place is not a physical thing but rather the relationship, support and solace she finds. Home to Mattie Michael of Brewster Place is anything she can do for her son, even if tragically it means giving up her physical home. Throughout the novel by Gloria Naylor called The Women of Brewster Place, we see that this idea of "home" changes for these two characters as their lives are constantly in motion.

Now pay attention, here we have Miss Etta Mae Johnson who seeks comfort and stability in a man. For her "home" is a man. " I love my man, I'm a lie if I say I don't...[he] had the nerve to lay a matchbox to my clothes, I didn't have so many, but I had a long long way to go" (55). She's the kind of gal who always falls for the wrong man. To Miss Etta Mae it does not matter what her man would do, she will ultimately still love him. On this long weary journey, Miss Etta's best childhood friend, Mattie Michael, was the only true "home" in her life. With all good intentions, Mattie takes Miss Etta

Mae to church to find a “good” man. But of course, Miss Etta Mae is pulled towards someone who is no good, “can’t you see what he’s got in mind” (69), Mattie exclaims to Miss Etta, who is blown away by the reverend, by his looks, wealth and class. But, after sleeping with him Miss Etta Mae, finally apprehends that all the reverend wanted was the physical and did not care for her in the way she needed. Miss Etta comes to the realization that they were using each other and what she really wanted was to have stability, security, friendship and “home”. Miss Etta Mae still had a long way to go, for her to know that her “home” was not in a man, but rather in the comfort of her friends. Outside dejected over her evening, she was trying to determine the music she heard. “She stopped straining when it suddenly came to her that it wasn’t important what song it was—someone was waiting up for her” (74). Well, would you look at that, Mattie was waiting up for her. For now, Miss Etta Mae finally comes to fathom that her “home” is not what she expected it to be. It is not a man, it is her best friend.

You think the story ends there, but Mattie Michael goes through her own heartbreak. In a desperate search for a home for her son, “she walked the entire day, and her hand became blistered from the handle of the suitcase. Basil [her son] was growing heavy and restless in her arms, and his constant whining and struggling was taxing her strength” (29). Mattie would do anything to find a safe home for her son. As the sun goes down, she becomes desperate: consumed with the idea of “home”. “Who would keep the baby? She could go home. Home. Home” (30). You see, Mattie is the type to fight for anything to provide for and please her son. Perhaps she gives too much for her son? In fact there is an early prophecy, when Ms. Eva Turner (the woman who took Mattie in) says, “Ya know, you can’t keep him runnin’ away from things that hurt

him. Sometimes, you just gotta stay there and teach him how to go through the bad and good of whatever comes” (31). You know Mattie, letting him grow might not be such a bad idea. For Miss Mattie her “home” is her son Basil. If he is gone, then her whole world will be gone and she will lose her comfort and support. Ultimately, Mattie should have heeded Ms. Eva Turner’s words because she will eventually lose her physical home to a bail bond, to a trial that her son never attends. To Mattie her home has become simply a worthless shell, just something she can use to help her son. Mattie Michael was always the one to never give up when it came to dealing with her son and his unmanageable ways. Although, as her life evolves and many other women enter her life, Mattie’s meaning of “home” will always be her son.

For most of my life, I thought “home” was a pretty easy concept to understand. It all began for me on Hamner Drive and now on Valley Meadow Place. It was essentially wherever my parents were, which it stayed that way for pretty much 10 years of my life. For those 10 years of my life, living on Hamner Drive was my “home”. The one with the white picket fence out in front and the tree house and play area out in the backyard. Then to my new house on Valley Meadow Place. After leaving my little house on Hamner Drive, “home” became known to me as memories and pictures. Moving into my new “home” was like starting a new chapter in my life, moving forward and yes, always having the old recollections there. “Home” is where you can be together in that “Little House on the Prairie” way with Mom, Dad, brother and sister and just doing that old family thing. Oh! Or that place where you can go, where no one can find you. Yeah, you know that place, where nothing bad ever happens to you or your family. Exactly! That one. However, “home” is wherever I am, wherever my parents are, and wherever my

brother and sister are. We are like turtles, who carry their homes on their backs. Our home is movable, we can recreate it wherever we go. We can make home together, within our families from our memories of the past that we shared and our hopes for the future. That is my “home”. Although, on paper myself and the two characters have different definitions of “home”, we all share a common representation of the word itself.

Miss Etta Mae first thought that a “home” meant having a man take care her. That a “home” would be the security and support that she so desperately wanted and needed. But on the contrary having her friendship with Mattie is what she really needed and wanted in a “home”. For Miss Mattie Michael, her son, from infancy to adulthood, a “home” is simply another object, another gift, another thing that she could give him. For me, a home is nothing less than the memories created and nothing more than the physical presence of my family. So what is home you ask? It is anything you make it out to be.