



## 129: At Home in the World

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 129.

This is a podcast about making decisions, but it's also about making a life. If you struggle with decision fatigue, chronic hesitation or just need a few minutes away from the constant stream of information and the sometimes delightful but also distracting hum of entertainment, you're in the right place for a thoughtful story, a little prayer and a simple next rate step.

Unless you're considered an essential worker, chances are you've been spending a lot more time at home these past few months. And from the looks of things depending on where you live in the world, we could be facing quite a bit more time within these familiar walls in the months to come.

For many of us, this has been an interesting experience to say the least. Many months of stay at home orders or even safer at home campaigns can drive even the most homebody among us to want to find ways to at least get outside or find a change of scenery. But since big-time travel might not be in the cards for a lot of us anytime soon, what might be a next right thing posture we could practice today? Well, lately I've been thinking a lot about books and a lot about home. So today you're going to get some reflection on both, and perhaps you, like me, could use a bit of reframing as it relates to this place we call home. Listen in.

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So last year when I did eleventy-hundred podcast interviews before the release of *The Next Right Thing* book, a question that I was often asked was: Tell us a book that's changed your life. And I love that question because there are so many books that I love. Books I remember at pivotal times in my life books that if I hadn't found them when I did things would be quite different in my life. So I've been asked a lot about books that have changed my life, and I love that question and the whole conversation that surrounds it. But I have to confess that naming the books that have changed your life is a tall order because it can cause a reader to have a bit of stage fright and to go into overthinking panic mode because what do we actually mean by change my life?

Is that all aspects of my life? What about if it just changed my life in the kitchen or my morning routine life? What about this changed my life as it relates to relationships or my imagination or with God?

I had a conversation with Anne Bogel who writes about books and reading. And people used to always ask her to recommend a good book, and she would get all tangled up because what does that even mean?

What do you mean by good? Who gets to decide? And how can she know what you like?

That question actually inspired her podcast *What Should I Read Next*, where she plays literary matchmaker by asking guests: what are three books you love and one book you hate. That gives her a better idea at least of the types of books someone might or might not enjoy. We can learn a lot about a person when we learn what books have changed their lives.

It tells us a bit about who they are, about what makes them them. I think that's often what we're really looking for when we ask. Those kinds of questions tell us the clues to who you are. Life-changing books are one way to learn to answer that question. Another way is to ask where someone is from.

When someone asks me where I'm from, it's not a simple answer. I was born in Indiana and lived there for many formative years of my childhood, but we lived in Iowa for a little over a year. Then South Carolina for high school, middle school and high school, then Michigan for just my senior year. Now, I've been in North Carolina since college, and this is where I got married and have all three of my children. So if you ask my Indiana family, they would probably call me Southern. If you ask my Mississippi born mother-in-law, I'm sure she would call me a Yankee.

And then there's the detail of our right now city of Greensboro. All cities have their regular names, but some also have nicknames like The Big Apple, The Motor City, The Big Easy. Another name for Greensboro is The Gate City because in the mid 1800s, John Motley Morehead, who was the governor at the time, used his influence to ensure an East-West line of railroad tracks would travel through Greensboro, his hometown, rather than miles to the South, which was what was planned.

Years later, Greensboro became known as The Gate City because the busy train station located in the city was the actual gateway from one place to another. As fitting with the name, there was a period of years where I believed Greensboro would just be a gate for me, a necessary passageway that I had to move through to get to where I actually wanted to go.

I moved here for college and thought once I got my degree, I'd peace out. I didn't plan to stay. As it turns out, Greensboro is not a gate after all, but more of a cul-de-sac for me. I wrote more about this in my book *Simply Tuesday*, but it's been a cul-de-sac both figuratively and literally.

I've stayed in Greensboro now for over 20 years, and we live on an actual culdesac. It took me a while to accept this city as my home. We aren't Charlotte with her pro-team and sweet skyline. We aren't Raleigh, Durham or Chapel Hill with the status of the capital city or the college basketball royalty. We aren't Asheville with her cool artists and smoky mountains. We aren't even High Point, which is the little town 20 minutes to our west, who hosts the world, the world, twice a year for Furniture Market. Joanna Gaines comes and calls it Furniture Camp. I'm not making this up.

I can't even talk about how we don't have a coastline in Greensboro. Many who live here often say it's a great place to live. We're only a few hours from the mountains on one side and the beach on the other. And we actually think this is a perk. Come on to Greensboro where you're only ever a few hours drive from beautiful destinations. I'm kidding. Kind of.

Greensboro is beautiful, but what our city lacks by way of attractions, she makes up for in this – she's

home. Here in Greensboro, I feel at home in the world, and that counts for a lot. It's not fancy, but it belongs to us and we belong to it. While it may not be interesting to anyone else, I've learned not to hold my hometown up to the impossible standard of being interesting.

It just has to be home in the same way a conversation about a book that's changed my life might be more compelling. But here's something no one's ever asked me: What are the books that have affirmed your life? Asking about the books that changed my life is a fascinating conversation, and it's one I would love to have with you sometimes because I have the answers for that. But our lives aren't always in need of changing, just like our homes don't always need to be entertaining. Sometimes what our lives need most is an affirmation that we're doing all right. That in some ways, we're good just the way we are. And that we don't have to be a dazzling hero to make a real difference.

I loved to read as a girl, but I didn't ever really know what to read so I just grabbed books that had cool covers as one does. And they were mostly forgettable if I'm honest, evidenced by the fact that I can't tell them to you right now. Save one. Because one of the series of books I read as a girl that I always loved but never quite knew why were books about a young girl with chin-length hair. She loved cats. She got in trouble sometimes, and she could be a pest to those around her. She was concerned about her parents. She watched them stress out about things. She was not dazzling, spectacular, fabulously skilled. She was not a hero, a prodigy or a star. She wasn't even the oldest child in the family. She was just the regular younger sister like me. Her name was Ramona Quimby, and I adored her.

I've always known those books meant something to me, but it wasn't until I read an article written on Literary Hub last year about Beverly Cleary, the author, and about Ramona, and I found myself crying like an actual baby.

And it was in that moment that I started to realize the impact reading those stories must have had on my life. The title of the article was *How Ramona Quimby Helps Kids Make Sense of This Unstable World*, and the author is a writer named Rachel Richardson. In the article Richardson plainly states this quote about Ramona, she says, "Nothing remarkable happens to her. No one notices her particularly, nor does she have the power to make her own magic."

I read, personally, the Ramona books when I was a girl living in Southern Indiana, and I would never name them on a list of books that have changed my life, but that's not always the point of reading. Ask me the books that changed my life; you'll learn something about my big city moments. Ask me the books that have affirmed my life; you'll learn where I feel at home in the world.

I wonder what those answers would be for you. Think of the books, experiences, people, and circumstances that have changed your perspective, challenged your worldview or taught you something at a pivotal time in your life. Who have you become that you may not have been were it not for those words, that story, that person, or that pivot?

We're grateful for these and we need them, but these are not the only ones that matter. Think of the books, experiences, people, and circumstances that have come alongside at a time when you needed comfort, healing and quiet confirmation that you're doing all right, that you're not wrecking everything up, and everything just might be okay after all. Stay grateful for these, too. They may not be as obvious, but they will show themselves if we look for them. And they can be a comfort to us in the midst of uncertainty,

loss, confusion or questions as we continue to learn to do our next right thing in love.

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Thanks for listening to episode 129 of The Next Right Thing.

Well, it's true, this is a podcast about making decisions, but the bigger truth is that our daily decisions are actually making our lives, both the big ones that change our lives and the smaller ones that build them.

As always, you can find me on Instagram @emilypfreeman or online at emilypfreeman.com. Speaking of books and a feeling at home, my friend Tsh Oxenreider wrote a book called *At Home in the World* that inspired the title of this episode. Since travel is limited for most of us, her book could be a fantastic way for you to see new places without leaving home. So I'll end with a quote from that beautiful book now.

In it, Tsh writes:

“On a steaming hot evening in early September, we board a westbound plane where in 29 hours, we will next touch Earth in China. As we rumbled down the runway, as the nose angles upward, as we lift into the air, I already miss the lamplight glow next to our couch.”

Thanks for listening and I'll see you next time.