

## A Place to Call Home by Ashlee Taylor Layton

I'm sitting out on my back deck on this absolutely gorgeous Labor Day. While I moved to NC for graduate school, it is for days like this that I have stayed here for nearly 20 years. The end of summer, the edge of fall; I adore it. For many years people asked me when I'd leave North Carolina. Not like they wanted me to go or anything but realizing that my family is all very far away from me and that that might be difficult. With a laugh and a shrug, I've always told them I'd leave when I had a good reason to.

I guess what it comes down to is that North Carolina has become my home. There *are* still times when I am utterly homesick for my parents, sisters, nieces and nephews. I have often spent late nights looking at plane tickets and my schedule figuring out how on Earth I could afford (both in time and money) to catch a ride to Utah for a few days.

During this pandemic with travel plans canceled, a lot of us working remotely, and parents and teachers facing some of the toughest decisions they've ever had to make, I've thought a lot of that sense of home and how it relates to our chosen profession. Why don't we just leave this profession where we can't seem to get ahead no matter how hard we try? Is it worth being hailed as heroes in April and selfish villains in August?

While the true answer is so complicated to really spell out, I think the summary can be found in today's weather. Sure, the NC spring is full of massive pollen, allergens, and beautiful flowers. The summers are mind-boggling hot, humid, and full of hurricanes. But on this perfect weather of a day, I'm reminded why I stay. It makes all the yuckiness melt away. I think that's true of our time teaching, too.

We may be homesick for the way things used to be. We may feel lethargic in the heat of remote learning and sweltering pressure of trying to teach and parent/grandparent at the same time. We worry that the small amount of time we spend outside the safety of our homes will cause someone we love to get sick. But then you have that one lesson, that one activity, that one student... and it just works. And you sit on your back deck and thank God you found a place to call home.