

GIMME SHELTER

Sarah Rosenberg | 2019 Adobe Creative Residency Proposal



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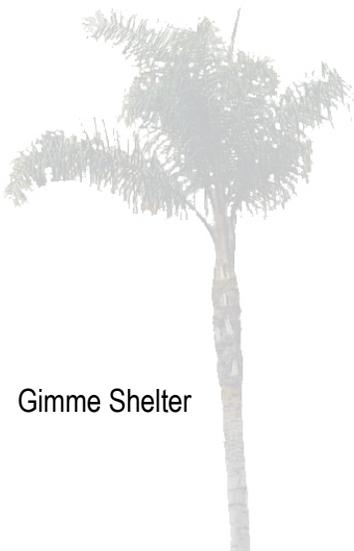
oo GIMME SHELTER

It all started when a toddler went missing at the annual Mothers' Day Brunch. After scouring the banquet room floors, interrupting several families' celebrations, and taking a couple indecent peeps under the linens of a few Viennese tables, the child's parents were ill with fear that their willful progeny had decided to inspect the tarmac of the municipal airport outside, whose little Cessnas and Pipers provided wholesome entertainment for the bored and food-comatose at such events.

It was my Aunt Nancy who finally decided to look in the kitchen. Sure enough, there I was, making friends with the line cooks and committing at least three OSHA and health code violations (open-toed jelly shoes, unwashed hands, off the clock). Crisis averted—but also, mischief managed.

After the brunch incident, my mother surprisingly did not invest in a kiddie leash. She did, however, start carrying colored pencils whenever she needed to bring the smaller and more feral of her two human creatures along for any errand. I remember my mother first showing me how to draw flowers as we waited on the pool deck for my sister to finish swimming lessons. What I do *not* remember is exactly how I became proficient in drawing people and buildings. While these both qualify as very common subject matter for the portfolios of young children, I (and, to her relief, my mother) found that I could lose entire afternoons inside the details of the worlds coming out of my drawing utensil.

Perhaps because my mother had a few academic art books on our living room shelves, I often made my parents uncomfortable with my precocious level of anatomical correctness when they appeared over my shoulder to let me know dinner was ready. As for buildings, it was a certain book of myths and fairytales illustrated by Greg Hildebrandt that made me see the magic in both edifices and the people who inhabited them. Years later, I came to discover that this artist (alongside his twin brother) illustrated everything from heavy metal album art to Star Wars promotional posters to pinup girls—but it was Greg's rendition of the Beast's castle that had won me over. I sometimes still picture it with all the golden light spilling from its windows while a woman in the foreground, oblivious to the structure's splendor, lovingly cradles its dying châtelain. I have to wonder if such an intimate impression of the human (and, I suppose, humanoid) element of space led me into the architecture and building professions—because, while the spaces we inhabit deeply affect our lives, it is our cohabitants who provide the lenses and mirrors through which we see ourselves and the world.



Fast-forward to 2017 when I was hired to help oversee the construction of a veritable modern castle. Having gotten used to the drudgery that so often accompanies everyday life in an architect or contractor's office (*another* revision of the window shop drawings?), it took me months to realize that I was literally living my dream of building palaces. However, there was something not right about the dream. I no longer wanted castles. Living in one of the most affluent places in the world after having moved away from a humbler place I loved, I found that I missed my chosen "home" ever more with every passing day. Furthermore, on my daily journey between my home and former office (an elite property management company), I saw the plight of those *without* homes, standing in stark relief against the clean Calacatta marble floors of the worlds I inhabited atop two different hills. The cognitive dissonance was beginning to make my head spin. When I moved out of the city, it was no longer my morning walk to work that tore the slipcovers off the stained streets; it became even closer to home and more omnipresent. At present I live across from a park that acts as the spillover for another nearby park, one that has gained national notoriety over several decades as a home for itinerants and the chronically homeless.

Needless to say, homelessness is an incredibly complex issue that has many causes, and there is indeed a faction of willful transients. That being said, I will go out on a limb and claim that a majority of these people did not intend to live on the streets. At the risk of making an assumption I have not formally quantified with hard numbers, I find *qualitative* evidence through conversing with such people, reading their signs, and simply looking into their eyes—this last action being the simplest and yet most profound humanizing action, to which many sources will attest*.

All of this begs the question: what is home? Is it a building with a front door and a roof, perhaps shared a person of our choosing? Is it a physical place, or a state of mind? Is it where we come to rest after a tiring but satisfying day of work, or a place where we come back to ourselves after renting out our minds for another's dream? Context is key: if you ask a suburban child to draw "home", chances are that their representation will look quite a bit different than that of a city dweller. Likewise, if you compare an immigrant grandmother's image of "home" to that of her grandchild, you may not even know the two images are related without first having context of the assignment. A large part of the phenomenon known as "The American Dream" is owning a home; however, everyone has some idea of home, whether or not they own one. Perhaps then, when dealing specifically in the physical aspect of this concept, "shelter" is the more appropriate term, being that it is one of the primary human needs, according to Maslow's Hierarchy. Other inflections of "home" notwithstanding, one can understand why children will tend to draw a house or other edificial shelter when tasked to represent "home", whereas an adult may describe something more abstract, be it a distant landmass or a loved one's face.

My creative passion is illustration and storytelling. I've been skilled at drawing from a very young age, and I honed these skills in architecture school. In the act of representation via ink, I find stillness and discipline; in letting my lines waywardly skew, release. But in choosing color, I create subjectivity and a more concentrated (and sometimes fogged) version of the truth: the viewer cannot physically smell the perfume of gardenias after a warm summer downpour, nor can they hear a pair of cats fighting under the crawlspace of a nearby rowhouse. They cannot know that, behind a lace curtain, two newlyweds are gingerly apprehending one other in the wake of their first argument as a married couple. And as an illustrator, I too cannot know these things, but therein lies my job as a *storyteller*, for visual postulation becomes its own little search for truth.

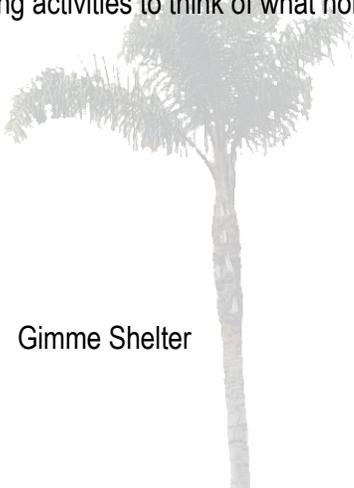
THE PROJECT

My interest in the Adobe Creative Residency springs from the many stories I feel compelled to tell, especially in regard to those whose voices may have been silenced in one way or another.

With the intent of creating a picture book depicting “stories of home”, I will have an opportunity to marry my love of storytelling via illustration and creative writing with my communication skills, activist bent, and inquisitive nature. This will involve asking people from all walks of life questions that ultimately pertain to their definitions of home. I would then be incorporating this research into the story of a child who receives a magical talisman which allows him to transport to any place he wishes with a guaranteed place to stay—the caveat being that he cannot choose said living situation. While these situations presented will remain within reason for a juvenile audience, they will nevertheless touch on the randomness of fortune that can shape how people experience “home”.

SCHEDULE

As a year-log project, the creation of this book will involve a period of daily sketching and note-taking based off of intentional conversations with a variety of willing strangers, with the aim to better understand the many concepts of “home”. This would then transition into a storyboarding and sequencing phase, followed by editing of my illustrations and their accompanying stories, all of which would be respectively refined and placed with the help of the Adobe Creative Suite (particularly InDesign, Illustrator, and PhotoShop). With years of experience drawing and talking to people about their homes and a love of creating subtle micro-stories in my sketches during visits to beloved places, the first aspect of this project is nearly second nature and will be continuous even as I move into the latter phases. The storyboarding and sequencing aspects are creative yet organizational tasks for which I believe my time spent in construction management will have prepared me well. The editing phase will be the most involved and time-consuming (and at times, tedious!), and will begin once I have a solid set of contending drawings and stories with which to work. That being said, these three “phases” will overlap: the storyboarding and sequencing processes will begin about a third of the way through the project and be finished within 1-2 months, while the editing will begin about 1-2 months in and remain in process up to completion. The first phase (explore, interact, react, create) will also be ongoing, though it will taper off during the last third of the year as the focus shifts from creation to production. Also of note in the last third of the year will be outreach to bookstores and time spent doing promotional work. In the last month of the project, I will ideally undertake a regional book tour, reading and sharing with children at bookstores and libraries, perhaps even schools, where I will encourage children via discussion and drawing activities to think of what home and shelter mean to them and to others.



BUDGET

Budget-wise, there is the cost of material and media to be taken into consideration. In addition to the watercolor paper, pigment liner pens and watercolor pencils that form the basis of my chosen media, I occasionally incorporate other materials depending on the particular subject being represented. I would need Adobe Creative Suite software for editing purposes and for creating the final product. Additionally, there will be printing costs for promotional materials and any archival prints to be produced for potential events (see below). Another significant aspect of this project that is pivotal to its mission involves engaging interviewees. Though not a monetary exchange, I would like to compensate informants for their time with shared coffee or food—particularly a solid meal for those who might not know where or when their next meal is coming. I would of course be working within any budget boundaries, frequency limits, and documentation procedures set by Adobe for such instances.

Last but not least would be the actual production and distribution of the final product, the book. The “book tour” aspect of the final phase is intended to be regional in order to keep travel costs low, but there is certainly potential for a wider reach given that I have relevant contacts in most states (in particular, librarians, local bookstore owners, and schoolteacher friends who would be inspired by this project). All things considered, I would ideally like to travel to at least a couple non-regional locations in order to promote this book.

JUST A (PARCEL) LOT AWAY

This project will help prepare me for transitioning into a career in illustration as both a medium for entertainment/advertisement/aesthetic and a tool for conveying messages and creating consciousness and conversation around oft-avoided taboos and societal problems.

I am thrilled at the prospect of sharing my work and process daily via Instagram stories and posts on a dedicated page. Ideally, I would also like to show some of my drawings at a gallery or event focused on social justice issues. A “#writehome” sidecar project consisting of creating and distributing postcard prints of various dwellings I’ve drawn (inclusive of my name and Adobe project information) would act as a straightforward and engaging promotional material for both my forthcoming book and for Adobe. These would be given to anyone willing to participate in my research as well as anyone who catches me drawing and offers their remarks or is otherwise interested in my work or the program (anyone prone to drawing in public will know that this type of interaction is actually quite a common occurrence!). I can say with full confidence that passerby commentators would love receiving such a simple yet meaningful souvenir, possibly wanting one to keep and one with which to “write home”, ideally taking a picture of their snail mail before dropping it in the box, thus encouraging others on social media to [#writehome](#) as well.

*Multiple sources all stress that much of the dehumanizing nature of homelessness lies in the fact that the majority of people walking by a homeless person will actively avoid eye contact, making the subject feel invisible, forgotten, unwanted, burdensome, etc.

1. <http://www.ihl.org/education/IHIOpenSchool/resources/Pages/CaseStudies/HomelessnessStoppingADownwardSpiral.aspx>
2. <https://www.aecom.com/blog/homelessness-divide-thin-line/>
3. <https://la.curbed.com/2018/1/22/16911052/homeless-count-volunteer-donate-housing>