

HOUSE HUNTING

UNHOMELY

NO. 1 THE PLACE

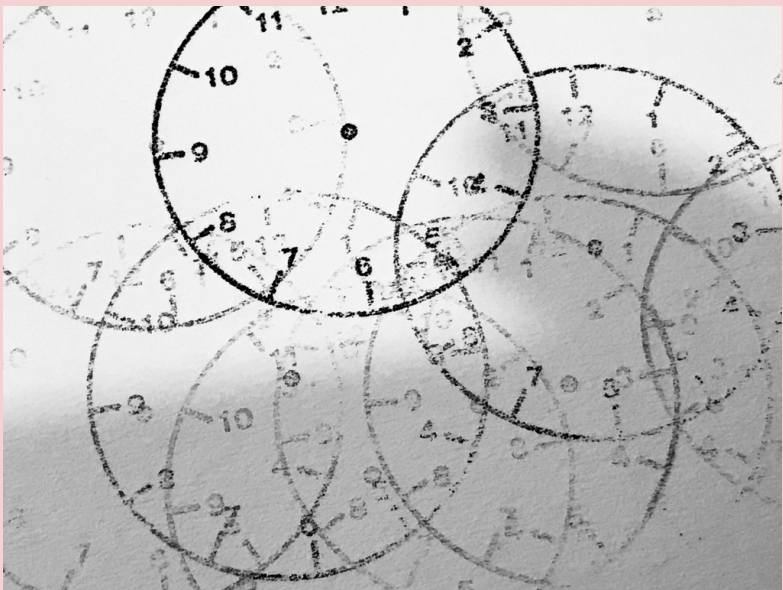
FIONA YUN-JUI CHANG



Don't Fall In Love With It

~~Between October 2020 and May 2021, I toured over fifty houses in suburban Los Angeles and bravely made offers to our dream houses. It took 27 rejections for me to understand the game.~~

“You can like a house but don't fall in love with it,” a real estate agent said to me.



House Hunting

The months-long city-wide lockdown was soul destroying. 24-7, our household of three was living, working, and schooling under one roof. Everyday sounds gushed out from computer screens. The voices flooded everywhere in our condo but they did not talk to me. I was drowning. My house hunting was not romantic. It began as a dejected time in my life.

My family agreed our ideal future home could have three bedrooms, a garage and a quiet backyard. *This* would make me happy.

Between October 2020 to May 2021, we toured over 50 houses in suburban Los Angeles.



~~NOT TO SUNDAY~~

~~NOT TO MONDAY~~

~~NOT TO TUESDAY~~

~~NOT TO WEDNESDAY~~

~~NOT TO THURSDAY~~

~~NOT TO FRIDAY~~

SATURDAY



My attention has always been devoted to garages or basements. I would examine lighting, doorways, windows, and electricity closely for potential studio usage. After we visited a house and a cozy backyard, my 5-year-old decided she'll hold a backyard wedding, no matter how much I have told her marriage is not a necessity.

Around Christmas time, we discovered a house with a detached guest unit on the west side of the city. The next door neighbor, a man in his 50s with cinnamon skin, came to chat when we finished our tour. He reassured us that everybody who lives in the neighborhood is very friendly, and enthusiastically welcomed us to our possible future home. That night we planned on using the guest house as a studio and dedicating the studio kitchen to a pop-up bakery where we would serve fresh bread to neighbors and friends on special occasions.



The first house we fell in love with. We never had a chance to make an offer. The day we came back from our visit, it was already under contract. A month later, I found it sold at 30% over the asking price.

We drove around the city to visit the houses we were considering but not quite sure how to make a compelling offer.

We packed snacks for the ride to visit each neighborhood at different times of the day and at different days of the week.

We planted the seeds of our dream in each house and made ourselves overly concerned that our cat might not like the idea of moving.

Our driving became a ritual, an attempt to engrave the text of our bodies into this illegible city.



The house requesting for a cover letter

Cover Letter

“Do you have a minute to talk?” This was how our agent delivered the news, first with this text message. We used the time before the phone call to prepare ourselves. I was waiting for news like “Congratulations! The seller accepted your offer!” But by that point we had learned that more often it was something along the lines of “We have received a counter offer and the seller is asking for...” — the kind of news that made us suffer a few more days— or “I am sorry, the seller decided to go for another offer...” — a death blow disappointment.

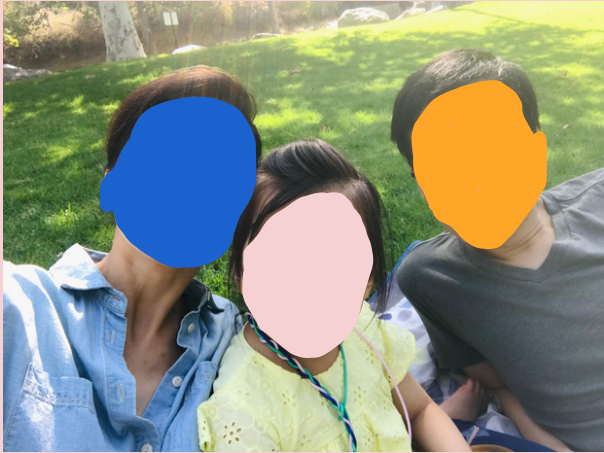
Only this time, out of the blue, we received new news after a counter offer was made. The seller was asking for a cover letter from us.

I was surprised.

A cover letter is a so-called buyer's love letter. It is a common practice that home buyers attach an additional piece of writing with the offer, explaining why they want to live in the house.

We'd tried offering a cover letter with the previous offers but were discouraged and told that cover letters raise the potential of discrimination as they reveal the buyer's family status, race, religion, sex, nationality, or disability. A love letter seems to raise all kinds of questions.

On April 1st, 2021, I read on the local news, the president of the California Association of Realtors said that "...combating systemic racism and unconscious bias is C.A.R.'s top priority for the year" and he added "We have a long history of being part of that problem. As much as we have learned, we still have a lot to undo." Over the next few days more appeals from realtors surfaced: "...buying a home shouldn't be about someone's story, but instead about who has the best terms, conditions and price."



Do people really think only the cover letter reveals personal stories?

What about a person's name? A language we carry intimately to make contact with others whom we have never met. A series of alphabets bound with legal obligations. That is the very first thing we offered on a contract before terms, conditions and price. My last name, Chinese character 張, translated from Mandarin to English "Chang" unveils an immigrant story, cover letter or not.

I immediately dropped everything and wrote a cover letter to meet the seller's deadline a few hours away.

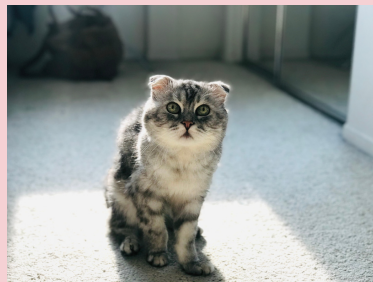
Dear A and C,

Thank you for considering our offer on your beautiful home. We are writing to introduce ourselves... Our family is small- three of us and a very sweet cat...

... We have been searching for a new home with a yard that can give us a little more outdoor space for fresh air and exercise. We visited your beautiful home and were immediately attracted to its private location and thoughtful design of the house. While we appreciated the well cared for room and elegant landscape we are also thrilled to discover the secret natural trail out the backyard. We found ourselves imagining taking a daily adventure stroll through the back. Our daughter has been dreaming about growing her own vegetables and pumpkins and I can finally have a small studio that is close by yet is detached from our living space. It is a perfect house for our family to share time and make memories.

I am sure you have made a lot of memories in this house. It must be hard relocating and leaving what you have built. We are grateful for you considering our offer. We hope to have the opportunity to call it our home...

*Warm regards,
Fiona*



Our family photo and the cat's picture were included in the letter.

Within an hour after the letter was submitted, we heard back from our agent: “The seller accepted an offer that is higher and all cash. They are asking if we would be interested in being a back-up offer.”



ASL Study Note: "House" and "Home" are different signs. It is a mistake to sign "House" when you mean "Home".

