

feminist activists before us, whose triumphs, disappointments, and occasional foibles provide invaluable lessons. And by communicating across class, race, and educational lines, we can build on the tremendous progress that older feminists have already made.

After all, making our message more accessible doesn't mean that we've been co-opted by the hegemonic capitalist patriarchy—or that we've sold out. It means we're getting savvy.

And only then will substance prevail over stereotype.

## LIVING THE LANSING DREAM

*Ted Kleine*

I went to high school at J. W. Sexton in Lansing, Michigan, a Depression-era brick fortress that sat across the street from a Fisher Body auto assembly plant. The plant was blocks long on each side and wrapped in a skin of corrugated steel painted a shade of green somewhere between the Statue of Liberty and mold. It loomed so near the high school that on football Fridays, when the Big Reds butted heads in Memorial Stadium, night-shift workers stood on balconies and watched the game.

A few times, I stood on Verlinden Avenue, along the plant's front face, and looked into the row of windows just below the roof. I hoped to see auto bodies jerking along in the progression from chassis to Caddy, but I was too low, the windows were too high, and all I could see were powerful ceiling lamps, beaming yellowish light on rooms full of mysterious auto work. General Motors, Fisher Body's parent company, wasn't releasing any industrial secrets, and they sure weren't letting any Sexton students in to take field trips or use the bathroom.

Back in the Factory Days, when Michigan-made cars ruled the roads, so many Sexton grads went to work for Fisher Body that there might as well have been a tunnel leading from the graduation stage to the Axle Line, or to the Oldsmobile factory, a mile away on Main Street. On a clear day, a Sexton student could see his future, and all avenues

led to a secure, middle-class life in a serene city full of UAW lapel pins.

Ransom Eli Olds built his first car in a workshop on River Street, and for years afterward, the city made a good living piecing together the ever-evolving models of R.E.O.'s buggy. A hotel and a freeway are named after Olds, and his initials have become a word: we have a Reo Street, a Reo School, and, until it burned in a spectacular fire in 1975, a Diamond Reo truck plant. R.E.O. Speedwagon, popular in Lansing since their bar band days, took their name from an early Olds car.

Getting hired at a Michigan auto plant in the old days was easier than getting drafted. A few days after his discharge, a World War II vet was walking down a street in Pontiac, in full uniform. As he passed an auto plant, a foreman ran out the front door and yelled, "Hey, Marine! You want a job?"

Even better is the tale of a young Flint gas jockey who did a fill-'er-up for a big shot in GM's personnel department.

"Why aren't you working in the shop?" the GM recruiter asked.

The gas jockey shrugged, so the recruiter took down his name and address. A week later, the young man received a letter in the mail asking him to report for a physical to determine his fitness for duty with the General. That was back in '72; the gas jockey is now a seasoned shoprat.

While Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev bragged about building a workers' paradise in Russia, we lived in one in Michigan: weekly pay stubs the size of Third World annual incomes, two cars in the driveway, and deer-hunting trips each November to the north woods, which were stocked like a royal game preserve. The shops offered blue-collar work at white-collar wages, so the riveter at Fisher Body earned as much as the fisheries biologist at the Department of Natural Resources, and they often lived in matching ranch houses in the same neighborhood.

My family was part of Lansing's other big industry. I was a state government brat. Throughout my entire childhood and adolescence, my dad worked as economist for the Michigan Department of Management and Budget. He took the job in 1966, when he was twenty-four and moved from

Maryland with my mother, who was six months pregnant with me and cried the whole trip.

As the auto industry boomed, so did the state bureaucracy. I always assumed that the state would one day have a place for me, too. If nothing better came along, I figured I could sit in an air-conditioned government cubicle and work as an editor at, say, the Department of Transportation. A state job was my birthright, but I didn't look forward to claiming it any more than the son of a shoprat looked forward to claiming his spot on the line.

Leaving home was never in my plans, though. My youth was spent plotting a way to be a writer and still live in Lansing. Journalism seemed like the best course, since the only time I ever read about Lansing was in the local paper, the *Lansing State Journal*. When I was eleven, I read a boy's biography of Thomas Edison, which described a newspaper he printed himself, then peddled on the train between Port Huron and Detroit. In a single page, it condensed the news of the world, with dispatches from England, France, and more exotic countries. This inspired my first journalistic effort, the *Lansing Eagle*, a lemonade-stand newsletter in which I ran articles on the Arab-Israeli situation, copied out of the *Detroit Free Press*, as well as local stories like "A Big Paint Mess," which began, "Someone dumped a bucket of paint on the sidewalk in front of the Barnes' house." The *Eagle* made me the Hearst of Christine Drive, where my "circulation director," a younger boy named Steve, sold the paper door-to-door for three cents, since I was too diffident for home solicitation.

Growing up in a subdivision on the western edge of town, I had no idea that Lansing was actually a city, with slums and factories. Beyond bicycle thefts, I knew nothing of crime. When a candidate for mayor campaigned on the slogan "For Safe Streets," I assumed he meant to fix the potholes. Although Lansing is stony cold and cloudy most of the year, when I recall my boyhood I am stuck with an image of the city in August. Locusts buzzed in the hot grass, and I sat out in the backyard reading *Baseball's Greatest Pen-nant Races*, the perfect combination of books and baseball, the only two things I cared about.

As I grew older, I discovered more of Lansing. For two weeks one summer, I delivered newspapers for a friend who lived in a compact brick house near St. Casimir's Church, about a mile from downtown. In its early years, his neighborhood had been Polish, and the houses were workers' issue: a living room, kitchen, basement, and a few bedrooms packed under the roof. Some of the factories were within walking distance. As I lofted copies of the *State Journal* onto the square concrete porches, I heard the iron hammering of the Lindell Drop Forge and smelled the oven-warm bread from Shafer's Bakery, an odor that made the humid air of summer taste lighter. The neighborhood was like an ethnic enclave of Chicago, although roomier, with bungalows and yards instead of row houses and stoops. The Catholic church was here, and so were the Polish Hall, the corner grocery stores (one fit to shop in, one run by a crazy widow who let food rot on the shelves), and the elementary school.

I came to love the city the way you would love a pond you had lived next to for years, or a forest you played in when you were a boy. Whenever I could, I walked or rode my bicycle around town, hoping to discover landmarks I hadn't seen before. Anything old, anything that suggested history, excited me: the brick arch in Durant Park, the plaque by the northside ice cream stand that marked the site of Lansing's first cabin. Sometimes, I even liked the greasy, rainbow-colored slick outside the Oldsmobile plant ("Old-smo-bile," I called the automaker's effluent.)

Lansing was a working town. Lansing—like Flint, Saginaw, or any other city of industry—takes on unpleasant burdens, often for meager rewards, so that towns such as Ann Arbor and Grosse Pointe can remain little green jewel-boxes unsmudged by factory exhaust. The factory workers live in my kind of town, the factory owners in the other. In the factory towns, a practical, almost grim attitude develops toward The Job. Even white-collar Joes say, "A job doesn't have to be something you like." Our local work ethic is to be competent as all hell while appearing thoroughly irritated by your duties. A baseball player from Lansing would demand time and a half for an extra-inning game, hit the winning home run, then have nothing to talk about when he

got home except the traffic on the way back from the park.

At heart, I knew I would always be a white-collar kid: I edited the school paper, earned a letter in cross-country, played on the Quiz Bowl team, and made plans to go to the University of Michigan. But not all my friends did the same. Mitch Kolhoff, whom I had admired since he used the word *fart* in a poem in tenth-grade English class, was the brightest, most thoughtful guy I knew at Sexton. He was in the Honor Society, partly because he had earned straight A's in construction class. (He was one of the only students strong enough to handle the jackhammer.) Mitch introduced me to punk rock, playing a tape of "The Shah Sleeps in Lee Harvey's Grave" by the Butthole Surfers, while we built sets for the school play in the basement of the auditorium.

Mitch, though, was not going to college. His father, who stocked vending machines, could not afford the tuition, so Mitch never bothered to apply, or even to take the college-prep classes that might have qualified him for a scholarship. After we graduated from Sexton, I went to the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, and Mitch stayed at home with his parents and got a job bussing tables at Kelly's, a downtown bar.

At college, my life was confined to a nine-by-twelve dorm room, my schedule defined by tests and term papers. I envied the freedom I imagined Mitch had. Compared to the uptight, career-mad preppies in Ann Arbor, he lived like a bohemian. On weekends, when I was home from school, we drove around in his sports car, holding forty-ounce bottles of beer on our laps, looking for an empty park to get drunk in. (Mitch, bald at eighteen, could buy at the less-discriminating liquor stores.) While the car stereo blasted Steppenwolf or Flipper, Mitch talked about his latest hobby. He was, depending on the week, a painter, a musician, a devotee of Taoism, or a student of karate. He read Carl Jung and Dostoevsky and took a class in Logic at Lansing Community College. He had no career plans but simply experienced whatever his mental appetites desired.

I felt aimless and alienated among the suburban-bred coffee achievers at the U of M, who thought my buzz cut and my Dead Kennedys records were stupid and didn't under-

stand why I never spent the weekend in the dorm. I was homesick for the grubby city I'd been reared in, and after a single semester in Ann Arbor's green groves of academe, I dropped out and enrolled at Lansing Community College—located in downtown Lansing, convenient to bus lines, sixteen dollars a credit, buy your books across the street at Chiwocha's Mini-Mart.

My motto became "Bloom where you were planted." Eventually, I landed at Michigan State, in East Lansing, which had been my collegiate ambition all along. At the campus newspaper, I was the Lansing reporter, writing features glorifying the city's eccentrics: a man who wanted to light the Capitol dome red, white, and blue, a city council candidate who claimed a fortune-teller had predicted she would win (wrongly, as you can guess). On Saturdays, I wrote and photocopied "97 Blocks," an underground dope sheet on Lansing politics, which I distributed at record stores and food co-ops all over town. The University of Michigan had made me feel depressed and mopish, but Michigan State invigorated me. There, I had a cause, which I attacked with preacherly zeal: telling MSU students the good news about the wonderful, colorful town that lay alongside their campus.

Most MSU students lived in fear of Lansing. They saw it as a Little Detroit, a menacing collection of blacks and red-necks that combined the worst elements of a hick town and a slum. Most had seen nothing but East Michigan Avenue, the seedy main strip that ran from the campus to the Capitol, and from its adult book stores and soup kitchens concluded that the entire city was unwholesome.

I carried on my mission in my circle of college friends. "Lansing is a good place to live," I told anyone I thought would believe me. "It's the best place." My girlfriend told me I had a "Lansing fetish."

The summer before I graduated from Michigan State, I worked as a stringer for the *State Journal*, and a few weeks before diploma time, I got a phone call: come to work as a part-time reporter, \$240 a week, nights, the police beat. It was the only job I'd ever wanted, in the only town I wanted to live in.

That winter should have been the happiest and most satisfying of my life. I had the job I had worked for all my youth. I rented a big house on the river, from which I planned to launch canoe trips once spring came. At Christmas, I was still enthralled with the city. We had a blizzard that night, and I trudged through the empty streets to watch snow swirl around a street lamp, the flakes glowing in the circle of waxy light. Then I walked down the river, to listen to the music of the cold water as it bubbled downstream, the only sound in all the still, snowy night. But that winter, I was assailed by feelings of boredom and an urge for adventure that could no longer be satisfied in Lansing.

By the time the sharp blue skies of December had been covered by the dingy, down-in-the-mouth clouds of January, I needed to leave. During those months when the days are gray and the nights long and black, I began to feel I was rotting. The paper gave me three days off each week, and I had trouble filling them: I read *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, I trained for a marathon, I took up cross-country skiing. When I was really desperate for stimulation, I shuffled up to the Vietnamese grocery and bought a Little Debbie jelly roll. In Michigan, wintertime is Miller time, all the time, and the shelves at my house began to fill with empty bottles, drained in front of the TV set. So what had happened? How had I slid from excitement to ennui in just a few months?

Well, first of all, I had graduated from college at the beginning of the winter. During my final term as a Michigan State Spartan, I had been consumed by my new job at the newspaper and a slate of esoteric humanities classes: Chaucer, English History, Philosophy of Language, and Christianity. Once I was handed my diploma, the entire structure of my life collapsed. For the first time, I had nothing to look ahead to. Four days a week, I wrote and reported for the *Lansing State Journal*, and every Thursday they gave me a check that took care of all my needs. What I did with my time off and my money was up to me. Not marching ahead, not tethered to an institution, I began to feel I was living a sort of weightless existence. Lansing had excited me because it was a place to grow. Now, I had acquired the marks of a

grown-up—a diploma, a job—and I wondered: What happens next?

I wrote to my younger brother in St. Louis and described my restlessness.

“I don’t know anyone who loves Lansing more than you,” he wrote back, “but I think you’ve gotten all you can out of the town.”

At the *State Journal*, the man I considered my mentor was a cranky, old-school newsman who still believed that all reporters should have bar tabs. He shunned all exercise except smoking and hoisting his belt up over his thirty-eight inch waist. He hated Lansing. He called all Michiganders “Mittenheads,” after the shape of the state, and vowed to commit suicide before his two-year anniversary at the *State Journal*. The very first time I asked him for career advice, he said, “Get the hell out of this state.”

So I did. It shocked my editors, whom I’d harangued endlessly with my hometown patriotism, but I announced I was quitting my job and moving to Albuquerque, New Mexico, a city I knew from having spent the night there during a spring-break trip the year before. What was I looking for? An unfamiliar city to explore, a job in which I could work forty hours a week, a bigger sky, and freedom. What was I giving up in Lansing? A part-time job with no benefits and take-home pay of \$9,500 a year. Nothing, or so I thought.

I blitzed every daily newspaper in New Mexico with my résumé, and three days before I was scheduled to leave town, I got a call from *The Albuquerque Tribune*, which I considered the most colorfully written newspaper in America. *The Albuquerque Tribune* wanted to interview me! I had never been so excited.

I traveled to New Mexico in a Ford Econoline van driven by my friend Jason Portier, who was lured to California by dreams of rock and roll fame. We arrived in New Mexico at sunrise on a Monday morning, after an all-night drive across the Texas desert. At the state line, I pulled the van to the side of the highway, leapt from the driver’s seat, and danced in the sand by the roadside, celebrating my arrival in my new home state.

I was in Albuquerque twelve days. During my interview,

I was promised a job as the *Tribune’s* University of New Mexico correspondent, but the next week, I got a phone call from an editor. There had been a budget cut. Perhaps I would like to try back in a couple of months. So a few weeks after I had left Lansing, bearing my hopes like a personal banner, this message appeared on computer screens at the *Lansing State Journal*: “Ted Kleine is back in town and looking for work.” No luck.

The city was so dismal that in November I left again, to seek my fortune in San Francisco. But though I had left Lansing again, I could not escape my memories of it. At night, after coming home from my job as a record-store clerk, I wrote short stories about a fictional city called Grand Banks, which was, in almost every way, a double for Lansing. Eventually, I began to believe in this romanticized version myself, and to want to go home to it. At the library, I checked out books on midwestern history, and I began to feel in myself the flame of a mission: I would go back home and write a book about what I called the “modern folkways” of the Upper Midwest: deer hunting, hockey, and oaczki, those lardy jelly doughnuts Detroit’s Poles eat before Lent. San Francisco had plenty of writers, I figured, and Michigan didn’t have enough.

I returned on a muggy Saturday morning in July of 1991, with four damp dollars in my pocket, and none in the bank. My car had broken down as I tried to cross the Sierra Nevada mountains, so I abandoned it and took a Greyhound bus across the country. After the bus let me off, I took a walk through downtown, which, after the taxi horns and monumental towers of San Francisco, seemed quieter and sparser than I remembered it. Then I phoned Mitch to ask for a ride to my mom’s house.

My first job was cleaning out the parking lot of a laundromat. I chopped the weeds that had grown through the fence around the lot and picked up broken bottles, candy wrappers, and used condoms. The ice-cream truck drove by every noon, and one day I bought popsicles for three children whose mother was washing clothes. The oldest boy asked to try my shovel, then inquired, “Do you have a real job?”

I only got a little way on my great book. I decided to write a chapter on "Hilbillies in the North," so for the last two months of the summer, I made several trips to Flint to interview southerners who had come north in the fifties and sixties, when Michigan was still a land of promise, to work in the auto factories.

Talking with the southern migrants, I began to realize what a bounty Michigan had once offered, and how far we had fallen. Most of the men got jobs in the factories within days, even hours, of arriving from Tennessee or Missouri. Nowadays, not even the canniest, string-pullingest scion of a three-generation Yoo-A-Dubya family can get a work boot in the door of an auto plant. The day after my class graduated, in 1985, the line of would-be autoworkers outside Fisher Body's personnel office looked like the ticket queue for a Van Halen concert. My guess is that most of those guys ended up working on landscape crews for four dollars an hour.

Industrial labor was once a young man's game, but now the average UAW auto worker is forty-six, an age that used to mean retirement time. Eventually, the middle-aged workers will retire and give way to a new generation of welders, tool-and-die makers, and quality-control inspectors, but young people graduating from high school in the eighties and nineties will probably never get a chance at a lucrative shop job. And I do mean lucrative: an average of \$16.75 an hour after the first ninety days. That's how much you make in a day on a half-time, minimum-wage job at an auto-parts store or a lumberyard, places you might find young men who were born too late to be autoworkers.

Today, if you're from a blue-collar family, and you're bright, you go to a community college or a small-town State U like Ferris State or Saginaw Valley State. There, you take a vocational program, something practical, like computer-assisted drafting. That enables you to get a seventeen-thousand-dollar-a-year job at an engineering company. Lots of people try this, but few seem to succeed. Lansing Community College, alias "Last Chance College," bills itself as "A Great Place to Start," but legion are the high-school grads who begin "taking some classes" there, then

drift away after a year or two and spend the rest of their young adulthood talking about how they're "thinking about going back to school." Those junior-college dropouts once would have had the factory to fall back on, but now it looks as though they're on the low road to postindustrial oblivion—a job in a warehouse, a room at Mom's, and a crappy Chevy with a worn-out tranny and a heater that blasts cold air.

It wasn't just the auto plants. You couldn't buy a good job anywhere in Michigan. By fall, I was broke, and I needed a regular job. I found one in a video rental store, where, I will freely admit, I was the worst employee ever. My lack of motivation might have had something to do with the wages: \$4.25 an hour, no raises. I filed the tapes at an arthritic pace and fantasized about ways to make the company go bankrupt. When the boss visited, I sneaked outside to spit on his Buick.

A year before, the video-store manager would have looked at my résumé (Michigan State University, *Lansing State Journal*) and asked, "Why would someone like you want a job like this?" But this was the fall of 1991, the pits of the recession, and it was understood that these were desperate times. And desperate men were ready to shelve copies of *Dumbo* for the minimum wage.

One day, as my dad and I ran along the riverfront, I went into my harangue about work. He told me that my friends and I had been born at the wrong time to find good jobs. Because he'd come of age in the sixties, during the biggest employment boom since the building of the pyramids, he'd been lucky in the job market. Sorry, son, better luck next life. What was I supposed to have done? Kicked out a Morse code message against Mom's womb: "MICHIGAN HEADED FOR FINANCIAL, ECONOMIC DISASTER. NO JOBS IN 25 YEARS. GO BACK TO MARYLAND." I blew up at my dad, falsely assuming he was being smug. Renting out copies of *T2* and *The Doors* had made me surly and cranky.

Throughout 1992, I searched for a real job, all the while working just enough to keep my belly above the starvation level. "Well, I guess these are my Ramen years," I sighed whenever I dropped a brick of pasta into a pot of boiling

water. My unemployment and poverty were my own damn fault, after all, I'd had a good job with the newspaper, and I'd quit. But I could still tell family friends, "There are no jobs out there" and receive a sympathetic reply.

If I had tried that dodge in 1967, I would have heard "(Fill in any business in the Yellow Pages) is hiring. Go down there and help build the Great Society." In the sixties, it seemed, there was so much work that the hippies had to construct an alternative system of morality to justify their indolence: "I'm not going to work to support a system that's carrying on an immoral war in Vietnam and pigs blah blah blah Mao blah blah blah." It was intellectually rigorous being too lazy to work back in the hippie days.

As a minimum-wage jerk-of-all-trades, one of my jobs involved going door-to-door, taking down names for the city directory. After a tiring, discouraging day during which I had a door slammed in my face ("I don't want to be in your directory!"), I was seized by regret over the dumb choices that had led me to that line of work.

It was becoming clear that Lansing had no use for me anymore. It hurt to find that out, because I wanted to stay in my hometown. I still wanted to write something that would define the "heart of Lansing." As a newsman, I hadn't been able to figure out what that was. Now I knew: at the heart of the Lansing experience was failure.

One concrete cold day in February, I was running up Michigan Avenue when I saw an old friend standing at a bus stop, head down, bundled into a thrift-shop tweed overcoat, a scarf, and a wool cap. Tam was not supposed to be at that bus stop. She was supposed to be in Chicago, working in a coffee shop.

I broke stride and called her name. She lifted her chin out of the warm bundle of wool around her neck, and her face opened in surprise when she saw me. I wasn't supposed to be on this street, either. I was supposed to be in San Francisco.

We both had complicated excuses for meeting at that Michigan Avenue bus stop. Tam had been fired from her waitressing job at about the same time her musician boyfriend was declaring his homesickness for Lansing. She read

the tea leaves, decided the sojourn to Chicago was a bust, and emptied the apartment into her boyfriend's car for the four-hour drive back to Square One.

In Lansing, she was managing a small suburban restaurant called the Travelers Club and Tuba Museum, earning less money than she had in Chicago. Now she was saying, with some regret, that she probably could have found another job if she had held on in Chicago.

Tam and I were both part of the same pathetic picture: having chucked our big-city dreams, we were reunited on this frozen, still-life afternoon in our small city. Being a washout meant having plenty of peers and commiserants. The rents were cheap—five people could crowd into a house for \$125 apiece—and the pressure to achieve something was nonexistent. In Tam's circle, postcollegiate slackers smoked pot, drank coffee in restaurants, watched videos late into the night, and listened to their friends' grunge bands play in cement basements.

In a myth, the hero travels to a distant place and returns with a gift that enriches his people. The story of Lansing was an antimyth. Young men and women ventured to a big city, like Chicago or Los Angeles, and returned, diminished and defeated. All my friends had made the round trip: Mitch had tried San Francisco, lasting three weeks. Even Jason Portier, my ride to New Mexico, came home for a while, to start a band. But after a few months, he realized that Lansing musicians play nowhere but three-dollar-cover college bars, and he drove back to L.A.

"This town is the Black Hole of Ambition," I carped. Young people came limping back into town with lame excuses like "I didn't know anyone in Los Angeles," or "I wanted to come back and get a band together," or "It was too expensive." I kept thinking of that R.E.M. song that runs: "Don't go back to Rockville/Waste another year." Those Georgia boys could have been singing about Lansing, Michigan.

Lansing was never a Horatio Alger town. If you wanted to be rich or famous, this was not the place. But it was once a city of promise. In the Factory Days, a Lansing life was simple and secure: a \$20,000 job as an engineer for Olds-

mobile. A new ranch house on Belaire Drive, walking distance from Frances Park and the Elks Club. A pew in St. Casimir's Church, your name on the list of donors to the building fund. A summer cottage on Duck Lake, where the Saturday air carried cool winds off the water. Each May, you hitched your sailboat to the tail of your Olds Delta 88 and drove the boat to the lake for the summer. That was the old Lansing Dream.

Young people can still find assembly work in Michigan, but it usually has nothing to do with cars. During my minimum-wage summer, I answered a newspaper ad for "assemblers" and ended up putting together Easter fruit baskets for Meijer, a local supermarket chain. Some of my coworkers had serious experience working on the line. My supervisor had been laid off from a factory and was building fruit baskets because "it beats watching soap operas." The guy who wrapped the baskets in cellophane was an ex-Oldsmobile shoprat who had lost his job when he refused a transfer to GM's Saturn plant in Tennessee. "In Lansing, they give you just enough to get by," said a friend of mine who was a forklift driver. "Enough to live on, but not enough to save and move on to something better."

That summer, I finally began to plot an escape. This time I was going to do what every slacker in Lansing and East Lansing fantasized about: I was going to ditch the city for good. I refused to endure another dirty winter of waking up at 6:30 A.M. to warm up my pickup truck for a drive through the slush to a \$4.50-an-hour temp job at a warehouse. That's what my life in this romantic city had come down to, and I finally came to the conclusion that eventually strikes every son of a dying town: life is elsewhere.

I should have realized that the first time I left when, shining with optimism, I quit the *State Journal* and ran away to New Mexico. After that, to expect to be welcomed home with hugs, kisses, and a full-time job was foolish. When I wrote to the *State Journal*, asking for another shot at journalism, my old employers didn't answer, not even with a rejection letter. After my year of low-wage jobs and low-rent living, I finally accepted that it was all over between me and Lansing.

And so I said the hell with Lansing, and I began working, diligently, to find a new home. Nearly every day, I set my manual typewriter on my bed and tapped out letters to companies all over the country, asking for a job. But job or no job, money or no money, prospects or no prospects, I was getting out of there. If my job search failed, I was going to move to Florida, where my grandmother owned a condominium. I'd heard there were good jobs in that state, even some newspapers starting up. Had I made the move, I would have helped close an ironic circle in Michigan history. In the fifties and sixties the southerners moved north to escape worn-out hometowns. In the eighties and nineties the northerners migrated south, for the very same reason.

I didn't go to Florida, though. Instead, I had some luck. A magazine in Washington, D.C., chose me as an intern (\$5.25 an hour? Thank You, Thank You, THANK YOU). During three months in the capital, I issued even more résumés and letters and found my first real job, at a newspaper in Illinois.

Lansing has produced other refugees, young people who realize there is no profit in living in Lansing and are working to stay away for good. Jason Portier is in Atlanta, where he is the bassist for a blues-rock band. They have a recording contract, or so I hear. Tam lives in Chicago again and swears that "my every action is motivated by a desire to stay out of Lansing." Wherever we are, we have one thing in common. We are living the new Lansing Dream, which is to say, we're not living in Lansing anymore.