

Hip Displacement

How I learned to stop worrying and love the burbs. *By* DAN MORRELL

WHEN MY WIFE AND I LEFT OUR CRAMPED ONE-bedroom apartment in downtown Boston to buy a single-family home beyond the farthest reaches of the city's subway system, I was supposed to hate it.

I have always seen myself as a part of an urban counter-culture. I was a graffiti artist (or at least what passed for one at my tiny high school). I listen to obscure music, the kind that seems to be written only to make other people feel ashamed of their pop records. I wear a lot of clothes purchased at secondhand stores, ironic enough to be confusing. It's a finely tuned aesthetic, born from teen angst and cultivated into a lazy, lifelong rebellion.

But when I heard the piano-clink of the ice cream truck meandering down my tree-lined street toward my new house, all those years of anti-establishment ethics were forgotten. Suddenly, I was waiting with great anticipation to see if Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle pops have changed over the past 20 years.

Life outside the loop, this signified to me, could be enjoyable. Out where things are more Crate and Barrel than concrete jungle, the neighbors bring brownies when you move in. Block parties have inflatable water slides, and the firemen will bring the truck by for the neighborhood kids to see. All of these are good, happy things, so I am allowing myself to stop caring that Bob Dylan and Johnny Rotten have written songs deriding my very existence.

At first, I couldn't understand why it was so easy for me to adapt to life here in Pleasantville. But as I resign myself to becoming culturally obsolete, I've realized that being culturally obsolete may have been a big part of who I am for quite some time. My favorite claims from trips to hipster outlets like the Salvation Army are used Brooks Brothers shirts, and I'm proud to announce in social situations their low, low price. I drive a Ford Taurus (complete with tape deck) that I purchased when I was 26, when you'd think my hipness would have been at its apex. I have had two hairstyles in 15 years—one with a part, one without. I am well known among my friends for enjoying a meal at a solid chain restaurant.

Plus, as much as I professed my love of city life, it was never a perfect fit. It's not as if my urban experience involved lots of hanging out on the stoop with my neighborhood sitcom cast, drinking PBR, talking about our favorite Sam Cooke records, and disparaging passing adults. Instead, my routine generally involved coming straight home, putting on sweatpants, and firing up the laptop to check on the progress of my fantasy baseball team. Finally surrendering in this 20-year losing

battle with coolness has almost been a relief.

So I'm going to embrace it. I'm going to learn the actual names of my neighbors, and not just refer to them as, say, Emotionally Disturbed Violinist Down The Hall. I'll mow the lawn and make small talk about the Red Sox and buy Girl Scout cookies and gossip over the fence. And not because I feel the need to play a role or a type, but because I think I truly want to be a part of this kind of place. Maybe, after two decades spent trying to find my place in album liner notes and punk rock lyrics, I've finally found my home.

So I'll see you at the PTA meeting, fellow adults. I'll be the one wearing the pretentious T-shirt and telling everyone how cheap my pants are.

Dan Morrell, a former senior editor of *The Penn Stater*, is a freelance writer in Boston. Suburban Boston, that is.

