



NEW YORK

state of mind

Tales from an aspiring writer

by shaun gunning '94

When I graduated from Adrian 10 years ago, I would have laughed in your face if you'd told me I'd be living in New York City. New York seemed too large and too foreign. It's the capital of capitalism, it's the anti-me. Yet here I am, hopelessly in love with a city that could take me or leave me.

My years at Adrian College were a very pleasant time spent bumbling around finding my artistic self. Professors like Diane Henningfeld [English] and Michael Allen [theatre] were instrumental in helping me believe in myself as a writer. Every week, four or five friends and I would meet in Diane's office to read aloud things we had written. Even after I graduated, Michael Allen was incredibly supportive when I approached him about producing a show I had written in the summer of 1995. To me, these professors were saying, "Decide what you want to be, and I will help you."

I decided I wanted to be a writer and so I moved to New York City. Frank Sinatra said if you can make it here, you can make it anywhere. When I first arrived, I was sure he was talking about just making it day to day. This wasn't little Adrian, Mich., anymore. It was

Adrian on crack AND steroids.

So, I essentially had to re-learn how to survive. I couldn't think about writing when every other day I was getting lost on the subway. Police sirens and car alarms kept me up at night. Cabbies yelling in their native language at pedestrians or other drivers kept me constantly on edge. New York was a playground for anger management gurus.

One day in Central Park, a threatening looking gentleman passed by and, forming a gun with his fingers, pretending to "bust a cap" in my brother and me. "That easy," he said as he walked by, "that easy."

It took me about a year to feel se-

"If I can make it there, I'll make it anywhere."

-"New York, New York," Frank Sinatra

cure that some bored punk wouldn't shoot me in the face. There is always something in New York that can shock you. You see things you never imagined almost daily, but you get used to it. These events became less threatening and more inspiring. I started setting my alarm for 5 a.m. to write. I couldn't STOP writing. New York had gotten under my skin and inspired me.

But writing - like all art in NYC - is business first and business isn't exactly my forte. The first thing to realize is that no one cares about your inspiration. They care about whether your product will make money. So after I finished my first novel, I sought to get it published, but first I had to write a syn-

opsis and cover letters and outlines. Then you're done. Now all that's left is to sit and wait for the rejection letters to pour in, and pour in they did.

But you take the good with the bad. After the novel, I wrote a one-act that was produced by a theatre company here in 2001. It was nice to follow a defeat with a victory. Plus the theatre is great for a writer in need of an ego boost. Not a word got changed without my consent. And yes, every single word was perfect as is.

Then 9/11 happened and writing took a back seat to survival. Why should I write? What was there to say anymore? For weeks, I sat and stared at the blank page on my computer, the smell of electrical fires burning at Ground Zero wafting through my window.

But life goes on and hope springs eternal, as corny as that sounds. New York at least has the illusion of security now and the cabbies are yelling at each other again, so at least some normalcy has returned. New York continues to inspire me and had it not been for a great support group in my brother, friends and therapist, I wouldn't be able to come home from work every day and write. One thing is certain. I have a sense of clarity in writing I never would have gotten anywhere else in the world. Moving to New York was the best decision I ever made.

Kevin Gunning '94



Shaun Gunning '94 has written and produced several plays and is a member of the Astoria Performing Arts Center in New York City. He's been revising a new play and working on a second novel. In his free time he plays original music at open mic nights around the city with his brother, Kevin.

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