

By LESLIE SAMPSON

# Lessons From My Past

**T**HE OTHER DAY, I found a letter that my mom wrote me years ago, during the worst time of my life – while I was homeless on the streets of Boston. In the letter, she berated me for running away from my Chicago home, for running away from myself.

But it all seemed like such a good idea at the time. You see, I was a high school outcast. While my classmates were into the latest fashions and music, I wore black and listened to The Beatles. Then, when I was 16, I started listening to the New Kids on the Block. Only the “popular” kids liked them, and for the first time, I had friends. It had nothing to do with who I was as a person – but I didn’t know that then.

Then, two weeks after my 17th birthday, my mom and stepfather split up, and my mother and I moved to Kentucky, which I hated. As soon as I turned 18, I returned to Chicago to stay with my stepdad. Our relationship was shaky – he’d begun to blame me for the divorce. To get out of the house and make some money, I took a job as a waitress. At the restaurant, I ran into an acquaintance from high school. Lori and I had been in the same home-room, and we were both New Kids fans. I got to know her better at work, and we bonded. Shortly thereafter, in the dead of winter, my stepfather and I had a huge fight. Usually I listened as he accused me of ruining his marriage. But that night, I stood up to him. He threw me out.

Lori picked me up and suggested that we leave everything behind and drive to Boston. In my vulnerable state, it sounded like a pretty good idea. I didn’t want to return to Kentucky, and the New Kids lived in Boston. I packed the next day, while my stepdad was at work, and then we took off. With nowhere to stay, we lived in Lori’s car. In the mornings, we’d find a gas station with a bathroom.

We’d wash up in the sink and use the hand drier on our hair. We spent our days searching for work. At night, we’d drive to a nice neighborhood and park, laying the car’s seats flat so that no one could see we were inside.

After two weeks of this, we stopped at a gas station to inquire about jobs, and Lori struck up a conversation with the woman behind the counter. When she heard that we lived in Lori’s car, the woman invited us to stay in her cellar. She was a New Kids fan, too, and she said she’d help

us until we got on our feet. She also got us jobs at the McDonald’s next door.

Lori and I worked different shifts, and she would keep the car and park it. I didn’t know about taking the subway, so I’d walk about a mile and a half to work every day. I couldn’t afford new shoes, so I wore my thin canvas tennis sneakers. As winter wore on, I lost sensation in my fingers and toes. I was constantly shivering, filthy. Living near my favorite rock band was beginning to lose its luster. Meanwhile, Lori bonded with our landlord, and she invited her to

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IN PURSUIT  
OF MY FAVORITE  
BAND, I RAN  
AWAY TO BOSTON  
AND ENDED UP  
ON THE STREETS.  
REFLECTING ON  
WHAT IT MEANS  
TO BE “HOME.”

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