This is what it's like to sit down and write a column about LeBron James leaving the Cavaliers and Northeast Ohio behind:

I'm sitting on the balcony of my new apartment in Willowick on a summer morning. It's the first time in a week that the heat and humidity have relented to the point that sitting on the balcony is reasonably comfortable.

Off to my right, Lake Erie. Directly in front of me, the complex's other building. Off to my left, the shopping center across the street, framed by green trees to the horizon.

Right, center, left. Left, center, right. No words coming to mind. No entry point emerging. I keep looking up from my laptop screen in an endless oscillation from vista to vista, side to side.

LeBron James is too big of a character. He meant too much to the region. There were so many other players involved in this production. It's stunningly complex, will be a painful subject for years to come, and can't possibly all be understood by viewing the saga through a single prism. I truly have no idea where to begin.

After some time has passed and the longer morning shadows begin to slip under the balcony railings on the other building, a breakthrough – sort of. Art gives way to science. The only way to understand this is to chew, swallow and digest. Break everything down into its constituent parts.

I scan across my panorama one more time, then look back down at my screen with a little bit more purpose.

We gave LeBron too much credit for being one of us.

Something about Clevelanders – we really want and need to believe that our heroes identify with us. That they sympathize with our pain as fans and want to make it right. We projected that onto LeBron more than anyone because of where he was born.

LeBron makes mention of The Drive and The Fumble, and it tugs at our heartstrings. He gets on stage at a Rock the Vote concert and tells us he loves us and he's not going anywhere, and it makes us fall in love all over again.

To LeBron, however, it was likely forgotten as soon as he said it. He didn't remember until some guy with a microphone asked him about it.

It's not slick marketing or self-promotion. It's the in-the-moment utterances of a kid who is fascinated by his ability to manipulate the masses.

Truth is, LeBron isn't one of us. He stopped being one of us as soon as Nike made him a millionaire before he was drafted in 2003. He never espoused the same values, he was never "in touch" with what we were feeling, he never had a special connection to the area he called home. Not any more so than you or me. And plenty among us would prefer to live among palm trees if given the chance. It's only being honest.

LeBron is Hollywood. He is Manhattan. He is South Beach. He is a jet setter, one of the beautiful people, rich beyond the wildest dreams of 99.5 percent of the American population. The only thing that attaches him to Ohio is his birth certificate. His lifestyle, his values, his acquaintances, none of it was at home in our unglamorous, unremarkable region.

In Miami, he'll be able to indulge in every trapping of celebrity 101 for young males: fast cars, beautiful women, exclusive dance clubs, VIP parties. And he'll be able to do it after every home game. At age 25, the spoils of a town like Miami are a major benefit for someone like LeBron, who is known for hosting his share of jet-set shindigs.

David Justice had much the same attitude when he played for the Indians. Cleveland, he thought, had nice enough people, but the town just wasn't his scene. His teammates nicknamed him "GQ" for a reason. Of course, when Justice departed via trade in 2000, he did so much more gracefully and graciously than LeBron just did.

Maybe it wasn't the deciding factor in why LeBron left for the Miami Heat, but there wasn't a lot beyond basketball keeping LeBron here. Which is 180 degrees from what we believed (or wanted to believe) prior to the past week.

Can you make LBJ the centerpiece of a championship team? Maybe not.

Prior to LeBron's defection, common wisdom stated that all great players wanted to have their own team, so obviously LeBron would never want to join forces with another alpha dog. You would never have seen Michael Jordan team with Magic Johnson, Isiah Thomas or Larry Bird. Not on the NBA stage, anyway.

There was the dynamic between Shaquille O'Neal and Kobe Bryant on the Lakers teams of early last decade, but those two thrived on being adversaries, constantly one-upping each other. And neither could lay claim to having been a Laker first. Both arrived in Los Angeles in the summer of 1996.

LeBron has shown now that he does not think like that, possibly because he's simply not an alpha dog. That's not his personality, no matter how much he is marketed to the contrary.

He is, plainly put, going to Dwyane Wade's team. When Wade, LeBron and Chris Bosh were unveiled in their Heat uniforms on Friday, LeBron and Bosh flanked Wade. That is the team dynamic in Miami moving forward. No matter how far Wade scoots over on the pedestal, the highest perch can only hold one pair of shoes. And those belong to Wade.

Second-in-command might be the ranking for which LeBron is the most suited. This is a guy who has never looked totally at ease taking the last shot. A guy who has never totally grasped the concept of what it means to make your teammates better. A guy who has shown through his actions that his competitive fire doesn't burn as brightly as it does with some other great players. That he is not above shutting down mentally when a nagging injury means he might look less than dominant on the court.

In other words, LeBron might be totally cool with letting someone else take the last shot. Whether it's a fear of failure and/or being the goat, or that he simply isn't the assassin that Kobe is and Jordan was, he might be more comfortable inbounding the ball to Wade and getting out of the way when the clock is about to reach "0.0."

So if LeBron is fine with never being held in the same esteem as Kobe, Jordan, Magic or Bird – and, judging by the fact that he has agreed to join another superstar's team, he is – the move to Miami might be a stroke of brilliance for LeBron. It means winning with a vastly reduced pressure factor. Perfect for a guy who might have been miscast as a king all along.

There is no "LBJ" in "team."

With all of that in mind, it was quite possibly a futile pursuit to try and build a championship team around LeBron. And if that is the case, it was definitely misguided for Dan Gilbert and Danny Ferry to make LeBron the foundation of the entire organization.

LeBron couldn't help but overshadow every player the Cavs put alongside him. It led to the widely-held belief around the country that, year in and year out, the Cavs roster consisted of LeBron and a band of scrubs – an assertion that might have been closer to fact five years ago, but certainly not over the past two seasons.

If we can assume that LeBron will function better as part of an ensemble of superstars, that surely wasn't going to happen in Cleveland. As a result, no matter who the Cavs put around LBJ, he would always block out the Sun for his teammates with his massive presence.

It's not healthy for one player to carry so much weight on a team. And with the Cavs, LBJ's

influence extended to all parts of the organization – from the locker room all the way up to the owner's office. If you put every last egg in the basket of one player, it's almost certainly a recipe for disaster. This past Thursday evening, the earthquake hit.

Is it possible to sell out for winning?

I used to think that giving up money for the sake of winning was noble. Then I saw LeBron give up everything he had supposedly stood for to this point in his life in the name of chasing rings. And I now realize that obsessively coveting anything – be it money, fame, championships or anything else – can corrupt a person.

This is the topic that cuts right to the heart of our hurt as a city and region.

We wanted LeBron to stick with us until he delivered a championship to the city. To recognize that it will be a hard road to the top, riddled with disappointment and setbacks, but the tougher the journey, the sweeter the victory. We wanted him to embrace the burden of being Cleveland's sports savior, recognizing that some of the greatest players in NBA history had to wait for the balance of their careers – sometimes until quite late in their careers – before they tasted a drop of championship champagne.

We wanted him to acknowledge that championships are extremely hard to capture, aren't a birthright, and to continue to fight the good fight, figuring out new ways to exercise his vast talents, until the last pieces fell into place and the long-sought title was achieved.

That would have been the harder route to take, but the route with more honor.

But that's not the route LeBron took. Haunted by visions of being, as he put it, "31 with bad knees and no titles," LeBron abandoned his home region, sold out any chance of being perceived as loyal ever again, and any hope of becoming a self-made champion, in favor of trying to stamp out championships assembly-line style on a ready-made contender in Miami.

In a quarter-century, 50-year-old LeBron might look back and think 25-year-old LeBron was pretty stupid. But right now, 25-year-old LeBron thinks this is a good idea.

Perhaps the greatest error in LBJ's line of thinking is the concept of "his time." Jordan had his time. Kobe is having his time. The assumption with LeBron has always been that, at some point, every great player has his dynasty. And if you don't have a dynasty, you aren't a great player.

So after being turned back in the playoffs the past two years, LeBron panicked. Now he's trying to force-feed a dynasty into existence with Wade and Bosh. It might happen. But when LeBron looks back after his career at how it was all achieved, he might realize that the rings aren't as shiny as he thought they would be, considering what he had to give up to win them.

LeBron is a monster created.

It takes a lot of work from a lot of people to turn a kid from a green 18-year-old rookie into

someone narcissistic enough to have his free agency decision broadcast on an hour-long nationally televised special. Vain enough to demand that pursuing teams visit him, not the other way around. Callous enough to completely cut off communication with Cavs owner Dan Gilbert in the days leading up to his decision.

When you seldom hear “no,” when everyone around you is mostly interested in pleasing you, lest they get booted out of your circle of trust, chances are your ego will overinflate and your sensitivity toward other people will begin to erode. If everyone around you is figuratively casting rose petals at your feet, sooner or later you’ll really believe that you are better than everyone else, and that no spectacle is too great a display for you.

You will also begin to believe that you owe nothing to anyone, that you can toy with the people swirling around your personal vortex, and if you cause damage to them or their endeavors, that’s their problem.

LeBron has been doing this for a few years now. He damaged the Cavs’ ability to sign free agents by not committing to the team long term. Last summer, Trevor Ariza balked at taking the Cavs’ midlevel exception offer because of the uncertainty surrounding LeBron. The uncertainty of LeBron’s future ramrodded the Cavs into an “all or nothing” mindset, making trades with only the present in mind, and in the case of the Antawn Jamison deal this past February, saddling the team with an aging player signed to an expensive long-term contract. It’s a move the Cavs might not have made if not under the threat of losing LeBron to free agency.

Of course, it does take two to tango, and former GM Danny Ferry wasn’t forced to add Jamison, or Shaq, or anyone else. But the common – and correct – assumption is if the Cavs didn’t show LBJ they were doing everything in their power to win a championship, it would significantly damage their leverage at the bargaining table this summer.

LeBron might have had a Miami rendezvous with Bosh and Wade in the works since the Olympics in 2008. It might have been his first choice all along. But whether it was or it wasn’t, he strung the Cavs along since then, damaged their ability to improve the team, possibly damaged their cap flexibility in the short-to-medium term, all in the name of stoking the fire of intrigue this summer.

Then, when the summer finally arrived, he messed around some more, waited until most of the other major free agents committed somewhere, then left the Cavs, and to a lesser extent the Bulls and Knicks, holding the bag.

Even in the cutthroat world of professional sports, you don’t work other people over like that unless you have a massive superiority complex.

But for a guy who has spent his adult life ruling over everything he surveys, the results are predictable.

So, where to go from here?

I'd like to tell you that the Cavs are better off without LeBron. That they can just as easily do without the manipulation of a destructively narcissistic and egotistical 25 year old.

But the Cavs aren't better off. They're worse off, and will be for quite some time. Even if LBJ will never ascend to the levels of Kobe or Jordan in the spectrum of NBA all-time greatness, he is still a superstar who made playoff 1-seeds and later-round postseason appearances possible. Now, that's not possible for the Cavs anymore.

Dan Gilbert and new GM Chris Grant have said, at varying decibel levels, that the Cavs will remain committed to winning, both in the short and long term. Perhaps words meant to cushion the blow to their season ticket renewals. But I wonder if that is the right path.

Unless the Cavs can get another superstar in a trade, or at least several star-caliber players, it will be extremely difficult to rise above the low playoff seeds in the coming years. And that is the worst place to be for an NBA team – not good enough to contend for a title, not bad enough to draft high enough for star-level talent.

There is absolutely no reason to stay on a treadmill of 35 to 45-win seasons, year after year. But that is where I fear the Cavs will land if Gilbert refuses to sign off on a rebuild.

The windfall trade that replenishes the team with star power may be out there. The Cavs have negotiated a sign-and-trade to complete LeBron's acquisition by Miami. The sign-and-trade will deliver a large trade exception and a package of draft picks – which might be used soon as part of a badly-needed "big splash" deal.

But a deal like that isn't guaranteed. And even if the Cavs manage to rebuild the roster in short order, the Eastern Conference is so stacked at the top with potential powerhouses like Miami, Boston, Orlando, Atlanta and Chicago, it will be very tough for a post-LeBron Cavs team to swim upstream against that current over the next few seasons.

But the Cavs do have assets which they can use to get better, and Gilbert seems more determined than ever to outmaneuver LeBron's defection. There is no apparent reason the Cavs should need to bottom out to the pre-LeBron levels of the 2002-03 season, when the team went 17-65. But in a league driven by star power, the Cavs don't have any right now, and until that changes, they aren't going to have much weight to throw around in the East.

After getting all of that off my chest, I exhale, relax the muscles around my eyes and let the light flow back in.

As I type out those last few paragraphs, I glance up from my monitor and gaze out at the lake – at its midsummer blue best. Sailboats are on the water. Earlier in the morning, an ore carrier cruised in the distance from west to east.

Off to my left, there are still cars on the road, still people walking into the supermarket in the shopping center across the way. LeBron is no longer a Cav, and life still goes on under a sunny, warm early July blessing of a day.

It turns out that maybe … just maybe … LeBron James isn’t that important to life in Northeast Ohio after all. And that’s a very empowering thought.