One of our more popular columns, long time readers of "Moot Points" know that native and current Clevelander Hiko used to live in both NY (1991-1995) and just outside LA (1998-2002). And it was a nostalgic last week for him as he headed off with Elektra for the Big Apple for a long weekend to attend a buddies wedding, and also saw his former hometown in California burn away in the wild fires. Hiko talks about his trip, his former hometown, and a Buckeyes/LSU title game in the latest edition of Moot.

OR

If I Can Make It There

From 1991 through 1995, I lived in New York City.

I went to NYU. My first two years, I lived on campus. My last two years, I lived in an apartment on 22nd and 1st. I had a plethora of jobs while I was there, including working at Macy's, a sound stage, a photo syndication company, and as a bike messenger.

Although, at the end, I was ready to leave, I loved living in New York. It's a great city.

Needless to say, it was great to be back last weekend. For numerous reasons, I hadn't been there since 1998, which is far too long.

Elektra and I went because one of my friends from CA was getting married on Long Island. He lives in LA, but he's from New York, and all his family still lives in the area. His wife is from China, and her parents couldn't get a visa, so obviously it made the most sense to move the wedding plans back to the East Coast.

We arrived on Thursday evening, taking a cab from LaGuardia to our hotel near Times Square. I must admit I wasn't thrilled about the locale, since Times Square is probably my least favorite area of New York City. But all was well, as we found a spectacular sushi restaurant just a few blocks away. The fatty tuna just melted in one's mouth, like meaty butter. Sadly, there is no remote equivalent in the state of Ohio.

Afterwards, it seemed logical to traipse to an Irish pub to commence serious drinking. We found a place on 45th Street that had a smoking balcony, which is fantastic as, like Ohio, New York has banned smoking from any indoor structures save nursery schools and retirement homes. Leaving Elektra on the balcony, I went in to get us some barley treats. Upon my return, I found that she had struck up a conversation with a few

other people, including a woman named Courtney. She had asked Elektra where we were from, and Elektra informed her we had come from the Buckeye State.

After talking for a few minutes, something I said struck Courtney as funny, and she insisted upon giving me a uncomfortably prolonged hug. After which, she grabbed my arm and touched my stomach and said "*Woo! Every part of this guy is hard.*
"

No, dear. That's just gas. This is easily the fattest I've ever been in my life.

Fortunately, my marked disinterest caused Courtney to hit on other individuals, and I ended up talking to one of her co-workers. "*I've never been to Ohio*," she admitted. "
It must be a strange place to live. Do any black people live there?
"

"*Yes,*" I replied. "*Some just moved in last week. We're all very excited*
."

She stared at me incredulously, then said "*You're kidding, right?*
"

"*11 and a half million people live in Ohio*," I explained. "
Shockingly enough, not all of them are white.
"

If the New Yorker has a flaw, it is self-absorption. I love New Yorkers. They are good, intelligent, interesting people that don't blow sunshine up your ass and can converse on a number of topics. But they have a surprisingly limited idea of what the "outside world" is like. When I first moved to New York, I was amused to learn that most of my new friends pictured Ohio as a vast field of corn, broken only by a few farmhouses and the occasional cow. The fact that Ohio

housed 3 major cities and several other minor cities didn't seem to register with them.

I clearly recall a New Yorker that had a self mocking picture on his wall: it was a drawing of a view of the United States looking from New York towards the West Coast. Half the picture was New York - Brooklyn and Queens, then Manhattan. Following that was a much thinner chunk of land labeled "New Jersey". Then a chunk of land - nay, a line - labeled "The Midwest". Then a line labeled "Rocky Mountains", a line labeled "California", and the Pacific Ocean.

Regardless, we had many good conversations, including talking to a really good guy in town from Cleveland (and - amazingly - he was black!) We ended up heading for the hotel around 3:30 for a crash and renew.

The next morning, Friday, we went to see my old roommate Antoinette, her husband Reynaldo, and their little baby Cedar. One of those names is real. You get to

guess.

They have an apartment down in the East Village in an area that was dicey at best when I lived in town, but now was quickly up and coming. Their place was very nice for NYC - it actually had a second storey - but would be considered quite small in Ohio, perhaps 900 square feet. Reynaldo was fixing it up - he's a carpenter on one of those home improvement shows on HGTV, and quite skilled. Their intent is to re-do the place and sell it and move back to Australia (Reynaldo's an Aussie) now that they have a child, and New York City is a very expensive place as it is without adding astronomical child care costs into the mix.

They might be able to get a million dollars for their place. That's some expensive real estate.

We went out for lunch, and Reynaldo and I downed several mimosas. He's quite a good guy, but I'd only met him once before, and that was perhaps my most embarrassing drunken extravaganza of all time (and

there have been many). It was great to see them - they haven't changed at all, except there was a lot more breastfeeding than there used to be. But we had many places to visit and limited time, so we regretfully had to go.

After a brief stroll around the NYU Campus (a stroll down memory lane, if you will), we hopped a subway up to the Met (Metropolitan Museum of Art). I'd been hyping the sucker to Elektra for years, and there it finally was, occupying a vast chunk of Central Park's east side.

We wandered around the museum for perhaps 2 hours before we finally decided to head over to the section that Elektra was most eagerly awaiting - the Impressionism/Post-Impressionism wing. I've been to that museum perhaps 50 times, and knew exactly which way to go, but it seemed that all paths that lead there were blocked off. Something mysterious was afoot.

Yes, sadly, the whole wing was shut off for reconstruction. Every last piece of artwork - and there

are MANY - were off limits. Elektra just stared uncomprehendingly at the barricades, muttering forlornly "*No Monet? No Van Gogh? No Degas? No Seurat?* "

"*It's OK, baby. We'll go to the MOMA (Museum of Modern Art). You can see your Monets there* . "

That was a lie. We never did get there.

After the museum, we sat in a bar on the Upper East Side for a while, drinking beer and talking. We stayed long enough that the bartender gave me a complementary shot of Wild Turkey. God, I love New Yorkers.

We were supposed to meet some friends that were in town for the wedding, but the groom got himself a cold and they cancelled the event. Which was fine, as we were beat from the previous night, so we went and got

some steak and called it a night.

On Saturday morning, we got up, packed our shit, and checked it downstairs. We trekked out to the MOMA to get Elektra her Monets, walking up about 15 blocks of Midtown 5th Ave. Tourists galore, gawking, taking pics, acting a fool. " *Stupid tourists*," I muttered. See how easily I slipped back into my New York frame of mind?

However, the line for the MOMA was almost out the door, and we were on a time schedule to get back to the hotel, get our stuff, get to Penn Station, and catch the LIRR to Great Neck for the wedding. So we opted to hit FAO Schwarz instead, where I spent most of my time drooling over all the cool Lego stuff they had, including the life-size Darth Vader made entirely of little black Lego blocks. "*Ooooo*," I gaped. "
Big Darth Vader
."

Shortly, we were on the train. We timed it perfectly. We got off the train in Great Neck and had just enough time to walk to our hotel, check in, have adult relations, shower, get dressed, and stroll downstairs to where the shuttle van was supposed to waiting to take us to the wedding. The shuttle van did arrive - 15 minutes late - and the driver asked us where we were supposed to go. "*I don't know, we kind of assumed you would know* ," we told him. " *Long Island ain't our turf* ."

After another 15 minutes of confusion, we all - about 14 of us - crowded into the van. Since we were already running late, it seemed like a good idea for the driver to stop and get some cigarettes and go to the bathroom. By the time we arrived at the wedding locale, we were 45 minutes late.

It was all good however, since there was no

possible way that they were going to start the wedding without yours truly (or, perhaps, the actual family members that were in the van with us). The wedding was short and sweet, and then I got to talk to another of my old roommates from NYC, Serge, and his wife and young son.

It was great to see them too. Way too much time elapses between the visits with these people that I care about. Such is life.

Dewars on the rocks was my drink du jour for the wedding, and God bless open bars. The memories are good - but blurry. At one point, I called DJC to check on the score of the Buckeyes game. "*37-7, Ohio State*
," he told me. "
And our friend Achmud is thinking about getting back with his ex-wife
."

"*No, that won't do at all!*" I blurted. " *Did he just eat a retard sandwich?* "

Inevitably, time passed, and we all boarded the shuttle van back to the hotel. Serge's wife and son left with his parents, but Serge came with us, and we desperately searched the town of Great Neck for a bar. It was a fruitless venture. Apparently, at 11 pm, the only open bar on the snooty North Shore is at the hotel.

We shut that one too. We said our goodbyes and headed our separate ways around 4:30 am.

If you read this week's Brown's Outsider (and actually had the perseverance to get past the first few paragraphs), you will already have known what happened next:

To sum up - On Sunday morning, we were hung over, we got up late, we checked out late, and we got on the train back to the city late. I had every intention of going to a Browns Backers bar to watch the CLE-STL football competition, but it was about 3 pm before we even got checked into the hotel, by which time we said "Flock it" and walked up to Central Park.

Sunday was the first nice day we'd had since we got to the city, and it was a perfect time to hit the park. Elektra submitted the same response that everyone new to city elicits when I take them to Central Park for the first time: I had no idea it was so large and so beautiful.

That was another memory lane trek... there's a tunnel where we shot a scene for my freshman vampire movie... there's a field we used to come to and play football on Saturdays... there's a rock where Antoinette and I shroomed and shot people

with a squirt gun full of wine cooler.

Night descended, and it was time to board the subway once more to change and get some more sushi. There is little in this world more fantabulous than good sushi.

The next morning, Monday, we had just enough time to see Antoinette, Reynaldo, and Cedar again at a coffee shop before hailing a cab and heading for the airport and home. During that last walk, I was a bit sad. I was comfortable here, and I hadn't realized how much I'd missed it. True, I could never afford to live in NYC again, and I wouldn't even want to, not with my daughters in the mix. But I was struck by how a place that was constantly changing hadn't changed at all since 1998.

Well, I guess that's not entirely true. There were a few new buildings in Midtown. And two really big

ones were missing Downtown.

Two hours later, we were flying over it, away from it. Back to life. Back to reality.

***From 1998 through 2002, I lived in Running Springs, CA, a small town in the San Bernardino Mountains of Southern California, about 2 hours outside of LA.

I lived in a little 2 storey, 2 bedroom, 2 bathroom house at about 6500 feet. When it snowed up there, and it snowed up there often, it would come down in 2 to 3 feet accumulations. You'd just call work and say "*Sorry - ain't comin' in. Can't see the road. Can't see my truck.*
"

In the summer, the hottest it ever got was about 80 degrees. The house had a fireplace, but no air conditioning. It wasn't necessary. It would be 60 degrees at night even in July.

The house had a huge deck out back that was probably 30 feet off the ground, since the house was built on a slope (the whole town was built on a slope). The deck faced the Los Angeles basin. On a clear day, after a rain, you could see to the ocean. Many days, the clouds would converge in the valley like a huge white quilt, and it would appear that you were living on green hills that floated in the sky.

It was a great house.

There were some wildfires in Southern California the last couple weeks. Almost 200 houses were lost in the Running Springs area. Looking at the map of the fires, I noticed that the burn affected the

entire area of town where my house used to be.

I can't even imagine what my old street looks like now.

RIP House.

***Since Boston College did the honor of losing last night, we now have a collision course between Ohio State and LSU for the BCS National Championship Game.

What does that mean for those of us in Ohio? Endless talk about the superiority of the SEC and how Ohio State hasn't played anybody and on and on and on ad nauseum.

Here is my personal message to you, the SEC fan: We shall see. If they both make it there, then the answer will be given to us on the field. Until then, why waste your breath? Talk is like a toothless whore: It's easy to do.

***Here's a public service announcement, intended for absolutely no one in particular (cough, cough, Achmed):

So... you want to reconcile with your ex-wife.

What are the qualities of a great partner? What are those things that one should look for in a husband or wife?

Intelligence? A sense of humor? Ambition? Attractiveness? A nice body? A good personality?

Wealth? Reasonability? Responsibility? A kind heart? Non-violence?

Congratulations, Achmed. Your ex-wife is the perfect woman. She's the only person - man or woman - that I've ever known that has absolutely none of those qualities. She's perfectly horrible.

And after years of pain and torture, you finally gain your freedom, and you would actually think about returning to this demon, a woman that you freely admit even now that you don't love?

It's fear of the unknown, my friend. Your life is now suddenly open, unfettered. You've never had that before, and it scares you. Enough that you would actually consider returning to a known - albeit mostly unsatisfactory - situation.

The first year of the process is the hardest. Believe me, there is a light at the top of the well.

You're my boy, and I'll love you regardless, but you've got to pull your head out of your ass. And quick.