

## MOVING A BUSINESS TO ANN ARBOR, MY STORY

'Living Large and Losing Large in A2'

These lines from the old tune "Nobody Knows You When You're Down and Out."

"Once I lived the life of a millionaire  
Spent all my money, I just did not care  
Took all my friends out for a good time  
Bought bootleg whiskey, champagne and wine."

"Nobody knows you when you're down and out."

Well, I was not interested in alcohol, and I did not have that much money to spend, and I never was a millionaire except for maybe a New-York minute, when signs pointed in that direction, at least for a short while. As far as being down and out, well, I had that part, but even then, only for a while. I was trying to move my company, AMG, (the All-Music Guide and All-Movie Guide) down to Ann Arbor and install it on two entire floors of a large office building at 301 E. Liberty, at the corner of Liberty and Fifth streets. We had 150 fulltime workers, and between 500-700 freelance writers working with us. Here is that long story short.

The company that bought my company wanted me to move down to Ann Arbor, my hometown, and have me run it. After thinking about it, there really was no choice and after a few months of waffling I set about looking for a good-sized house around or in Ann Arbor.

First of all, they rented me quite a lovely house at 632 S. 1<sup>st</sup> Street and W. Mosley, a corner lot. It was some kind of centennial home, and had a plaque on the front porch. The house was furnished, and was really nice inside, except it had carpets almost all around. And it even had carpet in the kitchen, which with kids (and ourselves), not to mention Kota, our good-sized Siberian Husky and Lab mix. I had to run a wire outside the house along the yard, so we could let Kota roam a little, and of course dogs love walks, anytime.

I didn't really have an office there, only a little desk on a landing at the top of the stairs, just outside our bedroom. Since the house came furnished, we had strange (strange to us) furniture and all that. It was a very nice house, but nothing compared to the house that was soon to appear in our lives and which we actually bought, and at a very high price, for us, some \$900,000. Who knew that would happen? Certainly not us. Here's that tale.

Finding a house, even back then, was not an easy task. "Seek, Seek and Ye Shall Find" was a song our band used to sing. Well, we sought, and looked and looked and looked and did not find. And then up popped one possible place, a house more than large enough for our crew of kids, and a dog, soon to be two dogs. Yet it was not out on

the edge of Ann Arbor where we had been looking, but right smack in the middle of what is probably the most in-demand part of Ann Arbor, and horribly expensive as well.

As mentioned, who wouldn't like it; it was right in the middle of Ann Arbor's most sought-after neighborhoods, where all the U-of-M fraternities and sororities are, a house up on 1921 Cambridge Road, all 5500 sq. ft. of it. The place was, for us, like a museum and from the very start, I felt I didn't belong there, yet of course we gave it a try. It was so lovely.

As mentioned, it was \$900,000, and I was making a lot of money then, plus my boss approved of it. I drove him past the house and got a thumbs up. Who wouldn't give that house an approval? It was almost like something we might find in Greenfield Village, or a place like that. It even had its own name, the "Henry Moore Bates House."

By that time, we were really pushing this envelope. Nevertheless, we put money down and signed our lives away. After all, it was a real beauty, and since I am long past owning a house of that stature, I should at least show it to you, now that I'm back home here in Big Rapids, in our (just a little funky) house and liking it.

In truth, despite the hugeness and the grandeur of the place, that vast house was something to worry us. If we had a lot of friends and liked to throw parties, that would be a place to do it. We had some friends but were not into parties. We just lived there, and even then, just for a while, like a couple of years.

Even so, I was somehow ashamed every time I drove my car out the end of that sweeping driveway. I didn't belong here. And I even went to one of those neighborhood gatherings, where they talked about, of course, the state of the neighborhood. And I soon found out they were all about keeping people, which would include many of my actual friends, out of their neighborhood. I got the message and never thought to go back to such a meeting. I felt like a spy.

One problem is that the house had a second floor back porch that had been entirely rubberized. Ice would form on it, and I injured my back just trying to use a 6-ft iron spike to break up the ice. And the same thing happened on the front porch, the ice literally formed stalactites (coming down) and stalagmites (growing up) until they would meet. And there is me, not so big, pounding away with a 20-some lb. iron spike.

And for all that space, the garage was too small for both cars, and the turn-around angled, so you could get in OK, but getting out, much less turning around, was a lot more difficult, unless you wanted to back down a steep and winding driveway to the street. Shall I go on? No need. Before I forget, although the house was as big as all outdoors, the kitchen was small and cramped, nothing compared to the kitchen we have here in Big Rapids, which I will add a photo of here. A kitchen means a lot to me.

My point is that just because a house is big, fancy, and expensive does not mean it is trouble-free. On the contrary. And I didn't even use the pool table that much, yet we did

like the hot-water furnace, and hot water heat, which had an array of pipes that looked like a miniature pipe organ.

My oldest daughter and her fiancé came and lived in the house for a year. They just melted into the house but could be found if you looked. And my youngest daughter May Erlewine, with her blue and pink hair and long chains on her belt, after traveling the country, hopping freight trains, and busking in major cities would, along with some friends, infrequently come into town and set up camp with us, along with her dog Molotov. They took over the basement which itself was huge, and we were glad to have her back.

And so it went, until it didn't. I reached a point where I had sold AMG, my company, and found myself sidelined because I was in the way. I had little choice. So, we packed up our things and moved back up to Big Rapids where we live today. It seems like a dream now, but also a little like a nightmare. Been to the big city, the big house, the big job, and the big bucks, and ended up back here, quite content. Our current house here in Big Rapids cost \$30,000 in 1980, and we added some space and rooms onto it. No problem, it is comfortable and suits us fine. Just thought someone might like to see the trail of houses we left behind. LOL.

[Here are a bunch of photos, mostly by me from back then, which should give you an idea of the houses. Easy come, easy go.]



Rented house at 632 S. 1st. Steet and Mosely..



Rented house at 632 S. 1st. Steet and Mosely..





Rented house at 632 S. 1st. Steet and Mosely. Stairway to my office.



Rented house at 632 S. 1st. Steet and Mosely. My mini-office.



Rented house at 632 S. 1st. Steet and Mosely.





Rented house at 632 S. 1st. Steet and Mosely.



Rented house at 632 S. 1st. Steet and Mosely.



House we bought at 1921 Cambridge Road. Front lawn.





House we bought at 1921 Cambridge Road. Garage.



House we bought at 1921 Cambridge Road.





House we bought at 1921 Cambridge Road.



House we bought at 1921 Cambridge Road.



House we bought at 1921 Cambridge Road. Front porch.





House we bought at 1921 Cambridge Road. Front porch.



House we bought at 1921 Cambridge Road. Front porch.





House we bought at 1921 Cambridge Road. Left to right May and Anne Erlewine, punked out.



House we bought at 1921 Cambridge Road. Pantry.



House we bought at 1921 Cambridge Road. Master bath.



House we bought at 1921 Cambridge Road. Master bath, also has a shower.





House we bought at 1921 Cambridge Road. Living room.





House we bought at 1921 Cambridge Road. Living room.



House we bought at 1921 Cambridge Road. Study.



House we bought at 1921 Cambridge Road. Back porch.





House we bought at 1921 Cambridge Road. Dining room.



House we bought at 1921 Cambridge Road. Kitchen. Too small.





Our current kitchen in Big Rapids, which we finally just redid, floors and counters.



House we bought at 1921 Cambridge Road. Basement.



House we bought at 1921 Cambridge Road. Basement.





House we bought at 1921 Cambridge Road. Basement.

