

# THE FIRST THE AFTER THE COLLEGE

Words by Abby Diskin

I had my heart set on moving to New Mexico. I imagined the Southwest as a place brimming with inspiration. I dreamt of hiking in the desert to study rock formations and petroglyphs, but things took a different turn.

The gradually fading leaves signaled a change. September would be the first month in four years I wouldn't register for college classes. My bank account held a mere \$50, and October's rent was looming. Jobless, I was watching my life pass me by. At a time when I most wanted to be independent, I couldn't be.

For the following three months, I walked circles through a maze without a map, playing an exhausting game of "search and apply". Each time I sent a cover letter, my hopes would swell and drop after hearing nothing. One afternoon, I called Mountain Rose Herbs to follow-up on my application, and the woman on the other line informed me that I was one of 300 people who had applied for the same customer service job.

I dialed my Dad's number next, and I asked if I could move in. "Only for two months," I promised, praying that would be true. "I just need to save some money until I figure out what I'm doing."

I sat in disbelief. The last time I lived with my dad I was 15. All I wanted to do was crawl back in bed and sleep through the afternoon.

The next day I balanced an overstuffed box and nudged my dad's guest room door open with my shoulder. The air was stale, and I worried if I could feel at home here. That night, I strung white Christmas lights around the room,

hung a glass lamp from the ceiling and placed a vase of turkey feathers in the bathroom, trying to create familiarity.

The next morning I decided to go for a hike, even if I wasn't in New Mexico's wilderness. The air was crisp as I started down the hill. Our neighbor's cows looked like a mirage the way the fog swirled around them. Nothing mattered that morning but keeping my feet moving and my arms swinging.

I kept moving on the job front, too. I had applied to write for a jewelry company in Albuquerque. I put so much energy into fantasizing about life in New Mexico, that when I received an e-mail saying I had made it to the second round of applicants, I felt like everything was falling into place. I waited to hear something for another three weeks, anticipating they would give me an interview. Finally I received a letter in the mail saying that they had chosen another candidate. My heart sank.

My Dad tried to comfort me by telling stories of all the odd jobs he's had. "Sometimes you have to throw a lot of mud at the wall before some sticks," he said, reassuring me. "I know something good will come your way." I nodded, wiping the tears that had gathered under my chin. "Thanks, Dad."

That was one of the only nights we sat at the kitchen table together. It was nice to have the TV off for a while.

That nights I lay in bed and gazed at the colorful glass lamp hanging from the center of my ceiling. The lamp became a meditative image for me. I'd close my eyes and feel its warm glow. On nights like these when worries about unemployment and my future taunted me, I looked up at the lamp and let my mind drift. It wasn't New Mexico, but for the first time in months, I felt at home.

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