

## Why our family chose to quit life in a run-down Midwestern rust-belt city for the sylvan splendor of rural Southeast Minnesota.

Face it. Minnesota is just plain exotic. Right up there with Tangier, Provence, or obscure Norwegian fjords - the bluff country of the Driftless Zone is stunning. For landscape alone, this region commands a visit.

Moving 850 miles across the country is, of course, a bigger commitment. We are a family of four. The kids were six and nine years-old when we moved. And when I say “moved”, well, we did it in stages. Mentally, we were dismayed by life in Pittsburgh by the time the kids started school. A huge factor in deciding to leave for good was the extensive “fracking” of the land in and around Pittsburgh. The search for natural gas in that region was clearly having an effect on air and water. Officials denied it. We felt that saddling our kids with a questionable, and potentially toxic environment, was not really a good long-term strategy.

Our family is all about making things. We are craftsmen. Our skills, and our tools were all portable enough to make a move.

We visited Lanesboro several times before moving, in summer and in winter. We met people, visited the school, learned about life for craftspeople here.

Our family history played into the decision too. While I claim no Minnesota background, Don lived in Lanesboro at various times in his childhood. His Grandparents lived on Ashburn Street. While his Mom felt Lanesboro was too small to make a life here and opted to bring up her family in Milwaukee, Don has happy childhood memories of this town. Perhaps having some sense that this place was good for previous generations of the family was some encouragement.

We rented a house for our first year in Lanesboro. 2010. We hoped to give ourselves a means of retreat if it turned out we'd made a mistake. Instead, we seemed to build connections and become ever more content here. By comparison, just the matter of relative quiet and less traffic in Lanesboro helped reduce our stress levels. We also seemed suited to life here because we were flexible enough to accommodate the things which amounted to differences from city life. It's about everything from planning shopping, to reading more books, holding potlucks, playing board games - self reliance rather than seeking immediate fixes for fun. Big city conveniences like museums, movie theaters, malls, galleries and art openings are replaced by other things. And life continues, happily.

We decided to find a house to buy about five years ago. We found a house and a garage big enough to fit our shop into. The house has proved a huge project for us. Trying to keep the kids content, in the midst of life in a construction zone has given me pangs of guilt at times. We had to replace the first floor of the house, right out to the rim joist. It's been a learning experience, lots of work, and has delayed our work as artists and makers, because we've been remaking our very

living space, by ourselves, mostly. So, it takes some knowledge, willingness to work, and luck to engage life in a small town without a hardware store. But we've managed, and on a pretty tight budget too.

So, what's next? We're busy making things. Helping our kids learn how to make things. Working in the garden as it comes along this Spring. Multi-tasking, but on our terms. And sometimes it takes volunteering for community events and the odd part-time job, and always helping out your friends and neighbors. But they are watching our backs too. It's a good life. I'm available to tell you about it in person, here in Lanesboro.

Sincerely,  
Anna Loney  
507-467-2171