

THE 2002 NISSAN ALTIMA

driven.

This past summer was flagged by a landmark in my journey to become an independent and, nearly, full-fledged adult. For years I have been buying sneakers, clothing, groceries and all things necessary for everyday living, but never anything really significant. In the past four years of college I have managed to successfully use and destroy four pairs of running shoes, 42 textbooks, three boyfriends and two cars. I have since bought a new pair of running shoes, gotten over the loss of both books and boyfriends, and was ready to tackle the job of finding, pricing and purchasing a new car.

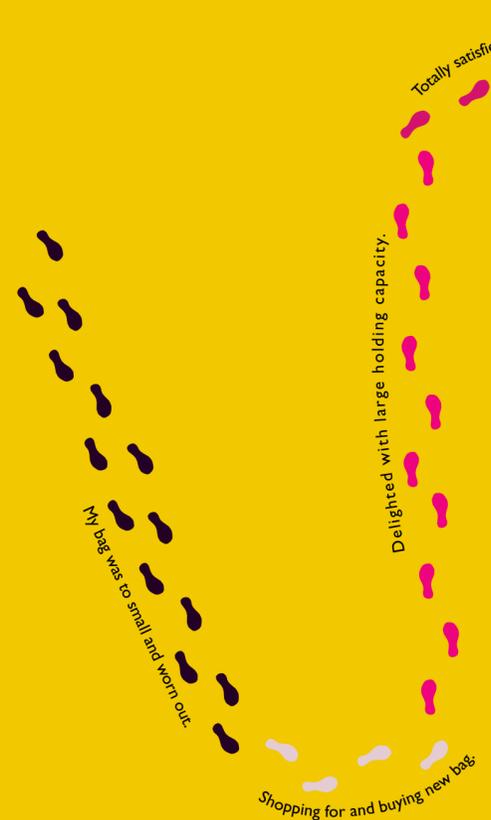
The first step in my car buying process was identifying a budget. This involved looking at and mapping out all of my expenses for the year, everything from monthly payments for bills to seemingly insignificant everyday expenditure (my dad, a finance executive, calls this my 'recreation fund'). I also had to map out my predicted income for the year, taking into account the wages earned at my job (which have been sadly low this year), and the financial help I receive from my parents. Once I had all these facts established I was able to draft a budget, complete with projected monthly income/expenses paid, and from that I was able to judge how much money I would be able to afford in car payments per month.

Although I wanted to take these figures and run to the nearest new car lot, I had yet to compute another couple of expenses. I still had to pay the license fee and various other one-time fees, plus deal with the cost of insurance. Because my father works for Ford Motor Company, I am able to get car insurance for a ridiculously small amount, thus never having to deal with the pain of researching different insurance companies and their rates. This was very helpful in reducing time spent on the phone with various agencies, and probably saved me a couple of trips as well. Upon learning the amount I would spend per year on my insurance plan, I deducted this number and the one-time new vehicle fees from my yearly car budget and proceeded to the nearest car lot.

Since I don't know much about cars, I decided to look first at the exterior. I visited various dealerships: Ford, Jeep, Nissan, GM, Oldsmobile, Pontiac, etc. looking for cars in my price range. Once I singled out the ones with acceptable exteriors that also fit into my budget, I began to research. I gathered estimates on base models, priced fully-loaded models, talked to sales representatives about possible deals and promotions and picked up brochures. At home, I went through all of the info and determined the elements that I find to be essential in a car: automatic, big trunk (art supplies), front and side airbags, front or four-wheel drive, A/C, 4-door, good fuel economy, CD player, power EVERYTHING. Once I had compiled this list, I went through the cars and weeded out those that didn't have those options. Unfortunately, several cars that I had especially liked were lacking in certain areas. For instance, the Cougar and the Eclipse were ideal on the outside, but deficient in the area of space. I drive too many supplies and too many people in too much snow to deal with only two doors, no trunk and rear-wheel drive. I was able to narrow the field of roughly 12 cars down to four, and headed out for a few test drives.

Upon driving a couple of the cars, least favorites became most-favorites, and vice-versa. One of my first choices, The Vibe, had everything on my 'check list' but felt sluggish on the highway, and also much too big. Same story with the Intrepid, which felt more like a small boat and had an interior that looked like a stock car. The Grand Am, one of my larger choices, was surprisingly fast, with great pick-up and good visibility. The last car that I drove was a Nissan Altima, which was fast, fun, had lots of storage compartments and space (essential for the art student), and a sleek interior. It was down to two.

Now I had found my two models, complete with all essential options, and just had to pick out the one that I wanted. I knew that I didn't want bright red or white, and since my last car was turquoise, I was ready to go for something more tame than bright yellow, blue, etc... I decided to go with black. The only Grand Am models I could find at either of the local dealers in that color had either patterned interior, or the base model wheels. Immediately upon walking through the Nissan lot I found a black Altima, with nice wheels and solid tan interior. I had found my car!!!



Every day I pack up my book bag and head off for school. Lugging all those books across campus day in day out makes my book bag an integral part of my life, so I thought it fitting to write about it's story.

Probably the awareness of needing a new book bag came when I was preparing for the school year. I dug my book bag out of my closet to see how it was holding up wear and tear wise. I also assessed its condition based on whether it would be able to hold up for an entire school year. My book bag was assessed and failed the test of use. It was too small for my needs and had several durability issues, which made me doubt that it could get through the school year. Once I had decided that a new one was needed I wasted no time. Immediately I picked up the Sunday advertisements to see what was on sale since price is a huge consideration in the my buying process. I then went to the stores that seemed to have the best prices. When shopping my first consideration was price (I am thrifty). Although I like quality I prefer getting it as cheaply as possible. So I looked at price, then style and functionality, then comfort and finally quality. If the bag was cheap, good quality and ugly you can just forget it. I also passed by any bag that was excellent quality but to expensive. In general the bag that I ended up buying was a decent style, functional (had several pockets for various items), was of medium quality and of course was cheap. All in all I was pretty happy with it.

The current bag that is use was bought about three years ago and is now coming to the end of its use cycle. I have had some delights and disappointments in my experiences with this bag. I can remember the very first time I used it, I loved the fact that I could actually fit all my books and my lunch inside with no pushing or smashing of the sandwich. Compared to my last book bag, which was much to small to hold all of my school items this bag was heaven.

Now I must tell of the first disappointment that my book bag gave me. It had rained very hard one day and I had to walk across campus with no umbrella, needless to say I was soaked along with my bag. When I returned home and unzipped the bag I discovered that my gray tee shirt which was inside had transformed and was now a pink shirt. My maroon bag had bleed onto my shirt! I was obviously a little disappointed and because of the experience decided that I should give my bag a through washing so that the incident wouldn't be repeated.

A second issue that I soon began to have was when the weather became hot and I began to bring a cold water bottle to school. There was no outside pocket that the bottle would fit in so I had to put it inside the bag. Well when it was inside the bag it would sweat and my schoolbooks and papers would get wet. This was very annoying because I then had to carry the cold water bottle so that my papers wouldn't get wet. After this became a problem I was never really totally happy with my bag.

I have decided that this will be the last school year for my current bag. It is not that the bag is in bad condition but it simply does not meet all of my needs anymore. Next year a new bag will be found, bought and put into use and my old one will be put on the back burner.

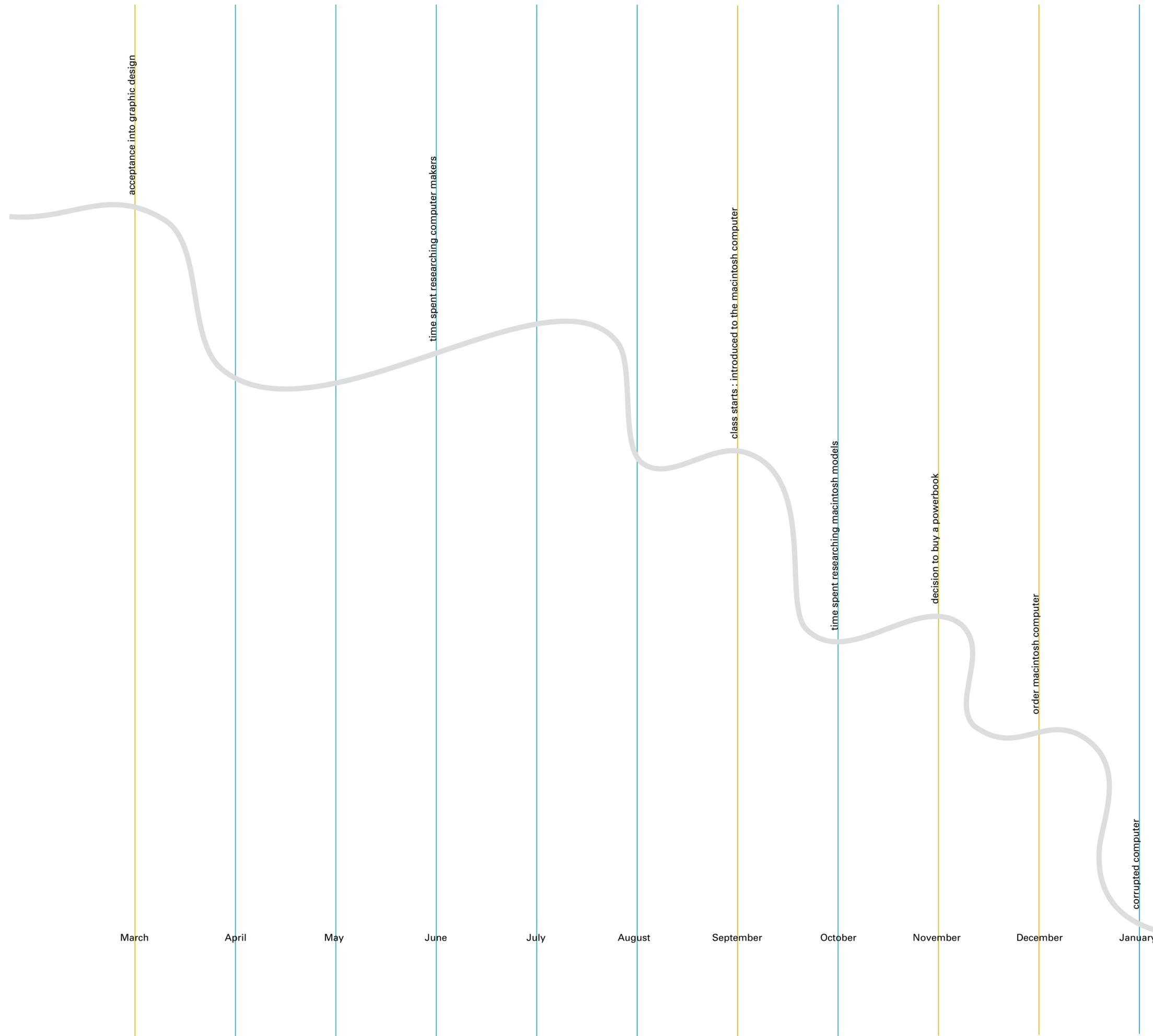
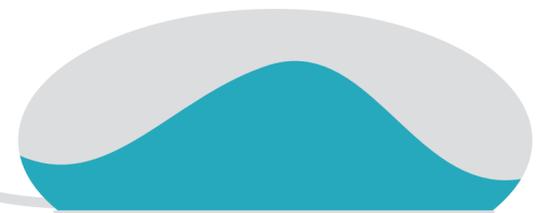
In the life of my backpack

POWERBOOK G4

Two years ago I didn't own a computer. When I was accepted into the graphic design program I decided to start looking around. I looked at Dells, Gateways, HPs, Compaqs, and Macintoshes. By the time school started that fall of 2001, I was overwhelmed with my options. After starting my design classes I knew that I wanted a Macintosh. I was getting use to the Macintosh software and programs that we were using in class. I thought that having the same computer at home and at school was a good idea. Once I decided what maker I wanted to buy the computer from, I had to think about what model I wanted. Macintosh offered many models like the iMac, the iBook, the PowerBook and the Power Mac G4. I was interested in the Power Mac G4 because it was the same computer that we used in class.

I asked my professor Keith Jones what his pick would be because I was interested in his opinion. It was at this time that he showed me his PowerBook that he recently had gotten. He suggested that I look more into the PowerBook. He highly recommended it and said it was the best laptop that he had ever used. He told me that having something that was easily transportable would be a good thing for me in the long run. I would be able to bring it with me from home to class and in the future from home to work. There were a few other people in my program that were purchasing the PowerBook. This helped me to feel more confident about my decision. I looked into the prices and options on Apple's website. My mother had offered to buy this computer for me. She knew how badly I needed a computer and that I could not afford one. I went to Micros and More to pick up a sheet on pricing and also one on computer software that was available. It was now around the end of the semester and I really wanted to get my computer before Christmas. My mother came up to Western Michigan University and together we made our trip to Micros and More to order my computer. I was so excited to finally get my very own computer. My mother and I ordered a 1GHz Power PC G4 PowerBook. It was right around \$2,400. It featured 256 MB SDRAM memory, 133 MHz system bus, 56K internal modem, a DVD-Rom plus many extras. It took about one week to get shipped to me. The day that it arrived I took it out of its box, plugged the battery into the wall, downloaded the OSX software and investigated it until the next day.

What I love about my computer is that it is portable, it has a beautiful 15.2" display along with 1280x854 resolution. Its titanium design allows it to be only 1" thick and weigh only 5.4 lbs. I also love the fact that it plays my DVDs perfectly. My only disappointment so far is that it doesn't have a built in CD-RW. I had the option of a DVD-Rom or a CD-RW. Sometime I wish I had chosen the CD-RW so I could save my work on CDs, and burn music off of the Internet. A lowlight that I once had was when I was trying to install AOL onto my computer. It corrupted the system and I could not shut my computer down. It was awful, I didn't have any idea about what to do. I tried a few things but I think I just made matters worse. Luckily, I had four free months of Apple Care. I was able to call an 800 number and the nice man on the phone talked me through the process of cleaning up the problem. I would have never figured it out on my own - thank goodness for Apple's support. From then on I have been extremely cautious about what I download onto my computer. Other than my stupidity about the computer's hard drive, my Power Book has been nothing but great to me.



Skateboard Science



The first thing I do when buying a new skateboard is shop around for a good deal on a "complete".

A complete runs about 120 dollars. It consists of a deck (board), two trucks (chassis and axle), four wheels and eight bearings. What I shop for is a bargain on these items or a specific brand or style of product that I like. Since I'm not picky, I'm usually shopping for the bargain price on the complete. This means I buy the entire board, as a package. Buying a board this way is cheaper and easier than buying all the parts separately. However, if I am interested in a specific brand or model I'll buy the parts separately. Either way I go I usually between 110 and 130 bucks. This deliberation can be done in a day, a few hours shopping around. Or if I order from a catalog I can get my things in about a week and a half.

Integration includes, (depending on what I buy) transferring equipment to create a complete. Also the application of the grip tape to a new deck, and adjusting my trucks so they are as tight or loose as I like. Also getting used to the new board or trucks can take a little while.

Maintaining my skateboard in good shape is really easy. As long as I have new or good equipment, I just need to keep the board dry and clean. Other than that is just keeping my trucks adjusted and hardware tight, and changing equipment when needed.

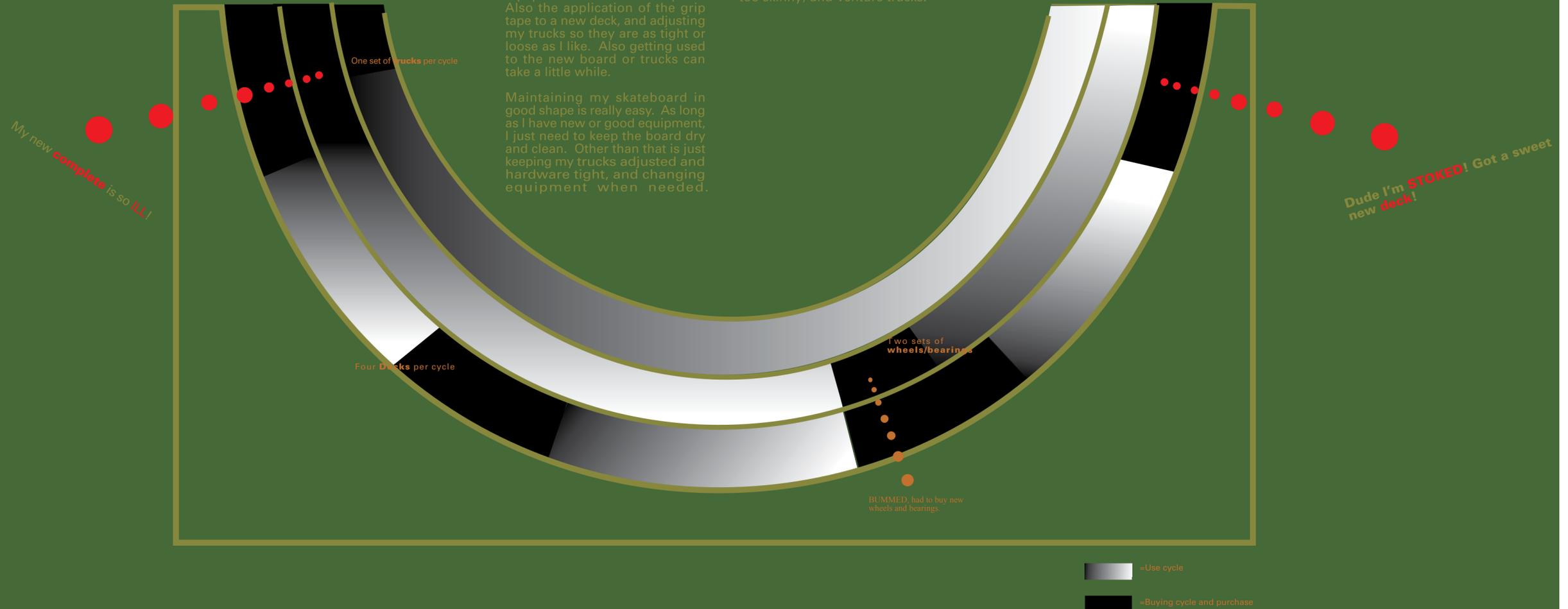
There are some landmark experiences that influence my decision when buying a new board. One would rely on past experience with products. For example, I refuse to buy Foundation brand decks.

I had a brand new one that broke within ten minutes of its first use. After that I've talked to others who have had the same problem. I won't buy Venture brand trucks because I've had the axles slip in them so many times. Also, I'll also take buying advice from trusted and knowledgeable people. Other influences would include, what's popular at the time and who my favorite skaters skate for. Watching a pro-skater use a brand and rip, is kind of like proof that that brand is good.

Some delights I've experienced would be the advent of the Zoo York company. I love their products and my Ricky Oyole deck was one of the best decks I've ever had. I was also very happy when I discovered Powell mini-logo decks. They're just as good or better than any other deck but 10 or 15 bucks cheaper. My disappointments lay mainly with Foundation boards, old style birdhouse decks (which were always too skinny) and Venture trucks.

Emotionally I am always excited to get a new deck. There is nothing like skating a brand new board. It is always sad and upsetting when I break a deck or when I see a deck deteriorating that I really like. I get mad when they break before they should, and happy when they last a long time.

In summary, I buy a deck almost every month, with some exceptions, new trucks every 4-5 months, new wheels about every 3 months and new bearing and hardware every complete. So I buy a new complete about every 4-5 months with some overlapping purchases of decks and wheels during that time. In a 4-5 month period I can spend around \$340.



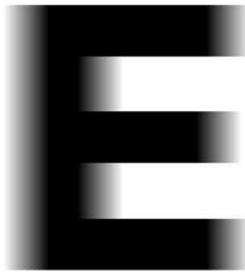
vision change



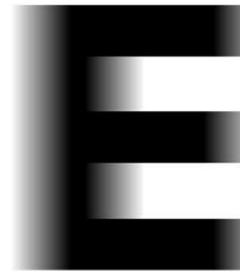
1993



1993



1993



1993

eyeglasses



1994



1995



1996

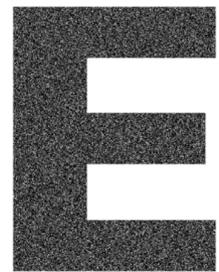


1997

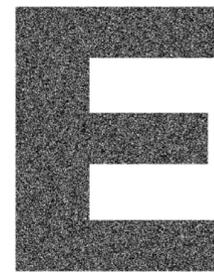
contact lenses



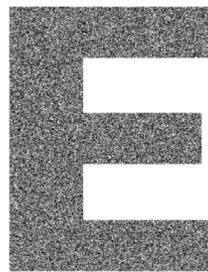
1998



1998



1998



1998

eyeglasses



1999



2000



2001



2002

I began life like most any other youth. I possessed perfect vision. This would change. It was during the sixth grade that I began to squint so much I resembled the reincarnation of Mister Magoo. It became apparent that it was necessary to have an eye exam; the result was the purchase of a pair of eyeglasses. This purchase immediately corrected the vision problems that I was having.

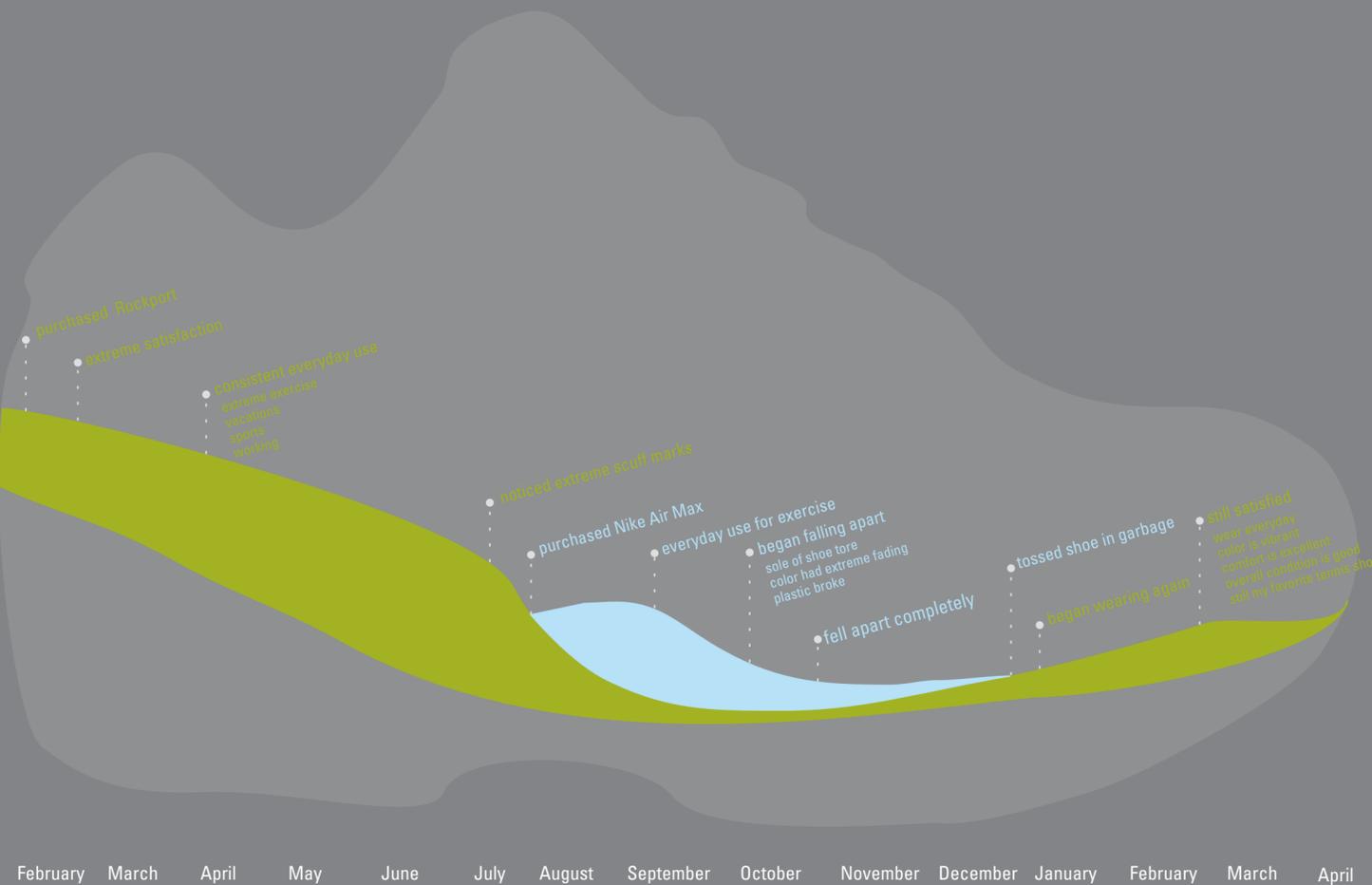
After much wear and tear to my original pair of glasses, a new option would be exercised in my next purchase. The freedom from glasses possessed earlier in life was something I had hoped to regain. Contact lenses seemed to be a viable option. This also would provide the ability to see clearly without having a noticeable aid. Soft, colorless contact lenses were purchased. Contact lenses proved to be a good choice for a short time only. After feeling like my eyes were being sanded with a fine grit sand paper, the option of wearing contact lenses seemed less than pleasing. In addition to this, having to deal with the lenses falling out, or tearing was more than I cared to put up with. The hassle of wearing and maintaining my contact lenses led to their disposal.

After the contact lenses, the more functional eyeglasses were again purchased. A style of a less conspicuous type was sought. Quite a bit of searching was done before a purchase decision was made. This purchase was of a pair of glasses of a simple sophisticated nature.

Upon considering my next purchase of vision aides, I may choose to buy both contacts and eyeglasses. This would provide a variety of styles and a choice of eyewear for a given situation. Many styles may be purchased. A large variety of frames and lens types, or contact lenses can be chosen to accommodate any need or want. Colored lenses, photo grade lenses, glass or plastic, average or ultra thin lenses can be bought. Plastic or wire frames of any type imaginable can be sought out. I would probably again choose a clean, functional looking pair of wire frames. These frames may accent a personal feature such as eye or hair color, as well as have the ability to wear and function in a variety of styles of dress and so forth.

Rockport XCS vs NIKE Air Max

Rockport XCS
NIKE Air Max



2001

2002

It was the year 1995, my freshman year in high school when my tennis shoe fetish began. It was the year that I began to become a serious athlete, and needed to find quality shoes. Not only finding the perfect fit but also obtaining an individual style became important factors in my buying process. I became very interested in the tennis shoe and decided to get a job where I could learn more about shoes and also sell them. I became very involved in the various brands and who their target markets were. By the end of my senior year in high school, I was very informed about every aspect of a tennis shoe. I began to examine brands like Nike, Adidas, Reebok, New Balance and Rockport. It had officially become an obsession of mine. Years have now gone by and I have experienced all types of tennis shoes. It was the beginning of 2001 when I once again needed a new pair of shoes. I spent months looking for the tennis shoe that I would buy. Finally in February of 2001, I found my ideal tennis shoe in Calgary, Alberta. It was the Rockport XCS running shoe. The sales associate said that it was the first day they were on the shelves and that I was the first person to buy it at their location.

The Rockport XCS had the design, comfort, style and durability that I had been searching for. It's a shoe that had the qualities that I needed and wanted in a tennis shoe. Its design and color is what first attracted me. After trying on the shoe I knew that they would be something I would be purchasing. The look, the comfort, the color, the style and the uniqueness, it had it all! I had never been attracted to the style of Rockport shoes previously but this pair caught my eye.

They had been through a lot that year including vacations, weather conditions, and of course, everyday use. I wore them to workout in and basically every opportunity that I could. It was midsummer and I noticed that I had been wearing them everyday. I saw that they were beginning to get rather dirty and worn. I decided that since they were my favorite pair of tennis shoes that I had ever purchased that I should buy an alternative pair so I didn't wear them out so quickly.

At the end of July I finally found the Nike Air Max shoes. The color and design first attracted me, and they seemed like a quality made shoe at the time. I wore the Nike shoe a lot through August and September but as early as October I noticed that they were already falling apart and becoming less comfortable. I started to wear them less and less as they fell apart. I began wearing my Rockport XCS a lot more again and realized that not only were they still as comfortable as when I bought them, but that they were not falling apart.

In late December 2001, I finally threw the Nike Air Max tennis shoes away. The Rockport XCS then became my everyday shoe once again. In fact, I still have them and wear them in most of my everyday activities to this day.

2001 New Beetle

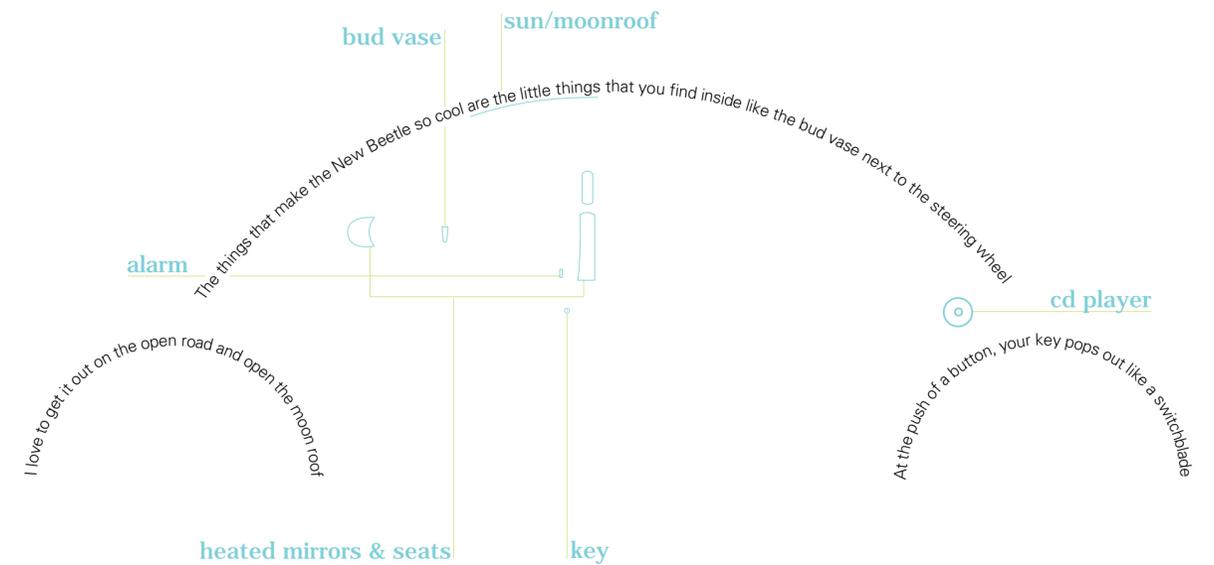
I can't put my finger on the exact date that I was turned onto the Volkswagen Beetle, but I do know that my love of the Beetle was inspired by the stories my mom told me about her 1970 Super Beetle. I can remember back to my freshman year of high school when she brought home a clipping from a magazine that announced that Volkswagen would be revealing the New Beetle soon. I proudly hung that little scrap of paper in my locker, vowing to get one as soon as I could. Well, after years of begging anyone and everyone to buy me a New Beetle, it was during the most devastating time in my life that I finally got my dream car. In the summer of 2001, my mother, who was terminally ill, sat me down and told me that when she passed away she would like me to get a new Volkswagen Beetle. After her passing, my father found my car at a dealership near his house.

It was everything I was looking for and more, a sharp contrast from my previous teal Chevrolet Cavalier. It was a shiny, new, silver beetle with black interior. Some of the features included heated rearview mirrors and seats, a sun/moon roof, special alloy wheels, an alarm system and a 6-disc CD player. But those are things that you can find in any old car. The things that make the New Beetle so cool are the little things that you find inside like the bud vase next to the steering wheel, or the knob on the side of the seat that you can pump either up or down to move the seat closer or farther away from the enormous dashboard, or even the indigo and red dashboard lights. However,

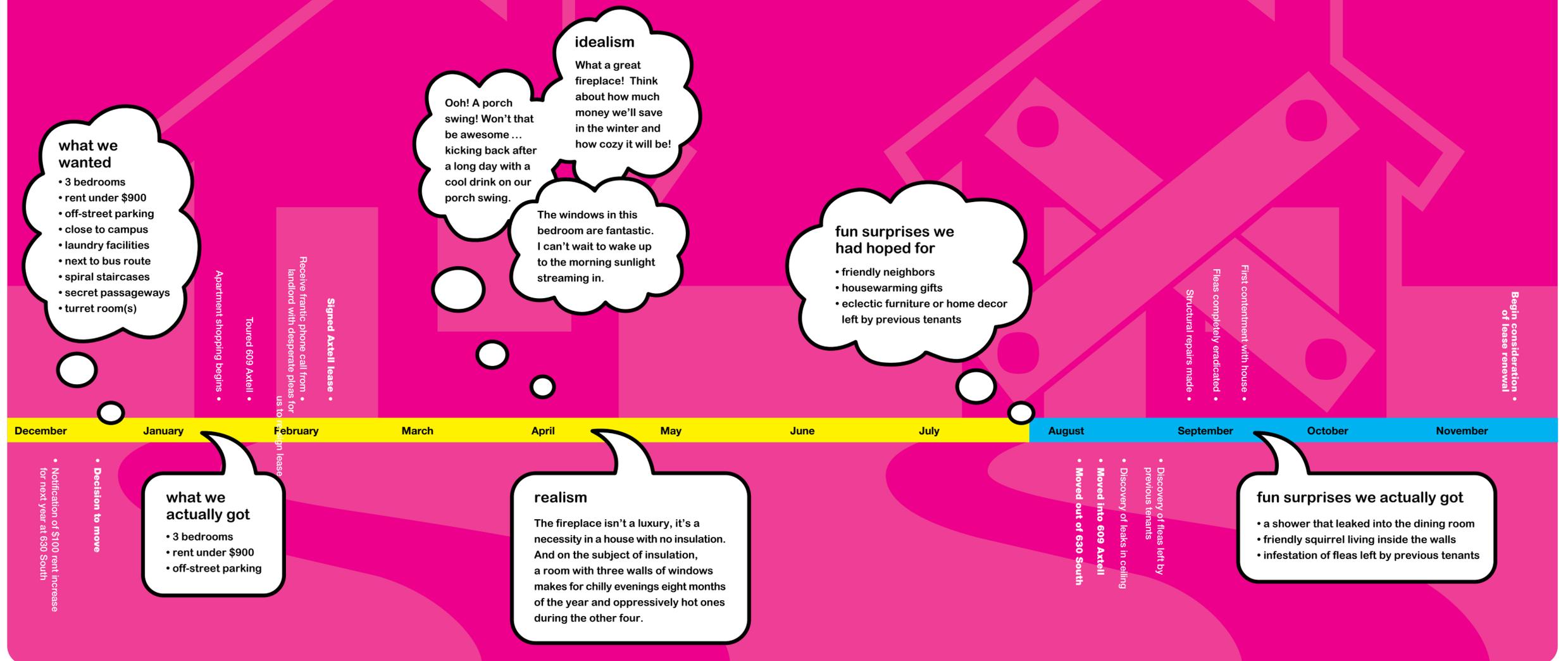
the coolest feature of the car isn't in the car itself, it's the switchblade key. It's a monumental innovation in the world of keys! The key itself is a wand-like piece of metal with an engraving in it that folds into the body of the keyless remote; at the push of a button, your key pops out like a switchblade.

After driving my car for a year, I couldn't be more satisfied. When I go in to get my free oil changes, the dealership checks everything else for free and vacuums and washes my car! The people are always really nice and willing to answer any questions. I have had a few problems with my car, most of which stem from the dealership that I originally purchased the car from which was a little hole in the wall. I love the way the car drives, it handles really well even under my crazy driving conditions. Some people question how it handles in the winter, but I can attest that it drives great, even in the coldest conditions. I have encountered a few sticky situations in which it's gotten stuck in the snow due to its low ground clearance. In the summertime, I've yet to encounter a problem, in fact I love to get it out on the open road, open the moon roof, turn up the stereo, and sing my little heart out.

My car provides me with happiness, it sounds funny to most people but the fact that I waited so long to have one and that it was a parting gift from my mother, I wouldn't want any other car. Anyone who knows me how I feel about it and for those who don't know me, they can just read my license plate that reads 'ILVMBYG.'



my apartment



Last November marked the beginning of my second month living on South Street. While my enthusiasm for apartment life was still exponentially greater than it ever was for living in the campus residence halls, I was beginning to realize the necessity for a change. Little quirks that seemed to add "character" when we first toured the apartment had become downright annoying. Furthermore, roommate compatibility issues were becoming apparent: while the situation never dissolved to the point of hostility or arguments, one roommate simply had different interests and it seemed we'd all be more contented not living under the same roof for another year.

As we began the search for a new apartment, we were looking for everything our South Street apartment lacked. Dreams of laundry facilities, walking distance to campus, and cheap rent led us to scour the classified ads and the off-campus housing database looking for a new dwelling. We divided our needs into essentials (3 bedrooms, rent under \$300), preferences (laundry, close to a bus route) and the downright unrealistic (spiral staircases, secret passageways, and turret rooms).

Touring houses, while offering some secret voyeuristic pleasure, proved less than fruitful. Generally, our expectations for price did not often coincide with our expectations for quality. Our solution to accommodate this discrepancy was to simply focus on cost, as we found that low rent greatly ameliorated many of a house's undesirable qualities. When we found an apartment with rent that was over a hundred dollars cheaper (per person) than our current living arrangement, we could easily ignore the fact that it did not have a washer and dryer, was not on the bus route, and offered no spiral staircases or secret passageways.

Finally moving in that August, we feared the worst. It had been many months since we'd last seen the house. We realized a distinct possibility that the house had only looked appealing when compared to its really unsavory competition, and suspected our frugality may have impeded an objective view. It was with some relief that the only issues presented by our landlord were a leak that had been repaired and just needed to be replastered and painted, and a leaky shower.

In the first two weeks of our new tenancy, the relief quickly transformed into dread. The hot water in the shower didn't work for the first four days. The phone didn't work for the first week. Then the roof started leaking. Then the shower leaked into the dining room. And then the final straw: the realization that the previous tenants had left fleas behind. Fleas. Like a vision of hell, my time at home was spent either smacking the fiendish pests off any exposed flesh, setting off insecticide bombs, or scheduling the next Orkin appointment. For the first time all summer, I was no longer excited for the workday to end. My residential utopia had become a nightmare.

The problems with the house came under control by the end of the first month we lived there, and it has turned out to be a satisfactory apartment. Our landlord is generally very responsive to our concerns, even calling on occasion just to make sure everything is going well with the house. But as my roommates prepare to graduate, I am now stuck between making the decision to seek out a new apartment for next year or simply trying to find new roommates to fill the other bedrooms and avoid the potential trauma of moving again.