

# I dreamed a dream...

By KRISTI EVANS

*There is nothing like a dream to create the future.*

—Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*

Paul Truckey '87 once dreamed a dream — a neon-fueled fantasy set amid the bright lights of the Big Apple. It all began with an introductory theater class at Northern Michigan University. Like many who step on stage that first time, Truckey was bitten by the proverbial acting bug. Its sweet, addictive venom channeled through his veins and lodged in his heart, mind, and soul. This creative juice became — quite literally — his lifeblood.

**D**reams can be intriguing snippets of our subconscious. Some feature extreme plots, hazy settings, faceless characters, and scenes that quickly fade from memory. Truckey's was far more vivid — saturating his senses with colorful images of billboards and costumes; the swelling sounds of orchestras and applause; and the feel of adrenaline pumping as the audience settles in and the curtain finally rises.

No matter what revealing glimpses dreams might offer about the state of our psyches, the bottom line is that many dreams are nothing more than illusions. Yet if some didn't at

least have the potential to come true, there would be no point in dreaming. Paul Truckey's vision was not your average escape from reality. It was rooted in hope and guided by clear goals, persistence, and talent. Now this Marquette native is living his dream of performing in a Broadway show.

"I absolutely love being on stage and live for those moments," he said. "I spent a long time working and training to get to this point, and I'm enjoying it while I can."

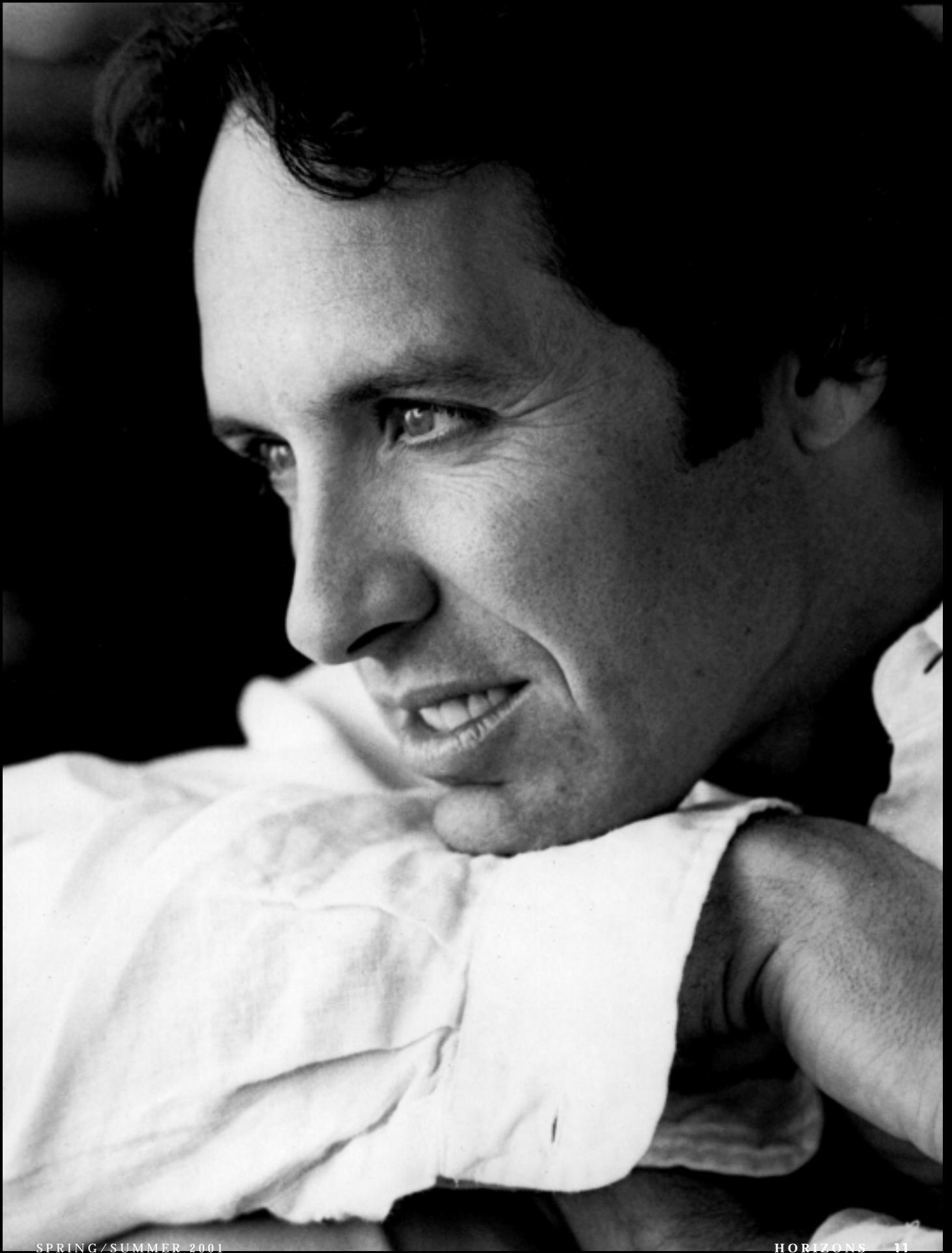
*Les Misérables* is not just any show. It is an international sensation that opened in London and made its New York City debut in 1987. The musical is

based on an epic novel by Victor Hugo. Though set in 19th-century France, its appealing score and universal themes of love, honor, redemption, and revolution have garnered a worldwide following. Based on the barometers of runs, receipts, and awards, *Les Miz* is arguably the mother of all musicals.

*You cannot dream yourself into a character; you must hammer and forge yourself one.*

—James A. Froude

Truckey plays the role of Grantaire, one of the students involved in the revolution. He also is an understudy for one of the lead



roles, Javert. He describes the former as a “been there, done that” type — one who offsets the idealistic attitudes of the other students.

“Grantaire hopes to convey to his fellow students a sense of their own mortality in a situation where their emotions override their common sensibilities,” Truckey said. “He knows they can’t win the revolution, but he won’t leave the barricades because he feels they are his family. He loves and admires them; in the end, to his own doom.”

Often seen with a bottle in his fist and a stagger in his step, Grantaire drinks to days gone by and to...well, almost anything. During a political meeting at a small café, Enjolras, the bombastic leader, tries to prepare the students for revolution. He admonishes Grantaire to put his bottle down, then asks if they have the guns they need. Grantaire replies, “Give me brandy on my breath, and I’ll breathe ‘em all to death!”

Javert, by contrast, is a relentless police inspector committed to tracking down a parole violator.

“He is not the bad guy,” Truckey said. “Javert is Old Testament. He believes in an eye for an eye, and that once a convict, always a convict. His demise comes from the notion that he can’t live in a world where people can rehabilitate themselves and create new lives.”

In order to transition to the Javert role when needed, Truckey is required to attend understudy rehearsals once every two weeks. He doesn’t find out until a half hour before curtain whether he will have to put that practice to use.

“I don’t get nervous when I see my name on the board for Javert; I prefer that. The only down side is that it’s hard to get better in a role you perform sporadically. When I get to do it a week straight, I like it because I

can grow into it.”

James Panowski, theater professor at NMU, went to Les Miz on three separate occasions, hoping to catch Truckey filling in for Javert. His timing was off, but former colleague Jim Rapport fared better.

“On our field studies trip a couple years ago, I went to see a dreadful musical by Paul Simon,” Panowski recalled. “Meanwhile, Rapport made a half-hearted decision to see Les Miz again. I dashed back after my fiasco and found Rapport standing at the door with a big grin on his face holding up a program insert. He got to see Paul as Javert, and did he ever rub it in.”

Undeterred, Panowski fulfilled his quest to see Truckey play Javert last year.

“When you see one of your students up there,” he said, “you’re almost in tears because you’re so proud of them and happy for them. You realize that the daily grind at the university really pays off.”

Most actors, including Truckey, don’t just fall into a coveted Broadway slot. He climbed the casting ladder gradually, first appearing in a national tour of the show.

*Let us go singing as far as we go: the road will be less tedious.*

—Virgil

Traveling with the same cast of players for two years is enough to test anyone’s tolerance. However, actors find innovative ways to adapt to the lifestyle and preserve their sanity.

“Normally you fly to every destination, but the way to survive on the road is to get your own car,” Truckey said. “You use the off day to travel to the next stop. That way, you get some time to yourself. The freedom is worth it.”

For those willing to forsake a more settled and stable existence, the tour offers many rewarding perks:

first-class hotels, fine restaurants, a healthy salary, and a generous per diem for living expenses. Savvy actors are able to live on the per diem and bank the rest. Truckey did indulge one passion, which required some extra spending capital.

“I called it the Golf America Tour, because I love to golf and I’ve been able to play in every state except Alaska. It’s exciting because there’s always a new place to look forward to. And if you don’t like a city, you don’t have to deal with it for long. Some people can tour for a decade and still love it; I just decided it was time to plant some stakes.”

*Every exit is an entry somewhere.*

—Tom Stoppard

Four days after Truckey made his exit from the tour, he received a call to fill a vacancy in the Broadway production. Three years later, he’s still performing at the Imperial Theatre on West 45th Street — easily identified by the famous Cosette lithograph suspended above the marquee.

Despite more than 2,400 performances of the same musical at a pace of eight per week, Truckey said he has no problem keeping it fresh.

“It’s always new for me. I get paid to make it be like the first performance every night. I think about the people who pay \$85 to sit in those seats and realize I owe them my best; it’s my job to entertain them.”

*An actor is only merchandise.*

—Chow Yun Fat

Steady work and paychecks are precious commodities on the acting circuit. Truckey does not take these for granted. He knows there are hundreds of aspiring actors eager to fill his shoes. He also realizes that Broadway productions are big business.

Producers keep a close eye on box-office receipts and bottom lines. Some

decisions, though made with the show's best interests in mind, can seem cruel and highly subjective.

While Truckey was on tour, the entire Broadway cast of *Les Miz* was summarily fired in an attempt to revitalize public interest. On the same day, at exactly the same time, the touring company was also assembled. Each cast member was handed an envelope with his or her fate sealed inside — to remain with the company or be fired. Truckey emerged unscathed and, surprisingly, unfazed.

"I wouldn't feel empty if it eventually happened to me. No one wants to get fired, but I understand it can have nothing to do with skill or talent; it might just be that you're starting to look too old. I wouldn't take it as a slap, as long as their reasoning was based on that and not the quality of my work."

Technically, the 36-year-old actor is already making a stretch playing the role of a student. But he can still pull it off. Truckey emits a youthful exuberance. He also has a smile of Osmond-esque proportion that he isn't afraid to flash.

*Humor is just another defense against the universe.*

—Mel Brooks

Broadway is notorious for "back-stage backstabbing," but Truckey likes to accentuate the positive. He finds humor in some of the miscues inherent in live theater. Like the power outage before the huge millennium celebration in Times Square, which made it necessary to stop and repeat a scene. Or the time he was looking out over the barricade waiting to hear trumpets but was instead greeted with the sound effects of a horse trotting and dogs barking.

"Some actors won't allow themselves to enjoy a moment like that," he said. "A number of us in the cast are pretty goofy. You pray for

moments when you can have a little giggle without the audience seeing, just to break up the routine a bit and keep things interesting."

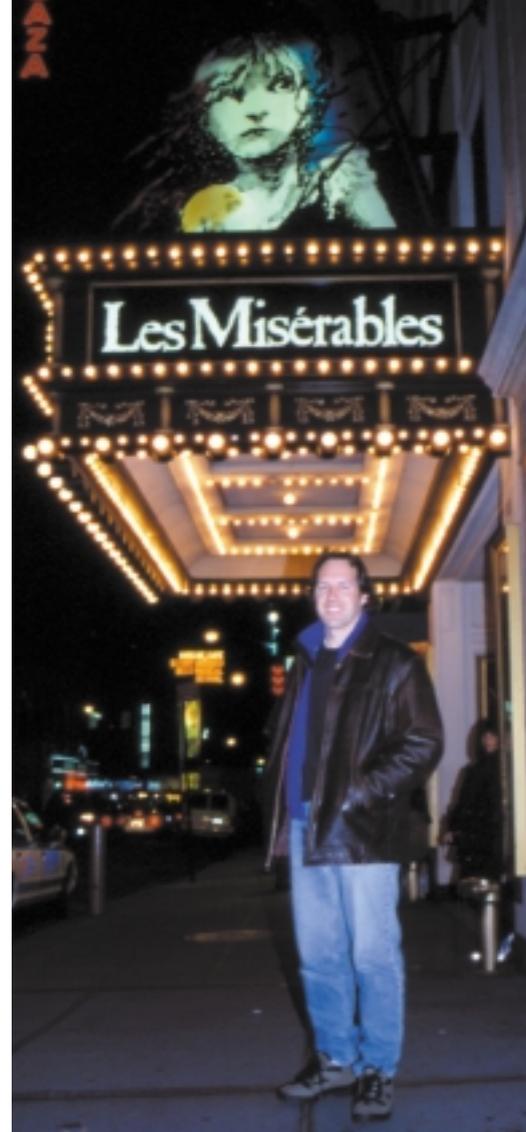
Truckey attributes his professional success to a strong work ethic and self-discipline. He attributes the overall success of NMU theater alumni to the quality of the professors.

"It's run like a professional theater," he said. "They never tried to hide or glamorize anything about the business, so there weren't any big surprises when I got out here. At some larger universities, you're not even on stage; at Northern, you can be cast in a lead as a freshman. At larger schools, it seems more about the professors than the students. At Northern, it's always about the students."

He gained insight from all four professors in the department, but developed his love of musical theater from James Panowski. The two remain in close contact. When Truckey gets back to the Upper Peninsula, he presents seminars in Panowski's mentor's classes. When "Dr. P" travels to New York, he tries to meet up with his former student.

A lot has changed since their first meeting at NMU. "I was in my office and a distraught-looking student came in," recalled Panowski. "Turns out Paul had discovered a rip in his pants. I asked him his name and told him not to worry. I found a little sewing kit in my desk and gave it to him so he could make a quick repair and get back to Jim Rapport's Introduction to Theater class."

Truckey later attended the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, where he obtained a master's degree, along with formal voice training to enhance his natural singing ability. It was also at UNLV that he met his future wife when they starred opposite each other in a play.



Paul Truckey will be taking a break from his New York City life this winter, when he'll return to NMU as a visiting professor. He'll be filling in for Jim Panowski while he's on sabbatical.

Now on the East Coast, Truckey finds New York a fascinating city. "It's not quite my speed, but a lot of people like it, and there's this illusion that goes along with living here. Why else would people pay \$2,000 a month for a tiny studio apartment?"

Truckey's success is anything but an illusion. It's the tangible result of a dream fulfilled. Theater can be a risky business to be sure, but he could not imagine doing anything else.

"Will I always perform? Yes. Even if they told me I had to do it for free. There's just something about the rush of being on stage and entertaining people. It's hard to describe, but that's what it's all about for me." ■

# three's company

There's a special kind of kinship that develops among theater students at Northern Michigan University. John Ogle, Dan Hicks, and Leah Hocking met as classmates, then became friends, and were even roommates. More than fifteen years later, even though they've taken slightly different roads, they're still friends, and all three are working in the entertainment industry in New York City — and they wouldn't have it any other way.

By KRISTI EVANS and KAREN WALLINGFORD

## john ogle

Most people working in the entertainment field in New York City get a little anxious if they're between jobs for too long. Not **John Ogle '82**.

The video producer took a self-imposed break from the *Live with Regis and Kelly* show after the hectic February sweeps period. When interviewed in early March, he planned to wait a few weeks and then put out the word that he was ready to get back to work.

"If you're the least bit creative, you'll get calls," Ogle said. "I've actually turned things down. I can't stay away for too long before I get antsy to hit it again, but I'm never concerned about what my next assignment will be because there's always something else out there."

Ogle primarily works as a segment producer at *Live*. He also free-

lances. He doesn't hold the camera, but he directs the shots; he doesn't edit the tape, but he supervises the process. Ogle said it typically takes an hour in the editing suite for every minute of final product, and that doesn't factor in the time required to shoot the raw footage.

NMU field studies participants had an opportunity to watch one of Ogle's creations when they were in the *Live* studio audience. It was called "A Day in the Life of Regis." The host's schedule was lighter than usual the day of the shoot, so the challenge for Ogle was to make Philbin appear busy as he shuffled from one professional obligation to the next. It helped that he selected an upbeat tune — "Mama Said There'd Be Days Like This" — to accompany the video.

"I've done a number of produced pieces with Regis, and I love working

with him," Ogle said. "Michael Gelman, the executive producer, has similar views on what a segment should be like. We either concept together or he'll trust me to go ahead with it, which is what I did on the 'Day in the Life' segment."

Ogle thrives on the creative aspect of his job — leading a camera crew and developing something from scratch. Video is his medium of choice now, but when he first moved to the East Coast, theater was his calling. He and **Leah Hocking '80-'83** left NMU for summer stock opportunities in Maine. Ogle met some people there who eventually moved to New York City, and he decided to go with them.

"I had directed summer stock, but I wanted to try something else," he said. "I mentioned TV to a friend who helped get me a job at Ricki Lake's show. My title there was audience

coordinator, which meant booking the audience by filling the seats with the appropriate demographic for the show. For example, if you're doing a show on pregnant teens, you want to have a few pregnant teens in the audience."

Then he moved back toward the creative track. Ogle spent two years with the FOX program *Forgive or Forget*, starring Robin Givens, before it was cancelled.

He also enjoyed a short-lived run with the *Aimsley Harriott Show* on NBC.

"I loved it there, but the show was cancelled immediately. There was



WHILE IT MAY NOT BE JUST LIKE OLD TIMES, it's pretty close. Dan Hicks, Leah Hocking, and John Ogle got together after meeting with this year's theater field studies participants and giving them advice about getting into the entertainment business in New York City.

a feeding frenzy for available talent after that show ended. Someone there worked on *Live with Regis* and recommended me. That's how it usually

works: a word-of-mouth recommendation and demonstrated talent get your foot in the door, but to stay there, you have to be likable and easy to work with."

His assignments may vary, but Ogle has every intention of staying put in New York City.

"I really like it here. It's actually a simple place to live because it's concentrated; things are either up, down, or crossways. I've wanted

to live in New York ever since I was a kid, and my [NMU] field studies trip really confirmed that this was the place for me."

## dan hicks

Once hooked, soap opera viewers are incredibly loyal to their favorite programs. It appears they tune in not only to keep pace with the characters and cliffhangers, but also the latest trends in clothing and accessories.

A recent visit to the *As the World Turns* Web site revealed that a large percentage of viewer e-mails are fashion-related questions: Who designed the dress Barbara wore at her wedding to Hal? What is the name and model of the tote Margo carried to Simon and Katie's court wedding? Where can I purchase the gray pants suit Camille wore in the April 14 episode?

Dan Hicks '82 can answer these questions. He works in the wardrobe and design department of *As the World Turns*.

"It's pretty ironic because I didn't know anything about dressing; I didn't even know how to sew. People were willing to show me the ropes because

they liked working with me."

The show's executive producer thought enough of Hicks to offer him the role of a homeless person. While he appeared in just seven episodes, it was enough to garner a *Soap Opera Digest* award for best recurring role of 1997.

Despite his brief stint in front of the cameras, Hicks seems content working behind the scenes. He and three other wardrobe staff members are responsible for running the show. They assemble the outfits and help the actors dress.

"We maintain continuity by writing down what people are wearing in a scene so it's the same when taping picks up again," he said.

The wardrobe staff also catalogs each new item that arrives at the studio. The inventory is more than 20,000 pieces strong right now, and will only expand with a monthly clothing budget of \$40,000.

Hicks previously worked at the same location on the soap opera *Another World*, which is no longer on the air. The union he belongs to also allows him to freelance for the NBC *Today* show and for photo shoots that appear in the soap opera magazines.

"There are only about 40 people working in TV wardrobe in New York City, so it's actually a pretty small network," he said. "It pays well and it's steady. Everyone around me considers it a career, but I'm the only one who tends to pooh-pooh what I do."

Hicks finds the "hurry-up-and-wait" world of television much different than Broadway theater. He arrived in the Big Apple about 15 years ago, joining friends John Ogle and Leah Hocking from NMU. After waiting tables and going to auditions, he was offered a part-time job as a dresser for *Phantom of the Opera*. "It was highly choreographed because it was such a huge production with so

many costumes. One of the bodices weighed 60 pounds!"

Other backstage work followed in the productions *Most Happy Fellow*, *Falsettos*, and *Tommy* before Hicks made the shift to television. In hindsight, he credits NMU with preparing him for graduate studies at Brandeis University in Boston, and for later employment in New York City.

"I worked in the costume shop at Northern," he said. "Back then, I never thought I would put that expe-

rience to use, but I've been at it for the last 10 years. I've developed a good sense of color, and I know what looks good on different body types. I've also learned a lot of tricks to minimize the negative and accentuate the positive. Water bras are the big thing now. Let's just say they make certain assets appear more substantial than they really are."

Hicks maintains an active interest in theater by attending off-Broadway and experimental productions. He said

he really enjoys living in New York City. His advice for surviving there boils down to one word: flexibility.

"You need to allow yourself to try different things. I used to beat myself up because I wasn't acting. At Northern, I worked in many different areas related to theater, and that helped. It's important to expand your horizons as much as you can because you never

know which skills will help you down the line."

## leah hocking

**L**eah Hocking '80-'83 seems to have the wind at her back. She has a confident ease about her — she smiles naturally and her laugh carries infectiously through whatever room she's in. She doesn't seem like an actor who is between jobs. And yet that's right where Hocking is at the moment. Even she admits that something has changed for her.

"I used to get really uptight if I didn't have work lined up, but I don't feel that right now because I feel so supported by the people who I've worked with and the people I'm auditioning for. Even if I don't get the job, I feel really good about what I've done."

This is a far cry from her first few years in New York City. Hocking moved to the city about fifteen years ago, and for her first five years, she did summer stock and worked between 60 and 70 hours a week as a waitress and a bartender to make ends meet.

About ten years ago, she was close to rock bottom. She had just finished summer stock and had only twenty dollars to her name with no job and no prospects. She remembered having a horrible attitude as she applied for waitressing jobs. But then she got the first of two significant

breaks. She received a phone call from the company manager for *The Best of Forbidden Broadway*, who asked her to be an understudy. She accepted the job and was in the show for just under two years. She then was cast as Sarah Brown in the Broadway revival of *Guys and Dolls*.

After a string of regional theater jobs, Hocking understudied the role of Lucy in the Broadway production *Jekyll and Hyde*. While she said being a part of her first original Broadway cast was amazing, she added that experience also made her realize she didn't want to be an understudy again.

"You don't get to make the role your own. It's hard on your soul, and ultimately that's not why I got into this business. I got into this business because I wanted to have *the role*. It's the only thing I've every wanted to do."

Theater is Hocking's first love, and she said she always knew she'd end up in New York. However, she also admitted to feeling lured by the silver screen.

"I kind of always wanted to be a movie star," she said. "I'd still love to do movies; it just hasn't happened for



me. But I just love the theater so much, too. It's what I grew up with."

In fact, Hocking grew up very close to the Forest Roberts Theatre stage at NMU. She's a Marquette native, and one of her best friends was the daughter of retired NMU theater professor Jim Rapport. She said that the Rapport family, along with all of the theater faculty at Northern, have always been a strong influence.

She still feels those influences today each time one of her former professors comes to see her perform.

"That kind of support, just to have Dr. P and Dr. Rapport come to see a show for the weekend — it

makes you feel so good.”

Hocking now has an impressive list of Broadway, off-Broadway, and regional theater credits to her name. She has added to her Broadway experience by playing Marty in *Grease* and Mae in *The Wild Party*. In addition to numerous regional shows, she has played title roles in *Educating Rita*, *Evita*, and *The Duchess of Malfi* at theaters including Milwaukee Repertory, Indiana Repertory, TUTS in Houston, and the Papermill Playhouse.

Hocking has never been in the same show for much longer than a year and half, and that is by her own design. She said she has never let herself stay in a show until she was burnt out in a role.

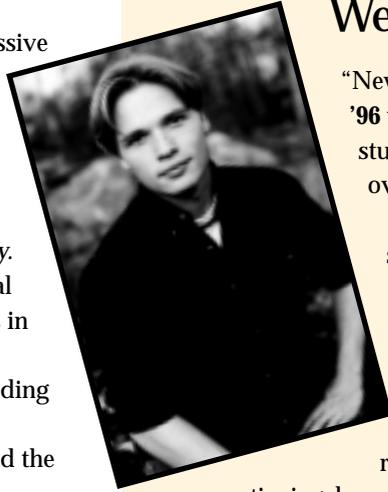
“I can generally gauge when it’s time for me to go, and I’ll go. I may not have a job lined up, but I’ll take that chance.”

Hocking attributes her success to perseverance and a strong belief in herself.

“Most of the time when you’re coming into this business, the only thing you have to hang onto is the fact that you believe you’re talented, because nobody else is going to tell you that.”

Fifteen years later, Hocking is having a great time. Like she said, something has changed for her. Even auditions — which she used to find nerve wracking — don’t seem as intimidating. She has learned to have fun and not take the results personally.

“It doesn’t have anything to do with you, and if it does, it’s because you’re too tall or too short or too young or too old. Those are things you can’t control, and the sooner you learn that the better,” she said. “Of course, it’s taken me how many years to learn it.” ■



## Weathering the storm

“New York is literally a city on caffeine,” said **Dan Roberts ’96** when addressing a group of NMU theater field study students in New York City in March. “The pace can be overwhelming.”

He recalled when he was a student on this same field studies trip six years ago. He was getting ready to go to the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., where he would perform the lead role in Professor Shelley Russell’s award-winning musical *Haywire*. He remembered listening to **Leah Hocking ’80-’83** talk about her experiences in New York. As Roberts listened to Hocking tell stories of ten years of heartache, hardship, and constant auditioning, he remembered thinking, “That’s not going to be me. I’ll come here and take it by storm.” But instead, he was swept away by the storm.

Before Roberts moved to New York in 1996, he had never really experienced rejection. He went to New York with what he calls a “fearless naivete” and spent his first two months throwing himself at every audition he could. After thirty auditions, Roberts hadn’t heard back from a single one.

“It was really eye opening — humbling,” he said.

During those first few months, Roberts learned one of his first lessons about professional theater — know who you look like. Casting directors saw him as a high school or college kid, and he wasn’t being considered for anything outside of that range.

Learning that lesson paid off. Roberts read a character description that he knew he was perfect for. He auditioned for a part in a touring substance prevention show called *Half Way There* and was offered the job on the spot.

But in 1997, he had another dry spell. Disenchanted, he left New York and spent the next five months living with his parents, trying to sort it all out. He then moved to San Francisco to be with his girlfriend Lorraine, who is also an actor, and pursue acting work in California. He worked on a couple of independent films, but in the spring of 1998, the couple — married and expecting their first child — decided to move back to New York to be closer to family.

Roberts found work in a few off-off-Broadway productions, but he quickly learned that sporadic acting jobs weren’t enough to support a growing family. He would have to look beyond the stage doors.

After working a variety of jobs — from clerical to construction — about a year ago Roberts landed a job with T.V. Guide working as a researcher. He said it’s the happiest he’s been with a non-acting job.

But the comfort of a full-time job presents a sort of catch 22 for the aspiring actor. His job doesn’t give him the flexibility to audition for, or accept, many of the parts he’d be right for.

Don’t think for a minute that Roberts has given up his dream of being a full-time professional actor. While he may have been swept away at first, he has weathered the storm and feels he now has a more realistic perspective.

“It’s been a long and interesting journey,” Roberts said. “I know what I’m up against, and I know I have opportunities. The real trick is holding on to your optimism.”

—KW