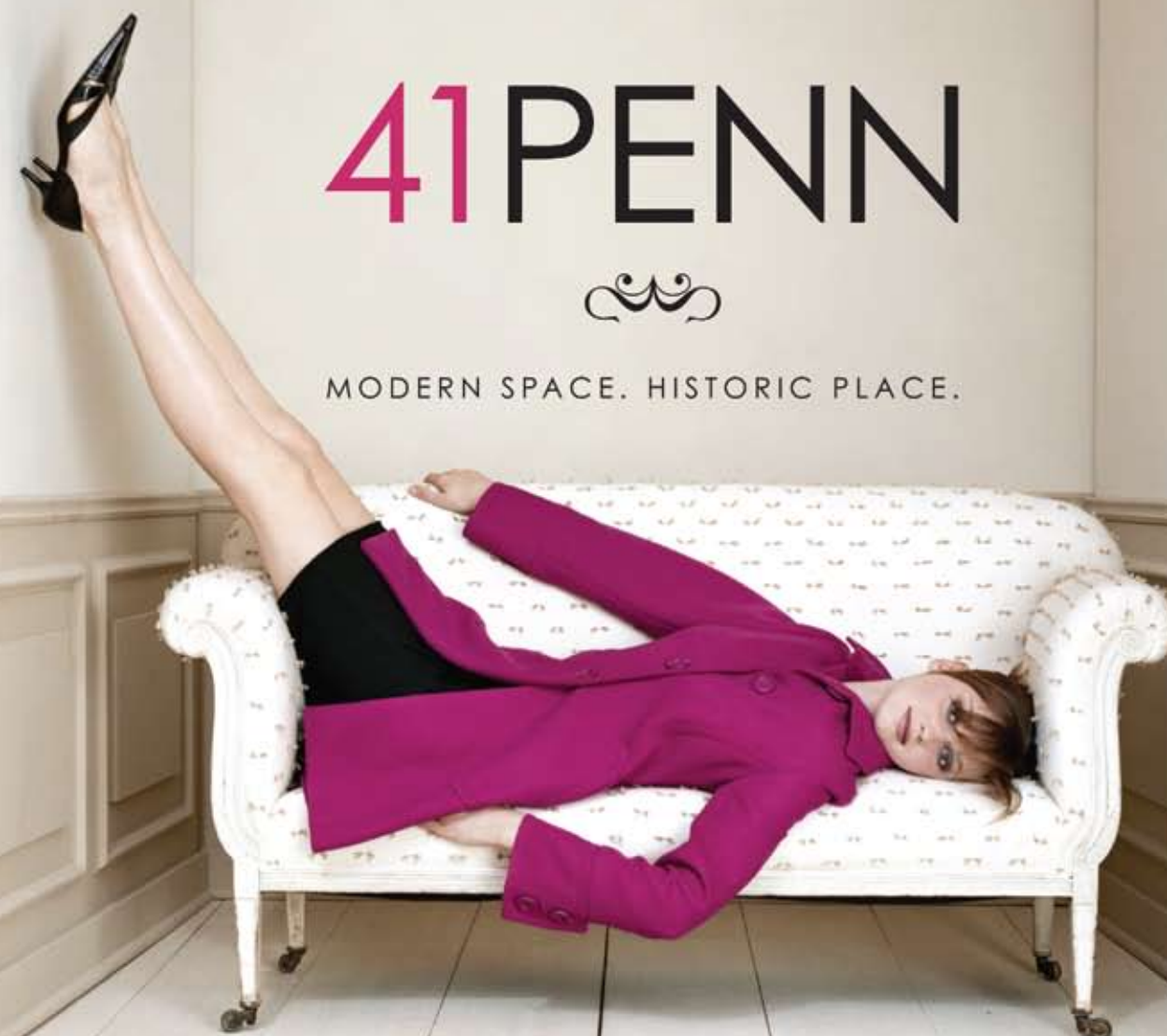


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MY LIFE SOMETIMES FEELS LIKE IT COULDN'T BE LESS URBAN. I write on Saturday afternoons when my children are kind enough to nap. I write about Kansas City with significant detail, occasionally working from the suburbs and drawing on the images from the city's astonishing urban renaissance that stay with me.

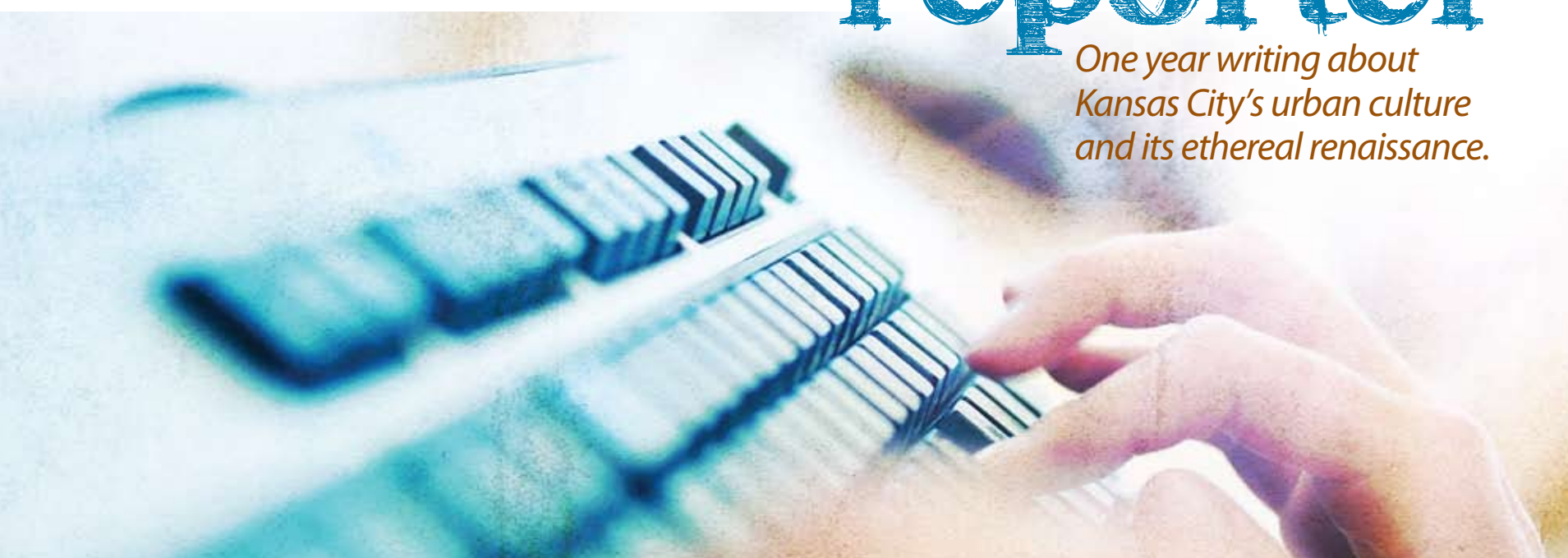
I've noticed, for example, the fathers in khaki pants that didn't have a place on downtown streets five years ago. Now, they push strollers on uneven sidewalks and point directions while passing window wells that once caught Mountain Dew bottles and drunks. And, in between sentences, I check on my own sleeping children upstairs with their heads pressed deep into the pillows, mouths open, and their necks craned while they are taking imaginary drinks of sleep.

For the younger writers at our magazine, *Urban Times* is a connection to the urban scene, a way of life where rent is cheap but drinks and clothes are expensive, and where friendships might land you in a fashion show or on a magazine cover. For me, it's a creative outlet where the publisher lets me use whatever words come to mind, where the phrase "drinks of sleep" actually sees light of day.

urban reporter

WRITTEN BY KEVIN KUZMA

One year writing about
Kansas City's urban culture
and its ethereal renaissance.



Urban Times was originally pitched to me as a publication for Kansas City's urban core—"a new magazine for a new city." At that point, in spring 2007, the expectation was set for a cosmopolitan downtown that wouldn't exist for another year or so. There was still chain-link fencing around the Sprint Center and the H&R Block Building. The Kansas City Power & Light District still smelled of sawdust, raw wood, and sheet metal. People were merely optimistic for Kansas City's future.

I had been writing in spiral-bound notebooks for about a year, and the voice in the room along with me began to sound lonely. Journal writing is a careless practice that could be equated to a musician picking up an acoustic guitar and strumming whatever chords naturally fall beneath the fingers. Worse than the loneliness of the writing trade, though, was not being paid for my work or being rewarded for keeping promises to myself to write.

So, on a whim, I responded to a vague posting for freelance writers that earned me an audition of sorts with Publisher Christina Boveri. I was assigned an 800-word piece about the Arts Incubator on 18th Street. I interviewed sculptor Jeff Becker and described the spirit of the Crossroads before the arrival of local artists as being "as broken as its craggy streets and sidewalks." I remember writing that and feeling as if I'd tapped into a voice that would carry me through my coverage of an entire city that has been uplifted and remade.

As a writer for this magazine, I've been granted nearly complete artistic freedom. Christina has allowed each writer to tell stories in his or her own style. I've written long, airy sentences that wouldn't be published in other magazines, and sometimes I felt like I was getting away with something.

I've written about book burnings, departing mayors, transportation systems, lofts and condos, and night clubs. I've been threatened by small-business owners and warned about the mafia's lingering ties to parts of the city. I've had my picture taken at launch parties and eaten in fancy restaurants before they are open to the public. But none of that has been as pleasurable as the writing process itself or meeting other staff members who have become friends.

The editorial board at *Urban Times* genuinely cares about Kansas City. The articles in this magazine take a fresh perspective by focusing on possibility—the positive in most instances. In our stories, we have described Kansas City's ethereal turnaround in almost dream-like fashion—me probably with a little too much attention to detail—but still with careful renderings and accuracy.

Now, almost a year after the debut edition, Kansas City's future is still being written. The revitalized downtown has been the answer to urban dwellers' prayers—almost a dream come true—and I've helped tell its story in the time before my children wake. Thank you for the opportunity, Christina. And thank you for reading. Amen. 