

Oct 5, 1989?

Dear Deb & Jerry,

I liked the birthday card. Even Carol liked it, and she prefers nice cards.

I think I sold Mr. Vaughn this house. It's the one Kathy & I were living in at the time we separated. I remember that when you spilled a beer on the kitchen floor, it ran to the corner of the room and out.

We got married ^{Friday, Sept 8} at City Hall with Carol's sister & brother-in-law as witnesses. They paid for a night at a local hotel for us — very nice. Then we ~~we~~ moved into our new house that weekend. Since then we've done little else but paint & try to find places to put stuff. We're enjoying it. It's quite a change in lifestyle — a yard to mow, a 2-car garage with automatic door opener, a nice neighborhood to jog in.

Last weekend Carol & I went to Ludington & camped at the State Park. There's a high dune north of the park I've begun to explore — not high like Sleeping Bear, but many acres, and remote. You have to be a real hiker to get to it, let alone into it. It's called the Nordhouse dunes. It's sprinkled with woods & shallow ponds and there's lots of deer. I went up alone a few weeks ago

and wandered around by myself for about 6 hours.

None of the family has come to visit yet. We keep thinking we should get the house a little more in order before we invite anyone. Maybe Thanksgiving.

Carol's 20-year old son Doug is living with us & going to MSU. Amy is ~~is~~ living in an apartment near campus with a friend (girl) from South Haven. She got fired from her job at a delicatessen yesterday. They didn't tell her why. Tom is living with Kathy & working at Prince Manufacturing in Holland, but through an agency, as a temporary.

I'm enjoying my work, but I have 2 grievances going - one against my boss for trying to ~~stop~~ me from pointing out to everyone his self-serving decisions and another because of an item on a civil service exam for managers that expected the examinee to discipline an employee for criticizing his department during off-hours. I'll probably have to take them to court on both issues.

Love,
Steve

Claude Vaughn watches his house sink slowly in the west

Giving directions to his house, Claude Vaughn says, "You can't miss it — it's the white house sinking into the ground."

It's true — you can't miss it. Take Wadsworth Drive west off Pleasant Grove. Hang a left on Hillcrest Street, then look for the three-bedroom ranch with the plunging roof line.

What's worse than a sinking house?

A partly sinking house.

"If it was all settling evenly, it wouldn't be so bad," said Vaughn, a 40-year-old afternoon-shift production employee for Buick-Oldsmobile-Cadillac. "The way it is, the house is breaking in half.

Little by little, the devastation is mounting: Vaughn points to broken windows and twisted frames, doors that won't close, cracked walls, buckled ceiling molding, ruined duct work, a living room floor that feels like a ramp under your feet.

"My 29-year-old house is falling apart and I can't do anything about it," said Vaughn, who lives there with his wife, Eva, and two sons.

As to why the Vaughns happen to find themselves living on top of Lansing's ver-



JOHN SCHNEIDER

sion of the Bermuda Triangle, the experts have offered several theories.

Some blame improper grading at the time of construction. Some blame a shoddy foundation. Some believe something large — a main sewer pipe, for example — was dug out of the ground and that the house was built on the site before the dirt resettled properly.

City officials tell the Vaughns it's the builder's fault.

The builder is nowhere to be found and probably went bankrupt long ago.

The Vaughns' insurance agent tells the

Vaughns that their homeowners' policy won't apply until after the place collapses.

The thing that breaks Claude Vaughn's heart is that he's been paying for the house for 17 years. There is only \$7,000 left on the mortgage.

"I worked all that time to get it paid off," he said. "I'm 40 years old now and I've got to start all over."

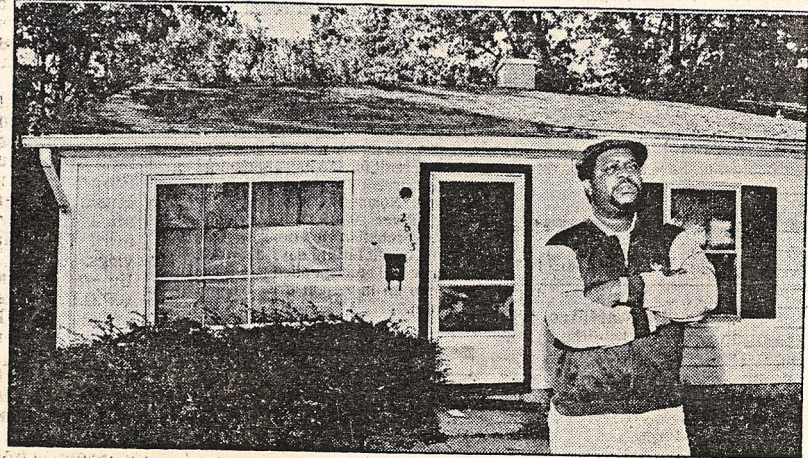
Repairing the house is out of the question. One contractor estimated that to raise the house, make the grading adjustments and pour a new foundation would cost \$24,000, which is more than the Vaughns paid for the house.

Another contractor said that wouldn't work anyway because the house, if raised, would split in half.

"I guess I just lose my property and leave," Vaughn said, "because of some freak of nature."

Although the house was built in 1960, it didn't start going downhill until about 10 years ago. In a snapshot taken in 1975, the

See HOUSE, Page 3B



Lansing State Journal/GINGER SHARP

Claude Vaughn stands in front of his home on Hillcrest Drive, which is sinking daily. The walls inside are cracked, the roof is sloping and repairs are out of the question.

House

From 1B

roofline is in its original form.

It was about 1980 that Claude Vaughn began to notice that his ranch was becoming a split level.

"They told me it would settle a little, then stop," he said. "It'll stop when the house falls in."

Vaughn is surprised that city officials haven't condemned the house.

Not only have they not con-

demned it, they've been raising the Vaughns' property taxes right along.

"The house isn't worth anything anymore," Vaughn said, shaking his head, "but my taxes keep going up."

John Schneider is a Lansing State Journal staff writer. His telephone number is 377-1175.