



Michigan is a folksy pop rock musical that follows Petoskey Vandam and Lulu Abughosh, a grieving Yooper boy and Dearborn girl, fight a data center to save their grandparents' historic lake house.

Michigan

Inspired by
The MacGregor Family
David Quang Pham's Childhood

&

In Loving Memory of
Andrew "Andy" Van Otteren
March 17, 1994 - July 12, 2026
Tiffany Marie Emmert
April 29, 1996 - January 19, 2026
James Emmert
May 5, 1991 - January 19, 2026

Thanks to you all, David and countless others
love musical theatre and Michigan.

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SYNOPSIS

To save their grandparents' lake house from becoming a data center, a Dearborn girl and her grieving Yooper cousin must bridge their peninsula-sized rivalry, proving blood is thicker than the Mackinac Strait. To buy back the home, they must trade Petoskey's late father's treasured heirloom (a heart-shaped Petoskey necklace with an elk symbol) which Lulu lost in Elk Lake years ago. Petoskey, a native fossil that reveals its true pattern when wet, serves as a metaphor for hidden grief and emotional depth.

Michigan is inspired by David Quang Pham's upbringing and the MacGregors who invite him to their Elk Rapids lake house on Harbor Days since being roommates with their family member Lukas Jacob in 2014. In 2026, after a series of suicides of his hometown and college friends in musical theatre, he began writing this musical as a love letter to his family and communities in our home Mitten.

WHY NOW?

Michigan champions human connection, creativity, and nature against the rising tide of technological isolation, symbolized by the threat of replacing a historic lake house with an AI data center. By centering its narrative on the long-term impact of suicide and collective loss, the play directly addresses our modern mental health crisis, offering a vital roadmap for healing through open communication and community. Furthermore, it uses localized science and folklore to bridge regional cultural divides, reminding audiences to protect both the natural environments and the shared, real-world heritages that keep us rooted.

Michigan is the homeliness of *Oklahoma* meets the whimsiness of *Waitress* meets the folksiness of *Bright Star*.

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THEMES

Collective Grief and Emotional Healing

The story explores the long-term impact of grief after Petey's suicide and Grandma Milly's death, demonstrating how silence fractures families while open communication fosters generational healing.

Community versus Technology

The central conflict pits a warm hand-made tradition against cold corporate greed, by keeping AI data centers from erasing local heritage, such as the family's lake house.

Geographic and Cultural Disconnection

The narrative highlights how families can become polarized by peninsulas, symbolized by the physical and emotional barrier of the Mackinac Bridge separating the Upper and Lower Peninsula identities. The story leans into subcultures, contrasting Yooper (Upper Peninsula) against suburban Dearborn/Lower Peninsula dynamics.

Belonging and Identity

Through Lulu's competitive drive to outshine her cousins, the musical examines the painful adolescent struggle to fit into a Midwest family dynamic and find one's own sense of worth.

Nature, Folklore, and Science Literacy

By embedding paleontology into the musical numbers, the narrative uses the natural history of the Petoskey stone fossil to teach environmental appreciation and show how memories attach themselves to physical landscapes.

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The Immigrant Experience

This manifests through multiple layers, such as Shelby marrying an Arab man, Jasper Tran's Vietnamese restaurant (Banh MiMichigan), and Jasper's realization that his refugee family stayed united across continents while local families are divided by peninsulas. It deals heavily with how different minority communities interact within the Midwest.

Economic Displacement and Xenophobia

The backstory reveals the harsh realities of blue-collar job loss during the 2008 recession, like David's family in the automotive industry. It directly addresses the displaced anger that can arise from automated or immigrant replacement (Petey being fired and replaced by a migrant worker), showing the tragic intersection of economic desperation, racial tension, and family fallout.

The Power of Hand-Made Artistry

The family's century-old Ford Model T, their decades of hand-made costumes, and the town's rally around them showcase art and weirdness as a form of liberation.

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PLOT SUMMARY

Michigan is a folksy musical dramedy set at a family reunion where two rival cousins fight a data center to save their grandparents' historic lake house. The themes explore grief, cultural disconnection of the peninsulas, and what it means to be a Michigander.

Grampy Willy and Granny Milly live in Elk Rapids on the north tip of the Lower Peninsula. They have four adult children – Cherry, Perry, Shelby, and the only son Petey, and some grandchildren. Every August, their lake house lodges them for the annual Harbor Days. The Vandam family are known for their century-old Ford Model T, wearing themed costumes for the parade, and winning every Most Creative Award (“[The Mitten Song](#)”).

In 2008, Petey lives with his pregnant wife Lizzie in the Upper Peninsula. His childhood friend is Jasper Tran, who runs the Banh Mlchigan (Banh MI) restaurant in Elk Rapids. On a swim, Petey jokily promises to name their kid after the first rock he picks up: a heart-shaped Petoskey with an elk symbol (“[Life is Complete](#)”).

But in the recession, their shipyard job fires Petey and Liz, with Arab migrants replacing them. He gets in a fight with his little sister Shelby due to her Arab husband. In a storm, he drives off the Mackinac Bridge to save their house on his life insurance. The detective finds Petey's Petoskey. Following his death, Liz refuses to cross the bridge, missing many family gatherings. And Harbor Day mornings feel hollow without goofy Petey to wake them up with songs until his son Petoskey was of age to sing them (“[Body of Water](#)”).

For family reunions, the aunts take turns driving him to Elk Rapids then Milly drives him home, while Jasper becomes his godfather. For every Mackinac Bridge crossing, he can hear his dad sing. And then there's his bright cousin from Dearborn, Lulu Abughoush. She always competes to find the rarest stones on their swims. In 2019, she tosses his heirloom into Elk Lake, severing his spiritual ties to his dad (“[Yoopers and Trolls](#)”).

In 2020, Milly passes away, cancelling the 2020 and 2021 family reunions. Soon, data center developer Amy Wayland tricks a grieving Willy into signing away the deed to his house by using afterlife.ai to bring Milly and Petey back to life (“[It Would Be a Shame](#)”).

In 2022, to honor Milly, 13-year-old Petoskey's mother returns for the first time since the 2008 tragedy. They drive the long way through Wisconsin. Jasper helps Petoskey, Lulu, and the other kids set up camp and go canoeing with them. He often takes some of their snacks as “dad tax.” The aunties take even more with “mom taxes” (“[Dad Tax](#)”).

With Willy believing Milly and Petey are still alive through AI, they discover Wayland's plot to turn the neighborhood into a data center. Wayland tours the home and sees a photo of toddler Petoskey and his hearty stone. She wants it. Worth more than the whole neighborhood, the boy promises to trade it for the deed. They have a day to find the necklace at the bottom of Elk Lake (“[Affordable](#)”).

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Conveniently, Jasper and Aunt Perry run a scuba diving company. But they could not find the heirloom ("Heirlooms"). The next few nights, Lulu and Petoskey witness deer pass by the bonfire. He wishes to see his dad while she hopes to win this year's rock collection ("Dearborn"). One day, while Perry teaches fossils to the kids ("Fossils in the Stones"), Lulu separates from the group and discovers a deer drop off the hearty Petoskey necklace and other rare stones on the shore ("The Great Lakes Ballet").

For Harbor Days' parade, Broadway actor cousin Jacob Jacobowitz is the MC. So, the theme is theatre. Petoskey dresses as *Oklahoma's* Jud Fry while Lulu plays Evan Hansen. Before marching, she shows her rare stone findings to the family. To spite Petoskey, she breaks his father's necklace, unaware it was their only chance to save the lake house from Wayland. The parade goes wrong as Petoskey beats up Lulu, disqualifying them for the first time ("Fraudway"). After a lecture, he runs away ("Kick Rocks").

In the following act, the family revisits a memory of Lulu and Petoskey meeting ("Hands Come in Handy"). Presently, they search for him while Lulu tries to find him at Banh MI ("Petoskey"). Jasper shares his refugee family stayed united despite continents dividing them as well as a time when a Lebanese family bought out his family's failing restaurant but did not resort to blame as Petey had. The Vandams are only divided by peninsulas. Lulu realizes Petoskey is most likely at the Mackinac Bridge ("North South East West").

They drive up to find him. She offers the broken stone as a truce, but he tosses it into the water ("Rock Bottom"). This causes the bridge to fog up where his father's ghost emerges as a giant elk. Petey shares that stones are special only when rocks are packed together. Like family, rocks come and go to leave a mark ("Family's in the Fossils").

They return to the fair where Wayland is exhibiting data center models with other developers. Petoskey offers the Ford which she scoffs but is interested in. Jasper then offers his restaurant. The Vandams return with decades of themed costume while Wayland shows how much "better" AI is. But the town rallies for this genuinely creative and weird family, against AI's goal of turning lakes into data centers. Wayland and the developers refuse and steal the Ford, causing the town to chase after them. She drives it off a bridge, then gets thrown into an asylum by Traverse City. Their contracts are declared void as their party is declared insane ("Leave No Stones Unturned").

After Harbor Days conclude, Liz takes the Ford for a spin and go the short way to the Mackinac Bridge, the first time since Petey's death. Liz and Petey's ghost have their own reunion as lovers once more ("Spirits Under the Bridge").

Years later, Willy passes away. Lulu and Petoskey buy and fix up the lake house. For the 2037 Harbor Days which celebrates two hundred years of statehood, the theme is Pure Michigan where the Vandam family resembles the state's best ("Michigan").

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

THE VANDAM FAMILY

PETOSKEY VANDAM is a 13-year-old farm boy from Skandia and the goofiest of Willy and Milly's grandchildren. Besides his mom Liz, the only connection to his extended family happens on Harbor Days in Elk Rapids. He never met his deceased dad. To honor Petey, his son wears his heart-shaped Petoskey necklace with an elk symbol and awakens folks with his Mitten Song.

LIZZIE VANDAM is Petoskey's mother and narrator from Skandia. After her husband Petey's suicide in 2008, she stops crossing the Mackinac Bridge to attend Harbor Days and all family gatherings. Liz is a proud farm girl Yooper.

PETEY VANDAM is Petoskey's father, Liz's husband, and Willy and Milly's only son of four. Every Harbor Days, he would be the first to get up to wake everyone up with mittens. During the recession, his blue-collar shipyard job fires him and Liz and replaces them with Arab migrants, leading to a fight with his younger sister Shelby for marrying an Arab. He would drive off the Mackinac Bridge to save their house with his life insurance. His ghost visits Petoskey whenever he crosses the bridge, and he hopes Liz visit agains.

LULU ABUGHOUSH is a 13-year-old city girl from Dearborn and the brightest of Willy and Milly's grandkids. Despite going above and beyond, she and her mom Shelby feel out of place. She tries to outshine her cousin Petoskey by finding rarer stones on their swims. She is Iggy Pop's biggest fan, and her favorite musical is *Dear Evan Hansen*. In Arabic, her name means "pearl."

SHELBY ABUGHOUSH is Petoskey's aunt, Petey's little sister, and Lulu's mother who lives in Dearborn. She is an automotive worker for Ford Motor Company. As the sister who broke the mold by falling in love with an Arab, she and Petey had a tumultuous relationship. She tries to respect Petoskey.

PERRY VANDAM is Petoskey's aunt and Petey's older sister in Lansing. With science on her campy mind, she runs a scuba diving company with Jasper.

CHERRY JACOBOWITZ is Petoskey's aunt and Petey's oldest sister in Grand Rapids. She arranges the theme and costumes for the annual Harbor Days parade. She is married to a Grand Rapids Griffins hockey manager.

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JACOB JACOBOWITZ is Cherry's son who is a successful Broadway actor in New York City. He is the Master of Ceremony for the 2022 Harbor Days.

MILLY VANDAM is Petoskey's bold grandmother and inventor. She invented the automatic toilet. With Willy, she owns a house by Elk Lake in Elk Rapids. She and Willy stumble into the audience every so often.

WILLY VANDAM is Petoskey's chill grandfather and gardener. With Milly, he owns a lake house by Elk Lake in Elk Rapids. Grieving Milly's death in 2020, he leaves the garden unattended and accidentally signs away the deed. He and Milly stumble into the audience every so often.

ELK RAPIDS RESIDENTS

JASPER TRAN is Petey's resourceful childhood friend and Petoskey's godfather who runs the Vietnamese restaurant, *Banh Michigan*, a scuba diving company with Aunt Perry, and a golf course for the heck of it. As a teen, he once looked down on the Arab community when a Lebanese family bought out his family's previous struggling restaurant. After Petey's passing with the last memory of him being his prejudice towards Arabs for "stealing American jobs," he vows to help migrants no matter what.

AMANDA WAYLAND is the sketchy CEO of Turkey Ventures and the creator of afterlife.ai whose mission is to turn the Elk Lake neighborhood into a data center. She sees the Vandam family's hands-on creativity as inferior to the efficiency of artificial intelligence. The Vandams describe her as a turkey vulture. But like most sane people in the world, there is one thing she likes more than data and that is a cool rock, which Petoskey holds.

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MUSICAL NUMBERS

ACT I

1. [Overture / The Mitten Song](#) Petey
2. [Life is Complete](#) The Vandams
3. [Body of Water](#) Petey, Lizzie
4. [Yoopers and Trolls](#) Petoskey, Lulu
5. [It Would Be a Shame](#) Wayland, Willy, Milly, Petey
6. [Dad Tax](#) Jasper, Lizzie, Cherry, Perry, Shelby, Lulu, Petoskey, Kids
7. Affordable Wayland, The Vandams
8. Heirlooms Jasper, Perry, Petoskey, Lulu
9. Dearborn (Dear Deer) Petoskey, Lulu, Deer
10. Fossils in the Stones Perry, Kids
11. The Great Lakes Ballet Company
12. Fraudway Company
13. Kick Rocks The Vandams

ACT II

14. Hands Come in Handy Lulu, Petoskey
15. Petoskey Company
16. North South East West (As Long As You Try Your Best) Jasper, Lulu
17. Rock Bottom Petoskey, Lulu
18. Family's in the Fossils Petey, Petoskey
19. Leave No Stones Unturned Wayland, The Vandams, Residents
20. Spirits Under the Bridge Lizzie, Petey
21. Michigan Company

👉 “Fossil in the Stones” is a David Quang Pham signature science song teaching paleontology.