

From: Narissa Willever and Brian Mitchell, Nomads At Large

present home address:

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Store 24 Corner
Thayer St.
Providence, RI
(Next to the old guy wearing the vintage green-and-orange striped
knit hat. We're the ones with teeth.)

Re: Happy Holidays, Recent Events, and Bellybutton Updates

Dear friends, family, Mafia contacts, [slugs,] and iguanas
(you know the category/ies to which you belong):

We sincerely hope this Holiday Greeting finds you well and happy, and adequately prepared for this joyous season.

This year, we have decided to institute a handy form letter for the Holidays. As we sat on our porch rockers [watching the sea gulls waiting for us to magically transform into completely unmoving food], bundled in old blankets to fend off the cold, we realized that we are just far too busy, and our net of influence has been cast just too wide for us to write to everyone individually. Do rest assured, however, that your letter is deeply personalized: we thought long and hard about each and every one of you while your page printed out.

With the Holidays drawing near, we are making time to reflect on our many blessings. As you may have heard, we are presently seeking that treasure beyond all treasures, Gainful Employment. While we have not yet discovered that El Dorado (not even under the Golden Arches, who claim we are over-qualified), we have not yet given up hope. [The words of the McDonald's manager-- "Mickey"--do give us hope, though. She claims that we are "highly marketable, and should have no trouble getting jobs" as produce in the local supermarket. I for one plan to plan to interview for First Rutabaga; Narissa wants to be one of those cool multi-colored Winter Squashes.]

In the meantime, we are finding that Unemployment is, in fact, a full-time job, and that the benefits are many. 1) Flexible schedule. 2) Health benefits: as long as you are healthy, you benefit. 3) Retirement privileges: experience not working while you are still young. 4) Room and Board: skulk in your room and be bored. 5) Job training: after all those wasted years of learning how to think, learn how not to think; (thinking about it all would be just too scary, anyway.) 6) Vacations: every few days you are granted vacation from Unemployment to go and look for a job. 7) Lots of time on the beach walking the dog: there's not much else to do; at least the dog's losing weight. 8) Research experience: catch up on those newspapers and magazines you haven't read since Reagan was in office. 9) The perfect boss: haven't had a conflict yet. 10) Annual leave: take the whole damn year off, working, or not, the salary's just the same.

Besides feeling pleased with our current benefits and musing on the significance of the varying colors of lint that fall from our bellybuttons, Brian and I have engaged in several other worth-while pursuits. For those of you who have been out of it for the past year or have been similarly absorbed with your bellybuttons [If you haven't tried it, you should. Really.], here is what has gone on in our lives since you last fell into your navels:

January found us both working in southern Florida, Brian at the Naples Conservancy, and me at Everglades National Park. Thankfully, we both survived the experience with relatively few bites from small children and large alligators, respectively.

After our stint in sunny Old People World, we gradually made our way back north. In April, I journeyed through the Southeast with my adventuresome mother, yelling "YEE-Ha!" most of the way and trying to find the secret to redneckdom. We quickly found that my pickup truck was far too clean and our Yankee accents far too thick to be admitted to the Inner Circle [Ahh, the thought of a pickup truck in Georgia brings me back to my youth...sitting shirtless and popping open a brewski while on a lounge chair in the back of a friend's truck, driving around Stone Mountain and hootin' and hollerin' while all them babes drool...]. We did have a marvelous time, however, exploring the wonders of Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Mammoth Caves, Red River Gorge, KY, and the endless scope and variety of Park Service Toilets. These last were perhaps the most dangerous and exciting, if not the most scenic, of many wild places. I was favorably impressed by Kentucky's geology, but missed most of the scenery while hooting over spectacular carbonate sequences in the highway road cuts [what a geo-nerd]. In mid-May I returned to Maine to start an early season at Acadia National Park.

Meanwhile, Brian was finishing up his time in Naples, FL. He continued to be kicked, slapped, degraded, punched in the wallet [what wallet? I pawned that off the first week], and generally abused by his employers. His slide shows continued to be a great hit, drawing crowds of as many as one or two [hey! I had at least 15 show up to one. Some of them even had pulses!]{Brian had them all at gunpoint with his special dolphin-boy water pistol.}[They wanted it.]. Thankfully, he was hired by Acadia, and traveled north and into a new era of monetary prosperity. He left scores of pre-school and grammar school admirers behind, who are doubtless still mourning his absence. Brian says his greatest coup on the journey north was the unexpected gift of a television set that gets no

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channels and a trunk full of Frito-Lay products. Long live junk food! He does not recollect much else from his travels, probably because of the unfortunate formation of a layer of Frito corn chips around his occipital lobe, which started growing around the time of his visit to cousins in New Jersey. By the time he reached Acadia, the deadly layer had spread over most of New England.

By late May, Brian had joined me in Acadia and we prepared to settle down in the House of Bugs. While being joyfully reunited with old friends from the Park Service [notice that she fails to mention any joy at being reunited with me][I was including you with the bugs][and I suppose I should include you with the bacteria and other “sub-cultures”?], we endeavored to make new friends with the thriving populations and sub-cultures of weevils, spiders, wood roaches, ants, pill bugs, lady bugs, caterpillars, and Elvis impersonators that shared our house. This done, we settled into the business of being Park Rangers.

All said, the season at Acadia was a successful and enjoyable one. The mountains were mountains, the sea the sea, and the little teeny orange fungi that grow out of logs little teeny orange fungi that grow out of logs. In other words, everything we expected them to be. We met many strange and interesting people, and pretended to be many more. Both of us were given opportunities to expand our horizons by developing new programs for the public. I was very excited to get Acadia’s new wildflower and plant lore program on line and to develop the new Great Head Hike with Brian (no comments from the peanut gallery!). Brian spent his summer feeling as fresh as a daisy [but, alas, not quite smelling like one], since *all* his programs were new, and he hasn’t yet had the time to become old and jaded [and pathetic], like me. It was great to work once again with all the folks from the summer of ‘94 and to get to know some new faces this year. For those of you who have moved on, know that you were missed.

After numerous thwarted attempts at finding further employment in New England, Brian and I have temporarily settled in the Parental Nest. Here, we are taking stock of our situation and enjoying our bellybuttons. We are also taking this time to work on old projects and enjoy quality time with family, pets, and significant others (not necessarily in that order; most of the time is actually spent with pets). While Brian reads through *Scientific American* and ponders possibilities for graduate school, I have chipped away at The Book and am looking at possibilities for publication. Current page count is: 1) read by Brian: 2700 pages fiction, 800 non-fiction (almost 2 tons, or 8 times the weight of his uncle Geoff, if each page weighed a pound); 2) written by Narissa: 963 hand-written, 65+ typed. Brian obviously wins for quantity of pages dealt with, but Narissa will hold out for superiority in the matter of quality [no comment, on grounds that I may incriminate myself].

While taking time off from these vital and time-consuming projects, we enjoy watching *Star Trek*, my two newts, and the family iguanas. You won’t be surprised to hear that Arthur and Gwen have swum their way into American politics, heading up the new coalition called Newts Against Gingrich. For those of you who knew Marvin the Paranoid Iguana as a young lizardlet, you will be happy to know that his home psychotherapy has progressed by leaps and bounds. You will remember the sad state of affairs when the triple horrors of the Metcalf Hall Stepdancers, a neighbor who threatened him with a fork, and Structural Geology lab assignments drove poor Marvin to a nervous breakdown, and the reptile had to leave Brown University in a traumatized state. Although he has had to postpone his dreams of a college diploma, Marvin has not despaired. At present, we are very proud and excited by the path his career is taking. Just last month, Marvin the Paranoid Iguana signed a contract with the well-known circus act the Flying Zucchini Brothers. He is to make several cameo appearances, blessed as he is with tremendous acrobatic ability as well as an uncanny resemblance to a zucchini squash.

[At last! I have finally gained complete control over this letter, and demand that you all send me \$5 before sending this letter off to the twenty people you like least, or suffer horrible consequences like being surrounded by lizards and amphibians and cursed with excessive belly-button crud. I didn’t send off the letter fast enough, and look what happened to me. What? Oh. Never mind. I have just been informed that this is a form letter, not a chain letter. In that case, forget the money (what do we need that stuff for, anyway?). Instead, we wish you much joy for this holiday season, and hope that you are all blessed with many endearing lizards and amphibians, as well as much technicolor belly-button lint to ponder during the coming cold months.]

[Slugs and Kisses,]

Narissa [and Brian]