



Nomads Newsletter

Our Sort-of-Annual Groundhog Day Missive

July, 2006:

✂ The Home Improvement[al] Issue ✂

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Dear Friends, Family, Loan Sharks, Pawn Brokers, and Illegal Organ Harvesters:

Back in January when this newsletter was begun while on a trip to sunny, fabulous, and California-fit San Diego, we had planned to introduce you all to the many fine items in our

new **SPUD LIFE™** line of Inactive Lifestyle Products. (Specially designed for those of you who, like ourselves, are sick of all the health-conscious crap on the market.) These include: 🍌 Lipolux FatWater - unfiltered tap water enriched with buttery chunks of lard, for those trying to beat the diet habit. 📺 TiNo - special TiVo boxes that block programming and only show the commercials. Includes options for slo-mo, repeat, and lots of storage space so you can keep those Superbowl commercials FOREVER. (Specially

endorsed by the **SPUD LIFE™** Council on Bigger Butts); 🐷 Pig Newmans - Figgy-licious filling wrapped in pork cracklin's - YUM! 📖 Tradeable fat credits - concerned about the government's new healthy weight guidelines? Now you can swap fat credits with someone skinnier. A great moneymaker for third world countries! 🍌 And much, much more...



But, unfortunately, our R&D budget got hijacked by that vicious money vortex called *Buying a Home*. Thus, we bring you the **Home Improvement[al] Issue** instead, so-called because the whole damned process of buying and outfitting a home is **DRIVING US MENTAL!!!** (Erhem...) In the spirit of adding more noxious vapors to the world's grotesquely ballooning blogosphere, we give you a blog-style account of our home saga.

Holed Up for Winter

✂ **3/3/06** Once again, another Groundhog Day went flashing by, and found us huddled in our burrow, waiting for the day when we could face our dreaded shadow-nemeses and determine whether the world should be blessed with an early spring or a long winter. Actually, thanks to anthropogenic global warming (which Brian, as a new and low ranking member of the Bush Administration, is instructed to deny), we didn't have much of a winter at all. Even in Vermont winter was less than half-hearted, and Brian's x-country ski excursions were severely limited by a marked lack of snow. 2005 saw us continuing our trend of uprooting ourselves every so often, but thankfully the distance migrated seems to be decreasing with every caravan. We moved from Burlington, VT to Woodstock, VT, so that Brian could begin a new (and "permanent", whatever that means) job with the National Park Service. He is now a network coordinator for the National Park Service's Inventory and Monitoring Program. While this may sound like someone who sets up computer systems to keep track of paper clips, in reality it involves tracking paper clips AND staples, as well as myriad other fasteners like binder clips and those ribbed plastic thingys. On top of all that, he is setting up and running a program to monitor ecosystem and natural resources health in eleven parks. The parks include Acadia and the Appalachian Trail, as well as 9 smaller historical parks in New England, New York, and New Jersey. It's a lot of work, but it is challenging, fun, and keeps him out of trouble (mostly). On the down side, we again began the long search for suitable housing, and given the scarcity of decent abodes in the area for a reasonable price, for a few months we thought we might really find ourselves living in a burrow (hey, the ground actually has good insulation value, so the heating bills would be low)....



Take This Roof and Shove It

✂ 3/20/06 We find ourselves in the final "throes" of contract negotiation for a 1940's-era house in Lebanon, NH. Unfortunately, way more came up on the inspection than we were prepared to deal with. The roof alone is going to cost \$10,000 minimum (oi!) so we have asked for a slight price reduction, since we are already at (if not past) our financial limits just purchasing the house. (Please let Narissa find a steady job, please let Narissa find a steady job!!) Seller has agreed to somewhat less than we are asking for, but we think we might be able to swing it.

✂ 3/22/06 Brian has been away and so Narissa could not OK the reduced reduction with him. Seller has decided she needs an answer within the next couple of hours as to whether we will accept her counter-offer. Brian still can't be contacted. At 6 PM, seller abruptly morphs into a RAGING WEENY and tears up the contract. We have officially lost the house.

✂ **Later**, after giving the bad news to Brian, we find out that we may lose our park housing at any time. Decide to look into condos, rentals, and large cardboard boxes...

Fools for Love and Mortgages

✂ 3/27/06 Wow, there are actually condos for sale right in Woodstock! And they're nice!

✂ 4/1/06 Offered \$14,000 under asking price for a condo and the sellers accepted with no counter-offer. Is it really an April Fools joke? No, apparently the sellers are really motivated. They just lost a prior deal because the couple buying decided to break up. (Can you imagine buying a home when your relationship is on the rocks? 'Maybe if we spend oodles of money on a house, go into massive debt, and throw ourselves into the unbelievable stress of home ownership, we'll *fall in love again*...!')

Sail Away, Sail Away...

✂ 4/5/06 Inspection Day. Boy this condo is beautiful! But don't you think it might be *too* perfect? Oh, except the brand-new basement carpet is trying to emulate the swamps of Dagobah with a hydrometer reading of 78%. And when you turn the dishwasher on, it spurts water all over the kitchen. Now we feel much better!

✂ 4/8/06 The sellers' real estate agent returns to the condo to finish mopping up the mess from Inspection Day. She arrives to find the kitchen's vinyl tiles sailing away into the sunset. Apparently the water wasn't turned off all the way and the dishwasher has mischievously opened its own water recreation park. A log flume is now coursing through the kitchen floor and into the ceiling and walls of the floor below. Basement carpet is sprouting mangrove thickets. Neighbors have broken in and begun illegal airboat tours.

✂ 4/10/06 Sellers have agreed to pay for both repairs of the basement leak and removal of the nascent water recreation industries in the basement and kitchen. We look at it this way: at no extra charge, we're getting the stupid basement carpet removed and the ugly/cheap/ineptly installed kitchen floor replaced. If they don't get everything fixed in time--hey, how else are we gonna get a water view for this price?!



"But think of the possibilities if we just leave it like this..."

Home Sweet Home

✂ 5/5/06 At last! CLOSING DAY. We schlep all our stuff from the Park Service apartment to our new abode. The place looks OK. But Narissa wonders, why does it smell like a dirty hamster cage? We discuss renovation priorities. Narissa wants the upstairs carpet (locus of hamster smell) gone ASAP. We settle in. Brian goes to take a shower--no hot water. After wrestling with the spaghetti mess of pipes down in the boiler room, Brian finally gets hot water--spurting out of the pipe valves, that is. Then the shower plugs up. And the towel racks fall off the wall. And the stairway railing pulls out from the sheetrock. Thought bubbles inflate above our heads:

"Oh my God, have we bought a money pit...?"

✂ **Some days later**, we recall that Sartre wrote, "Hell is other people." But he was wrong: the entrance to hell is marked by a flaming orange Home Depot sign. And the deepest circle of hell is the flooring department.



The Fungus Among Us

✂ 5/16/06 It has been raining pretty much since we moved. Narissa's new window boxes are growing toadstools instead of pansies. A leg rotted off the patio table. Green slime is covering the siding. Strange marine creatures are heaving themselves out of the ooze in the back yard, and several kayakers have just whisked past the deck. The folks at Billings Farm are building a large wooden structure in the back pasture that looks suspiciously like an ark. Narissa walked into our utility room today and little jets of water spurted up from the carpet. She put her hand down on the floor, pressed, and the floor made a noise that sounded like "squoodge." She sent an email to the condo association president and the property manager. Then she set about ripping out the wooden shelves lining the utility room. Behind them was a forest of white, fluffy mold, and malignant looking films of black stuff covering the walls. It is so wet out that slugs have started coming into the basement to die...

Haiku: An Inadvertent Invertebrate Tragedy

*Our basement--a pocked
Graveyard of dried, black boogers
Stranded on the slab.*

✂ 6/2/06 Maintenance supervisor has come by so Narissa can harangue him about his people not cleaning up the plaster mess from the original basement repairs. His revenge: "This basement WILL leak again," he intones lugubriously, his mouth twitching in an evil little smile.

✂ 6/7/06 Still raining. Basement utility room still leaking. Suggest to condo association president that we start a mushroom-growing cooperative.

✂ 6/8/06 Narissa finally gets around to ripping up the master bedroom carpet in preparation for new bamboo floors when--AARGH!!!!!--the source of the hamster smell finally becomes apparent. Leaks throughout the dormer roof have dissolved the pressboard underlayment and rotted the tackboards. Fingers of black mold have crept through the wood fibers, the carpet foam, and the carpet. Armies of fat black carpet beetles scurry out around Narissa's feet. She has seen suppurating road kill carcasses that were less disgusting. At this point, though, she's numb. For a moment, she thinks she might laugh hysterically and then jump out the window...except the window trim is rotten, too, and won't open. Narissa contacts the association president again about that mushroom farm; suggest they might add an insect zoo to the venture.

A Plague of Mice



✂ 6/10/06 A couple of days ago Narissa "walked into" a circulation manager job at the local library. A job with real-people hours; meaning that she needs to stop going to bed at 4 AM immediately. Even with her HappyLite sunlamp, she has not exactly been all Sweetness and Light (or Lite). She had been sleeping poorly and writhing in fibromyalgiac pain, already primed for a massively grumpy day, when she was rudely awoken

just before 6 AM by a loud "SQUEEKSQUEEKSQUEEKSQUEEKSQUEEK!" immediately outside the bedroom door. (Actually, office door. Since the master bedroom fiasco, she has been sleeping in Brian's home office on top of two box springs and a mattress, with her nose grazing the ceiling and a stepladder to get into bed. Brian has been away on business--the lucky sod.) She slammed open the pocket doors and there was Max with his mouth full of mouse and very proud of himself. (This was his first mouse.) He had no idea what to do with the mouse besides carry it around with a macho swagger and growl around it from time to time. So eventually Narissa threw him out into the ceaseless rain to hunch and growl and glare about in his imitation of a tough-cat. Eventually he dropped the mouse, which appeared to have died by cardiac arrest rather than through any predatory efforts on his behalf. Narissa jettisoned the tiny corpse over the deck railing.

✂ 6/12/06 Narissa went up into the stripped-down, moldy master bedroom to watch a movie. Just as she was sitting down--"squeeksqueeksqueeksqueeksqueek!" Gabby had found a mouse for himself. Then "squeeksqueeksqueeksqueeksqueek!" again: Max had one, too! Tiny hopping grey mice seemed to have erupted from the rotting floor. (*Lord, have Mercy!*) Brian called just as Narissa grabbed a couple of the cat-spitty, wriggling buggers by the tail and she shouted, "Call me back! I'm having a mouse emergency!" Narissa ran downstairs to throw as many of the mauled creatures outside as she could; she just didn't have the stomach to finish them off. Sometime during the movie, Narissa heard the now-

familiar “squeeksqueeksqueeksqueeksqueek!” break out again. Gabby ran, growling, downstairs with his catch; he wasn’t about to let Narissa take this one away. “Well, good,” she thought. “Maybe he’ll eat this one and that will be one less for me to deal with.” Then all was silent. Before bed, Narissa cautiously walked about the house looking for mouse remains. Nothing. “Wow, Gabby’s a clean eater,” she thought admiringly. She opened up the office/bedroom and started cleaning up some of the dirty laundry on the floor. She picked up a bra and--“squeeksqueeksqueeksqueeksqueek!”--a baby mouse fell out of the cup. Narissa picked up the panting little creature by its tail and stared at it, dazed. She tossed the mouse outside and went to bed. As she fell asleep, images swam through her brain: mouse-officials huddled around spool tables discussing the recent disaster; mouse-EMTs scurrying from field station to field station to tend to the wounded; rows of emergency mouse-yurts erected throughout the house, all constructed from foam-cup braziers...

Give us a Break (Be Careful What You Ask For)

✂ 7/1/06 With next to no progress on the house in the past weeks, we decide we needed a break and go to a 4th of July party. Narissa joins an impromptu cast of the Vermont Riverdance Company, and is practicing her Irish step-dancing on our friend’s lawn when the dancers all hear a swift *CRACK!!* as Narissa lands in a low spot in the lawn and twists her ankle. Narissa decides that she’s probably just strained the ankle, so we ice it and stay at the party for a bit longer. She wonders, though, if it’s the ankle or the two piña coladas that make her feel like she’s going to pass out.

✂ 7/2/06 The next morning, we hobble to the nearest ER, where they x-ray Narissa’s ankle while Brian talks to the guy who was trounced by an ATV. (His family wasn’t talking to him, since he’d been drunk at the time). The guy’s shoulder is completely messed up--looks like he must have broken a collarbone and some ribs. Ouch. Speaking of “Ouch”, Narissa’s ankle is broken, not strained. The ER sends us home with an air splint and no painkillers, with the recommendation that we go to the bigger ER in Lebanon later in the day to get a cast put on. (The Windsor orthopedist didn’t feel like Narissa’s break was worth a trip to the hospital on Sunday). So, later that day we drag ourselves in to the Lebanon ER, where they at least gave Narissa some painkillers and a “Franken-Boot” splint. No cast; evidently her leg too closely resembles one of those animal-balloon poodles for that to be advisable.

✂ 7/3/06 – 7/4/06 After work on Monday, Brian makes sure that Narissa is situated, talks with a co-worker who agrees to cover him on a trip to Maine later in the week, and mentions that he’s never actually broken any bones (quickly followed by a superstitious knock on some nearby wood). Then he heads off for a bike ride. Brian finishes the first stage of the Tour de France in the middle of the pack, and decides to make up some time on the steep descent. Unfortunately, the descent is a little steeper and curvier than expected, and the ensuing wipeout at about 30 mph proved that Brian may have a bit more training to complete before becoming Lance Armstrong’s replacement. With a crunchy shoulder and a bike with a warped front tire, Brian walks and rides home, and then we both head to the ER for the third time in 2 days. The ER wait is long (“Excuse me, if you are going to have me wait for over an hour to see someone, can I at least have a bandage so I can stop bleeding on your carpet?”), and includes several hours stashed in an ER hallway watching a platoon of nurses try to draw blood from a drunk, reeking, chronically constipated man. The nurses are impressed by Brian’s x-rays, which is always a bad sign. The damage includes a number of broken ribs and multiple breaks to his right clavicle. As it turns out, there is typically nothing to do for clavicle and rib breaks, so they send us home with more painkillers, and we both spend Independence Day passed out on Percocet, having finally gotten our lucky breaks. We hereby request a *vacation*, and retract our previous ill-phrased request for “a *break*”...

Wishing you joy this Groundhog Day...er, St. Patrick’s Day...er, Memorial Day...er, Independence Day...er, just have a flippin’ great day, OK?

Much love,

Narissa & Brian