

STORY-TIME

with
Zorro the Mouse



The Winter Collection

With a special surprise addendum

Compiled and edited by DotRot

Many thanks to VacaDude, without whom the chatroom would not exist.

Without the chat, the chatters would not have remained together.

Without the chatters, the stories would never have happened.

Without the stories, life would be much duller and more humorless.

And many thanks also go to Zorro for bringing our stories to life in his own inimitable way.

The stories are presented as written with only minor editing to preserve continuity of owl gender and verb tense and to correct punctuation. The plots (or lack thereof) have not been changed.

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A collection of stories written Round-Robin style by the chatters in the VacaChat chatroom. The collective minds, wit and humor of the chatters have blended into twelve funny, touching and delightful tales.

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Table of Contents

“where you can find the stories”

January 9, 2011	<i>Wesley Says, "Check Out My New Digs!"</i>	3
January 16, 2011	<i>Pattison's New Job: Understudy for The Hunchback of Nowltre Dame</i>	7
January 23, 2011	<i>Vinky and Vobble on "Dancing With the Owls"</i>	11
January 30, 2011	<i>Polez and Boltz Nominated for "Upstanding Citizens of the Year"</i>	15
February 5, 2011	<i>Vinky Scores Tickets to a Johnny and the Horkers Concert!</i>	19
February 13, 2011	<i>Vinky's Vowlentine</i>	24
February 20, 2011	<i>Vobble Asks, "What Is the Meaning of Life?"</i>	29
February 27, 2011	<i>The Journal of Arachnidology: Glowz Tells All</i>	34
March 6, 2011	<i>Zorro Parties at Mardi Gras</i>	38
March 13, 2011	<i>Vinky and Vobble and the Wearin' o' the Green</i>	44
March 20, 2011	<i>Vinky's Ready for Spring</i>	48
March 27, 2011	<i>Vinky Tells Vobble, "Go Fly a Kite!"</i>	53
Addendum	<i>The Recipes from CC's Café</i>	57

Wesley Says, "Check Out My New Digs!"

Wesley stomped into the owl box and hollered, "Mom! I found it! I found it!" Molly, in her most soothing voice, asked, "You found WHAT, dear?" Wesley screeched impatiently, "Mom! I found it!"

I found a house just for me! It's so perfect, I can't believe it. It's big and roomy so I can stretch out on the floor. It's private and all mine and no pesky brothers to poke me awake all the time,

and best of all it's close so it won't be out of your way when you and Dad bring me dinner and shred it and feed it to me!" Molly, placing her wings on her hips, said, "Now Wesley, you know . . ."

that a house is a lot of money and you're too young to live by yourself." Then Wesley said, "But Mom!" Then Molly said, "Maybe some other time." Then McGee came in and asked, "What's going on? I could hear that from the other side of town." Then Wesley said, "Mommy said I couldn't live in a house I found." Then McGee said . . .

"Mama Molly, I think we should talk about this over in the Royal Palm Tree first before we say anything else. Wesley is growing up and I am so proud of her hunting skills now." Molly thought about it and said, "Okay Papa!". The two flew over to the Palm Tree and . . .

Papa said, "You might want to build you own house or a nest like other birds. Wesley could talk to the Royals to see if they would help." Just then . . .

Carrie flew in to say "Hi," to Mama and Papa. Molly looked at McGee and both of them smiled. Molly said, "What if you and Carrie shared a house together?" Wesley had a weary, wary look on her face, but . . .

she thought about sharing a house with her sister, Carrie. But she really wanted a place of her own. After all, she had already shared a box with her brother and sisters. It was then that Wesley heard Carlos hammering on something. What could it be? She looked out and saw . . .

a beautiful penthouse - with 3 stories! It had a basement, a gag shag room and

a great loft just for Wesley to snooze in. Wes wondered if she could go and ask Carlos to add more. That is when Carrie showed up. She said, "What about me?" and . . .

Wesley told Carrie that she could have the gag shag room, that she had to have the loft with all the trimmings. Carrie stomped and said, "That's not fair, Wesley! I want . . .

my own place too!" But Wesley said, "I'm older than you, so you have to wait your turn." Carrie pouted, and said, "You always think you're so special! I'm important around here too!" Then Molly said, "Girls, girls, stop the squabbling! You're just going to have to . . .

respect each other's decisions now that you are getting older." Wesley looked pleased with what Molly said but Carrie wasn't convinced. She thought Wesley would always order her around so she decided to make up a plan and find a way into Wesley's penthouse. But just then she heard Ashley crying and when she went to her, Ashley said, . . .

"How come you always give in to that Queen Bee? I think WE should be roommates in the new house - we ARE sisters. We're good roommates," she sobbed into her wing. Carrie put her wing around Ashley's shoulder and said, "Hush Big Sister. Don't worry, I have a plan. Here it is . . .

"How about if we share the new owl house and help Wesley build a special home of her own in the Royal Palms? She deserves to have a place of her own. She could design it to look like this.

"I have the plans all drawn up," Wes said. Dad said he would help. Its a bi-level penthouse with a cabana, where I can entertain visitors like my new boyfriend that just flying in to meet you. Here he is . . .

And with this addition to the family we'll have Carlos build a new playground too with swings, a teeter totter, and a jungle gym. We can have all of our friends over! What do you think Mom and Dad? Molly considered it . . .

and said, "Why don't you have Carlos build you a Robot to play with?" Then McGee said . . .

"What is that noise outside?" Wesley said, "Finally, my boyfriend, Mel, has arrived. Mom and Dad, I don't really need a new place. I just wanted to see

what you said." Mel and I are moving into a beautiful brand new owl box in Oceanside! We want to make the wedding plans with you today!" "Oh, My!

"Oh, my!" said Molly. "This is very sudden. We should sit down with McGee and discuss this over some nice gopher grits and snake gravy. McGee will take this shocking news better with a full belly. We could all use a good meal. Maybe with some possum and honeysuckle pie for dessert." Just then McGee popped in and . . .

asked, "What's going on? Who is that young male owl?" As Molly serves McGee his meal, she updates McGee about Wesley and Mel's wedding plans. Carrie looks sheepowlishly at Ashley and says, "We have to do something special for Wesley. After all she is our sister. We can overlook her Queen Bee attitude for a little while, can't we Ashley?"

As they all sit down to gopher chops and snake gravy, McGee eyes Mel from across the table. "So, Mel, can you support my Wesley? Are you a good hunter? Can you provide for her and someday owlets?" Mel swallows hard at his soon to be father-in-law's questions. "Why, yes, Sir. I am a very good hunter. I would like you to go hunting with me so I can show you that I can take care of your daughter." After dinner McGee and Mel set off for the hunting grounds. It was then that . . .

Wesley jumped in and said "But Dad hasn't seen the wonderful box Mel has set up for me yet! We should have gone there first, then you could have checked out Mel's hunting skills, but then . . .

McGee and Mel came back from hunting. McGee told Wesley that her boyfriend, Mel, is a great hunter and she should very happy about that. Wesley said "Oh, Daddy, Mel is the best at everything! You just have to come and see Mel's digs for him and me." Then Mel and Wes . . .

pulled them all out the door, and they flew off to Oceanside to see Mel and Wesley's new box. When they got there, Wes said, "Just look, it's so light and airy! And the porch is furnished so nicely too. Of course, we'll have to build up the gag shag, but there's plenty of time for that!" Then Mel added,

"I have a surprise for you Mr. McGee. Something you have always wanted. I am good at electronics so come see this." McGee flew upstairs with Mel and there to his amazement he saw a camera set up. As McGee hunched over to get a good view of the screen, he realized the cam was inside Carlos and

Donna's house!!! McGee was aghast and sneered at Mel . . .

Mel said, "My human is a whiz with cameras. I was homesick for San Marcos and he gave me Skype. Tauntz ran the other camera into Carlos' house and . . .

But McGee interrupted Mel and said, "A better place for that camera would be on the intruder owls! Or the rat and mouse families around your digs! That way you can feed your family!"

Meanwhile, Carrie and Ashley were planning "We'll have a quick wedding for Mel and Wes since they already have their new digs and by then Carlos will have our new digs ready! Carrie and Ashley are happy for Wesley's new digs but are even more happy for themselves! They will have the new bi-level penthouse and cabana owl box all to themselves with a brand new playground! Oh happy day! Molly and McGee are happy too because Molly is eggplant.

Mel said to Carlos, I'll add some outside cameras to watch for intruders, but I want to keep the Carlos cam too. Just think. We can sit in the privacy of our own homes and join with owls from all over the world. We can watch the two leggers in their own natural habitat without disturbing them in any way.

It will be so wonderful. We can share with each other and get to know owls from other lands and learn more about two-leggers than any owl has ever known before. It will be very educational for your new little ones. Maybe Austin will even write a book! And Max can do some beautiful paintings and Pattison can share cartoons with everyone.

It will be great! And we'll be a part of it!"

THE END

Pattison's New Job: Understudy for The Hunchback of Nowltre Dame

Molly looked at her second born and shook her head sadly. "Pattison, dear," she said, "I do wish you'd try harder to stand up straight. It's just not proper for an owl to slump the way you do."

"I fear you'll never find a mate and make a home and family of your own. No one wants a hunchbacked owl." Pattison vowed that he would try, but wondered why. There had to be a place for him.

A few days later, Pattison shrieked excitedly! "Mom!" he hollered. "I've found my place in the world. I know what I'm meant to be! The theater wants me for "The Hunchback of Nowltre Dame!"

Molly said, "That's great, dear!" Then McGee came in and asked, "What's going on here?" Patterson said, "I'm in 'The Hunchback of Nowltre Dame!'" McGee said, "That's great!" Then Zorro came in and said, "Patterson is in The Hunchback of Notre Dame? Wow!" Then Zorro said, "Well, I must be off. I've got to get some more cheese fudge from CC." And, with that, Zorro was gone. Then Patterson said, . . .

"I think I need to ask for Austin's help since he has the brains in this family." Austin went to Carlos Royal's computer to Google "Notre Dame". "Hey, Brother! You get to go to Paris, France! Can I come with you since I am studying French right now?" Then Austin paused, "Oh, there is a cathedral in San Marcos, Chile!"

Pattison replied back to Austin, " I don't speak French, but some Spanish, so I could go to that Cathedral in San Marcos, Chile." I hear they have some pretty female Barn Owls there . . . But, the Hunchback of Nowltre Dame is suppose to be . . . umm . . . ugly. I'm not." Austin said . . .

"Don't worry about ugly. We can glue gag shag to your back and make you very scary. Let's have some honeysuckle pie and decide on the rest of your costume." Just then . . .

Max tumbled in the door of the owl box. "What's this about a costume? I've always wanted to make a costume . . . and learn how to sew. Hey, where can we get a sewing machine?" Austin said that they were coming up with a

costume that did not require sewing. Max was very disappointed. She hung her head and said, "Well, I'm here to help anyway. Just let me know what to do." Pattison got a big beaky smile and said . . .

"We need something that's going to make this Esmeralda chick forget Quasimodo ever fumbled in the big game against USC. Perhaps something with an amazing amount of "hork" for shoulder pads, and a jersey made of gag shag?! Wait, what play is this again?!"

Pattison looked down at the floor and then up at his brothers and sisters. "I know how we can forget that fumble," he said. "Let's climb up the tower and ring some bells and see if any chicks show up but then . . .

Wesley said, "I think you're just making this part up. Patti, why do you want to be in this old play anyway?" And Pattison replied, aghast, "Why? But I've been practicing for this since even before I fledged! It's all I've ever wanted to do! I just didn't tell you because I was afraid I'd never get the chance!" The others looked at each other, and . . .

Pattison said "I was made for this part! You guys just don't understand. And Glowz has woven the most magnificent rope to swing from the tower on!" Meanwhile, Wesley had gone off to find Chili's in San Marcos because she got confused . . .

about the football reference. "What position did this El Dorado guy play? Was he a half-back, or a full-back?" she had asked. Patti shook his head. "No, it is Esmeralda, and SHE is a NO back--she just knows a Hunch-Back". Wesley said, "Okay, then OWL be back later." But right after she left . . .

Pattison said "I guess this part would not be so good for me." Then Wesley came back and said, "You can do it! I believe in you!" Then . . .

Austin looked at his sister, Wesley, with one eyebrow raised. "Wesley, I Googled Chili's and there is no Chili's restaurant in San Marcos! It is in Oceanside!" Wesley ruffled her feathers and said, "Okay, Austin, have your way!" Off to Oceanside, she flew.

Meanwhile, Pattison wondering what to do, took off and flew to the nearest palm tree to think about it all. All of a sudden a beautiful female barn owl appeared in the palm. Pattison's eyes just about bulged out of their sockets. He said, "You are beautiful! Who are you?" And she said . . .

"I am visiting from India. I am making dinner for the actors. We are having gopher chops with snake gravy and warm beaver buns and scalloped cactus with honeysuckle pie for dessert. And we are drinking a warm honey dripped pomegranate juice. Then, there will be a quick rehearsal before . . .

we start looking for the understudy for the main roles." Pattison's world seemed to be getting better by the minute. "There are actors in town?" The beautiful owl explained that there was a production of "Hunchback" in town. Pattison said . . .

"These gopher ribs remind me that there are things in life far more important than a simple understudy role." This is Oceanside, isn't it?! I know it is!! This place is magical!! There's a Chili's here!!" Pattison stoked up his courage, preened his feathers and, shouting at the beautiful owl, exclaimed, "Esmeralda!! I want my baby back, baby back, baby back!! I want my baby back . . ."

"baby back ribs with snake gravy and bloomin onion!" But Esmeralda just looked at Pattison and said, "You've gotta be kidding me? right?" Then Pattison said to Esmeralda, "Yeah. What I really need is a sanctuary to think about this hunchback thing. Where can we go next?" he asked. She said . . .

"You know, I think the two of us need to find someplace more private to discuss this. Can you suggest a good spot?" Pattison gulped and said, "well, I know a nice palm tree near here. It's called the Palmz." Then Esmeralda batted her eyelashes and said, . . .

"Pattison, I know in the story I am not supposed to like you, but this is real life and I have fallen for you. You have brought me to the most beautiful palm tree in the world and shown me your etchings . . . Let's go celebrate at The Elephant Bar!"

When they entered the restaurant, Pattison walked up to the server and said, "We would like a quiet table in the Bell Tower Room, if possible." The girl at the reservation desk looked down, said something about talking owls, and having worked at an Elephant Bar for too long, she passed out cold. At this point, Esmeralda said . . .

"You know, Pattison, I think you SHOULD audition!" So Pattison auditioned for

the play and was awarded the job of understudy. Little did they know that the star would soon run off to Vegas with a sailor in a white truck, giving up the role.

Pattison was given the role and became a star. The play became a movie and Pattison made millions. He designed and built a soy mouse and rabbit factory to provide for his siblings.

He and Esmeralda made sure that all his sibling were provided with huge mansions and then they moved in to their own place near the beach where they raised a huge family.

Then they all lived happily ever after.

THE END

Vinky and Vobble on "Dancing With the Owls"

Vinky appeared lost in thought. Vobble called Vinky's name. No response. Vobble waved a wing in front of Vinky's face. Still no response. Finally, Vobble poked Vinky in the side. Vinky shook her head to clear her thoughts.

"Vobble," she said, "I've been thinking. We've got some pretty classy moves. Why don't we try to get on that new show, 'Dancing With the Owls?'"

Vobble said, "Vinky, are you sure? The owls on that show are all big celebrities. No one's ever heard of us." Vinky replied, "Ya' know Vobble, I get the feeling that we're better known than you think."

Then Vobble said "Alright, we'll try." Then Ashley came in and asked, "What are you two talking about?" Then Vinky said, "We'll be trying out for Dancing With The Owls." Then Ashley said, "Good luck" and with that she was gone. The next day they went to try out. They danced to Johnny and The Horkers' The Owl Box Rocks. The Judges were impressed and they said, "You're in." Then Vinky said to Vobble . . .

"Sweetheart, dear, now that we are in the show, we have so much to prepare! Costumes - what will we wear! And we have to practice all the dances on the Owl Box Platform in Carlos' Royal Garden. Do you think that Molly and McGee would mind?" Vinky said, "We can practice the Molly Bobble - that should please her!" Vinky got out her yellow legal pad to make notes.

Vinky scratched her head and said to Vobble, "hmmm . . . maybe, just maybe, if we can twirl fast enough, we'll become three dimensional." And so they set about practicing their dance moves, when . . .

they noticed that Molly and McGee were in the audience. Feeling overjoyed they did the Merengue and then the ChaCha. The audience roared in anticipation of their next move and gave them a standing ovation upon their completion. Now . . .

if only their siblings would come to support them, they would win this for sure. Just then . . .

Max and Pattison came in dressed up nicer than any Hollywood star . . . now the support was there. The other owls began to chant. Molly and McGee were ecstatic. To get everyone involved , they decide to do the Macarena. McGee started and then . . .

Suddenly, Vobble turned very pale and said, "Oh no, Vinky! I don't think I can do this after all! Vinky said "This is no time for stage fright, Vobble! Come on, you can do it, it'll be easy!" But Vobble just shook and stood frozen to the spot. So Vinky . . .

took Vobble by the hand and spun her around. The crowd roared. "That was great!" they said. This helped Vobble's confidence and he began the Macarena with the crowd. Then . . .

Vobble let the applause go to his head. He dropped Vinky's hand and began leaping and flapping all around the stage. The judges were aghast. They had to decide whether or not to stop the dance but then Vobble saw the look on Vinky's face and . . .

was about to catch Vinky and continue on with the dance when he saw a last minute group added to the competition. He saw Austin, Wesley, Ashley and Carrie backstage getting ready for their piece.

In the meantime - Two guest owlets were going to do their special dance called the "Punk" - it turns out the Punk family owlets were in town waiting for their new brothers and sisters to hatch - then . . .

yet another owl couple showed up for the competition. It was Lucy and Ricky who danced the Paso Doble like there was no tomorrow! The crowd cheered and Lucy and Ricky gained some points over Vinky and Vobble. Vinky and Vobble decided they needed to pick up the pace! They decided on the quickstep to liven the pace as it was their specialty! Especially when going after treats! Then . . .

Ashley came in and said, "You can do it!" Then Vobble and Vinky looked at each other and were like, "We can do it!" Then . . .

Vinky suddenly shuddered once, then twice and another time! "What's wrong, Vinky?" Vobble put his feathery wing around Vinky. "Oh, I think something is happening to me, right now!" Suddenly, all the judges, the dancing couples, the audience and the chatters watching on Live Stream Ustream gasped as an

egg dropped onto the dancing floor!

Vinky looked down at the round white thing and wondered what happened? She picked it up, decided it would be a good dance prop, and fastened it to her fancy dancing hat. When suddenly, six flying monkeys swooped into the dance room, swirling and spinning overhead, Vinky took off her hat and hunkered down over it, and Vobble . . .

just shook his head in amazement that a Dance Contest could be turning into circus. Vobble put his wing over Vinky and said, "Ya know, Vink, we really need to win this . . . and it's not going to happen if we don't get it together." Quickly, Vobble ran the lone egg over to the incubator and they continued to dance. The last round in the competition was coming up and now was the time to really make a difference. It had to be done as the owl the world was watching. So . . .

then Molly put on her high heels and asked the monkeys to fly in a figure-8 over head. McGee led while Molly danced backwards. "Oh! can she do it?" exclaimed McGee. All Molly could think of was to get home to some snake gravy and gopher chops. This always calmed her down. McGee was ready to do a flip and the splits just as . . .

the audience gave a collective gasp as a pair of surprise last-minute contestants appeared. It was Glowz and Glimmerz! With a steamy red dress and sparkling stiletto heels on her 6 back feet, Glowz was stunning! Molly and McGee finished their number, and as their music started, Glowz and the handsome Glimmerz danced a tango so intricate that no one with less than 6 legs to dance with could possibly have performed it! Everyone gaped with astonishment, and as the many-legged couple finished their performance . . .

the judges were perplexed. How can we judge such a dance? How can we keep track of so many legs at once? They scratched their heads and then decided to let everyone do one final specialty dance. Well, with that Vinky and Vobble winked at each - no problem - we'll pull out our all stops - Johnny and The Horkers! - but then Vinky couldn't find the music so . . .

thinking quickly, Vinky said, "Vobble, we'll have to ad lib the music." Vobble said, "OK!" as he was scanning the audience and the backstage for musical instruments that they could borrow for their grand performance. Vinky entertained the audience and the judges with a two-step jig while Vobble gathered available instruments.

As Vobble was looking in the audience he noticed Vaca! Then he realized he didn't need instruments! He talked Vaca into coming up on stage and singing! So Vaca got the microphone out and also asked his new band, Johnny and the Punks, to accompany him. But Vobble wasn't sure about that - were they going to be the A-#1 band to play at Vinky's and Vobble's #10 winning dance? Vobble said,

"Give us a little time so we can work this out." And the judges did. So before Vinky and Vobble's final number, Mel and Sydney performed the Melbourne Shuffle and did a mowlvelous job! But Vinky and Vobble were now ready for their last dance. They decided on the tango and came out dressed in their Tauntz, the Rabbit, costumes! They came out onto the floor and did a few little bunny hops around the floor and then whisked off their costumes going into their famous Vobble Tango to The Owl Box Rockz. Vinky and Vobble wowled the crowd with their intricate steps and so then . . .

Vobble gave Vinky one last dip and twirl. They held that final, almost impossible to imagine, pose for several breathtaking seconds while the judges and audience sat in stunned silence.

Then they erupted. The noise was deafening! They stomped and hollered and clapped for what seemed like an eternity. Vinky and Vobble were blown away by the response.

The judges gave their scores - enthusiastic perfect scores across the board! Vinky and Vobble had won! Fame and fortune awaited them! But Vinky turned to Vobble and said, . . .

"Vobble, it's wonderful knowing that we were able to do this, but I'm ready to hang up my dancing shoes. I just want to take my egg home to Vacaville and be a family."

THE END

Polez and Boltz Nominated for "Upstanding Citizens of the Year"

Vobble turned to Vinky and said excitedly, "Vinky! I just heard the most exciting thing! There's a new contest! They're looking for the most 'upstanding citizens.' I know who should win that contest!"

Vinky looked puzzled. She said, "Who do you mean? Mom and Dad? Momma and Papa Royal? Uncle VacaDude? The Moderators? There are just so many possibilities."

Vobble said, "No, none of those. They're all OUTstanding, but look at our friends, Polez and Boltz. They're always there, standing up, giving support. They're UPstanding!"

Vinky said, "That sounds like a good idea!" Then Vobble said, "Well, come on then. Let's go tell them and see what they think!" Then Vinky said, "Lets go!" But Vobble said, "But, before we go, let's get some Cheese Fudge from CC!" Vinky said, "I love her Cheese Fudge!" Then Vobble said . . .

"Cheese fudge! I thought CC only cooked snake gravy? Should we go get enough for all the Upstanding citizens that made our box really stand up? Including wirez and cameraz and cordz?" Vinky said, "That sounds like a great idea!" And then . . .

from the side of the box there was a squeaking sound. Polez and Boltz were whispering since they had overheard the conversation. Polez said to Boltz, "Do you think the Mayor of San Marcos, or Gov Owlward of CA, or President Owlbama, or the Great Wizard of Owlz will give us the award?"

Boltz was so stunned he could not respond immediately. Once Boltz came to terms with the idea, he said, "This is really big. We could become nationally - heck, internationally - famous. Just imagine! All the screws and metal parts looking up to us."

Polez and Boltz realized how big this could be. The Royals' place wouldn't be large enough. Maybe they could use the park that Carlos used last time - Walnut Grove.

Vinky said, "We will need a stage built and a place to cook our snake gravy and gopher chops. And don't forget honeysuckle pie. Who will help?" Just then . . .

Carlos came whistling by the Owl Box. "Hey, Donna!" he called. "You've got to see this. I can't believe my own eyes. Now I am reeeaaalllly sorry I didn't put up the cam this year. Look!"

Donna walked up to Carlos and stood below the box with her mouth open. "Carlos, I can't believe it either. I didn't know they were real did you?" Carlos shook his head in wonder. On top of the box . . .

Mockz was dancing around with glee! "A party, a party!" he called to everyone. Polez and Boltz decided they needed spiffing up for the big event.

Boltz asked Tauntz to send up some bunny fur so they could shine themselves and look really bright. Polez called Glowz and asked her to swing right over and spin them a beautiful web for adornment to look like jewels.

Glowz was spinning and spinning. Then she wondered . . . if Tauntz brought up the fur, who be able to spiff up Polez and Boltz?

Vinky was amazed at how concerned Glowz and Tauntz were. "Well, this is what we can do!!!" Vinky said. "What?" Vobble replied. "Well, the solution is . . .

to have one of the owlets bring the fur up and rub against Polez and Boltz on the way. A few trips should do it.

As the spider continued to spin an incredibly beautiful web in the corner, Polez said, "Ooooooh, that bunny fur sure feels good and it makes us sparkle, but isn't it too early to celebrate? We don't have the award yet. This makes me very nervous -- we are just ordinary common hardware - nothing special about us!

Boltz smiled and reassured Polez by saying, "Just think about it -- we know oodles about every owl who has checked in here since the very beginning. Heck, we could be historians and produce an oral history of the Royal owl box."

Just as he said that, there was a strange noise coming from the ground beneath them. It was . . .

just Carlos using the leaf blower, though. Glowz continued spinning her webz, and planning how she would extend it down Polez, as soon as the polishing was finished. But in the back of her mind she was thinking about making a banner with "Some Polez" and "Some Boltz" spun into it. But where to put it? Then she suddenly remembered something she had heard one night while sitting

in her webz. Someone said that when Molly and McGee: The Movie was made, Polez and Boltz would be sure to be nominated for a joint Best Supporting Actor award! Yet another honor for the pair!

While she was thinking this over, Glowz decided Polez and Boltz had enough webz round around them. They were beginning to look like Beauty queens from some modeling show. In the meantime she decided to go on the roof and spin a beautiful tent for the awardz ceremonies.

Then she discovered what Donna was talking about earlier. Donna had said, "I didn't know they were real!" Glowz noticed two fake owls standing on the roof which Mockz had been using as a nest of her own! Glowz noticed in the nest was . . .

a collection of this and that and who knows what! Just then, Carlos finished cleaning the Owl Box area with his leaf blower. It was peaceful and quiet for just a moment when Molly, McGee and their children popped into the owl box. Polez and Boltz told the Royal owl family the fantastic news about them being nominated for upstanding citizens of the year.

Molly turned to McGee and said, "how can we get the word out quickly and encourage supporters to spread the word about the positive impact Boltz and Polez made on the world in 2010. Austin chimed in, "I know!"

"We could use one of those planes that fly over the beach with banners on their tails. Also with all the technology that Carlos and I have, we can put the word all over the net. We just need more . . .

owls to spread the word by beak." Boltz now had an idea. "We could get those chatters from the Owl Box and the other sites to go outside supermarkets and Owlmarkets and hand out leaflets."

Just then McGee flew in with a thud. "I've got it! I've got it right here! Look at this! In his hand was the New Owl Times. The headline read, . . .

"Rally round the Polez! Vote for Boltz and Polez for Upstanding Citizenz of the Year!"

Finally!!! The word was out and people were sending in votes by the millions!

It was the big night! The searchlights were scanning the heavens bringing folkz

from everywhere to the park. The aroma of all their favorites . . . cheese fudge, snake gravy, honeysuckle pie was bringing them from all over the world. Polez and Boltz were so excited . . .

Polez said to Boltz, "Now don't cry or you will rust." Just then, Carlos and Donna decided they better get ready for all the food, people, and . . . oh my! . . . the camera's too. Molly and McGee swung in with the Banner for Polez and Boltz to hang, all the owls and owlets from every where started to decorate the park.

With amazement, Vinky and Vobble were jumping up and down singing The Owl Box Rockz. All of a sudden . . .

they noticed that the park had a beautiful red carpet (red rose petals). Carlos and Donna were on the path leading from their mansion, heading for the red carpet! Donna was donned in a gorgeous gown and a beautiful hat that was adorned with FEATHERS!

Carlos beamed as he smiled his very proud smile to the cameras. All of the gathered owlets were screeching their very audible cheers as Polez and Boltz swooped down to accept their accolades. Just then . . .

Glowz and all her vriends arrived, trailing streamers of intricately woven silk, embellished with dewdrops that sparkled like diamonds! All the spectators were open-mouthed with awe, and as the spiders gently draped their masterpiece over the stage area, a surprise guest appeared! It was . . .

Simon Cowl!! He was speechless over the spectacle (a first for him, for sure!). The paparazzi were out in force to get the first and best photos of the now internationally renowned Polez and Boltz. Polez and Boltz were suddenly on every magazine cover, in every newspaper and on every entertainment show on TV.

Little hardwares all over the world were joining themselves to cardboard boxes, trying to be like their new heroes. Polez and Boltz didn't know what to think. But then Polez thought about it. He said to Boltz, "You know, Boltz. This could be such a wonderful thing. Little polez may grow up and make new owl boxes all over the world.

Our legacy will continue forever.

THE END

Vinky Scores Tickets to a Johnny and the Horkers Concert!

"Vobble! Vobble!! Guess what!!! You'll never believe what's happened! I am sooooo excited! This is the best thing that's happened to me since . . . since . . . since . . ."

"Oh, heck! This is the most exciting thing that's happened to me EVER!" Vobble looked at Vinky in amazement. "I've never seen you like this. What's got you all horked up?"

Vinky smirked and said, "You thought Austin and I were nuts for learning how to sneak into Papa Royal's and use his computer, but LOOK! I won! I won!!"

"What did you win? More mittens like last time?" Vobble sneered.

"NO!" Vinky replied. "This time I won two tickets and backstage passes to a Johnny and the Horkers concert. Be nice to me and I'll take you with me."

Then Vinky said, "I'll be nice to you. I promise." Then Vobble said, "Good!" Then Vinky said, "Lets go get some Cheese Fudge from CC's Cafe and celebrate." Then Vobble said, "Sounds good to me." And with that, they were off.

At CC's Cafe, CC said as they walked in, "Welcome Vinky and Vobble. What would you like today? Hot Choco? Hot Tea?" Then Vinky said, "Nope. We would like two pieces of Cheese Fudge, please. Vinky just won tickets to the Johnny And The Horkers Concert." Then CC said, "That is fantastic Vinky and Vobble! Can you bring anyone with you? I would love to go and take Mom and Dad along too."

Vinky said, "Well, I will have to find out. Can you help sneak me back into Carlo's computer?" CC then said, . . .

"Well, in cyberspace at my cybercafé we can go anywhere!" Vinky and Vobble were well aware that they lived in Vacaville and CC lived in Kansas City. "Where is the concert going to be held, Vinky?"

"With VacaDude's help with Google Earth, I bet we can make the concert anywhere we want. I'm thinking Walnut Grove Park in San Marcos would be great!"

Then Vobble said, "We may have a problem."

"We need to be able to get the food to the concert as well as our friends. The buzzards will take care of the biscuits, but we may need to ship some stuff . . .

"If we can get helpers at Walnut Grove park to do the cooking, we can have snake gravy, gopher chops, honeysuckle pie and maybe,. . .

"just maybe, Carlos and Donna will come get the food with their RV and transport it to the park. "You know how they enjoy traveling and they would love to do it."

Just then Vinky's cell phone rang (with the Molly Song ring tone) . It was Carlos. "Yes, Vinky, Donna and I will pack up the RV but you need to think of a warm up act before Johnny and the Horkers play. You know, something to get the crowd going."

Vinky turned to Vobble. "Gee, Vobble. What do you think we should do?" Vobble said, "Well, I have heard of the Chitter Chatters Choir. You know them. They are lead by that famous Concert owl.

"For our warm up act, we have to go shopping for our special concert outfit. Maybe VacaDude can create a feathery vest with rhinestones and rat tail streamers!

"And then we will have to wear special ear plugs so the loud music doesn't hurt our hearing. Bunny fur ear guards held tight to our heads with snakeskin wrappings. But then we will need to . . .

find transportation to take us to Rodeo Drive for the shopping trip. Hey! I know! Austin just got his license and has a nice ride. We can ask him. We might even ask Donna to ride along. She has such good taste . . ."

So Vinky, Vobble, Donna and Austin hopped into Austin's car and drove to Rodeo Drive to shop for concert outfits! Meanwhile, CC, Dot and DaddyBird started cooking away when they realized they were missing some ingredients! So Daddy Bird hurried out to the car to head for the store, when he found the battery was dead!

What to do now? CCz suggested that they call the AAA to get their car started, so that's what they did. After 45 minutes, they were on the road to the Piggy

Wiggly store and got the ingredients for a great picnic meal.

After all of these diversions, they suddenly realized that the concert time was coming up soon! So they finally got themselves all into the RV and on the road to Walnut Grove Park. They were nearly there when suddenly . . .

The RV quit! Carlos moaned, "Oh, come on! Not now." Then, CC said, "Let's call AAA again." Carlos said, "Good idea, CC." When suddenly . . .

the RV started to roll down the street, without being turned on, with everyone hanging on for dear life inside the RV. But at the end of the street there was a giant bale of straw, meant for runaway RVs and the RV softly came to a halt, while everyone in the RV hugged each other with joy!

But then the clouds became dark!

"Oh, no!" said Carlos. "We can't go all the way to the concert grounds in the rain!" He asked Donna what to do because she always has the best ideas! She got out her "McGee" cell phone and sent him a text to come with all the other owls to make a umbrella over everyone with their wings so they could all walk to the park and stay dry.

But when Molly got there she couldn't understand how that would work. Especially since they had boxes and boxes of food to cover too. Then Donna had another idea . . .

But suddenly, out of nowhere, a large Greyhound Bus pulled up. And as it pulled to a stop, everyone shouted with glee! "Yay, it's the Johnny and the Horkers Bus!"

A good-looking man stepped out and tipped his baseball cap - sporting a "McGee Fling and Fly" logo. He winked and said "Going somewhere? Can I help you?" Donna blushed.

It was VacaDude!! He asked them to join them in the bus to get to the concert. There was plenty of room for all the food too.

What a lucky break they got!!

As they neared the park they saw all of the fans surrounding the stage. Luckily Zorro was there to show them a shortcut except for . . .

except for . . . a small crowd blocking the entrance to the stage. They were doing the Macarena! CC and cardsfan wanted to dance with the crowd but it was nearing time for the show.

Carlos was to MC the show. It was about to start when Zorro said he wanted to dance too, then without a word the horkers . . .

burst into singing their theme song! Suddenly everyone went wild! CC had stars in her eyes! Everyone was dancing and singing along!

Carlos and Donna quietly moved through the crowd to set up the food for CC so she wouldn't miss anything. Johnny was singing and all of a sudden . . .

a cry came up from the audience. Everyone was pointing skyward. There in the night sky, lit up with radiant lights, were the Voblettes flying in formation. They flew in flight patterns never seen before at any air shows.

The flapping of their wings was deafening, fire works streaked across the sky, but suddenly . . .

one of the Voblettes came tumbling down, scaring everyone half to death, but she had a parachute, and soft landing right into the arms of Johnny, leader of the band.

Pfffff that was close! And then . . .

Now that the Voblettes had arrived, it was time for Vinky and Vobble to perform. They had their costumes, thanks to Donna and Austin.

They were ready to go on but their backup didn't show! So, Rocky volunteered to help them out. They took center stage - something they never expected when they won their tickets to the concert.

Going on after their heroes Johnny and the Horkers was going to be hard but the crowd roared when they saw them. Then . . .

Then they went through their act, and - wonder of wonders, it all went exactly as they had rehearsed it! The crowd loved it, especially the finale, when the stage crew unrolled the magnificent backdrop that Glowz and her friends had spun for the occasion. Sparkling and shimmering with colored lights as Vinky and Vobble took their bows, it was the perfect ending to a

perfect show. But just when everyone thought there couldn't possibly be any more problems, suddenly . . .

Johnny started clutching at his throat and looking like he was in distress! Everyone started to panic and Donna was going to call 911 (not AAA). After several agonizing moments Johnny suddenly coughed up a large shiny HORK and everyone breathed a sigh of relief.

Now that the emergency was over, the band decided to treat the crowd to a couple more songs. The crowd swayed to "The Molly Song" and cried to "Ode to Molly's Owlets."

Vinky held aloft her lighter (unlit, because she had no thumbs) but it just wasn't bright enough. Then she felt a tap on her shoulder. It was VacaDude. He handed her a super bright LED spotlight!

She proudly held it high, swaying to the music. Her light was so bright, it caught the attention of the horkers. They called her up on stage for a special rendition of "The Owl Box Rockz."

She was so excited. After the song, the drummer handed her his drum sticks. She hugged them to herself, thinking, "Nothing will EVER top this!" Then Johnny said, . . .

"Vinky you won tickets to the concert because of your wonderful answer to the question, "What would make YOUR life Rockz?" You answered, 'My whole life Rockz! I've got a wonderful family - a great home - and thousands of wonderful friends - too many to count. I can't think of a single thing I need except more of the same!'

"So, since there's nothing you need, we've decided to take the prize money and build owl boxes all over the world, with Ustream cameras in every one of them!!"

THE END

Vinky's Vowlentine

Vinky stood in the owl box chanting, "A - E - I - O - U - sometimes Y and W. A - E - I - O . . ."

"What ARE you doing?" Vobble hissed. "You sound ridiculous!"

"I'm practicing my vowels for tomorrow," Vinky replied. "Tomorrow's the special day for vowels. Hmmmm. . . I wonder if there's a special day for the OTHER letters?"

"What are you talking about? A special day for VOWELS?" Vobble queried incredulously. "Wherever did you get such an idea?" he asked.

Vinky looked smug. "Tomorrow is Vowel-n-times Day. I heard Uncle Vaca talking about it. Gee. You don't know ANYthing!"

Vobble started giggling, then burst into full-blown gut-busting laughter. "Oh my! That's one of the best you've come up with yet! Tomorrow isn't Vowel-n-times Day. It's . . .

Valentines Day," said Vobble. Then Vinky said "Oh." Then Vobble starting laughing out loud. Then Vobble got an idea! "Let's go to Princess CC's Cafe and think about what we will do for Valentine's Day." Then Vinky said, "Great idea, Vobble! Let's go!" When they got to CC's Cafe . . .

they noticed that the door was locked and a sign on the window said "Back in 10 Minutes". "Hmm . . ." said Vobble, "when did the 10 minutes start?"

Vinky said, "Good question, Vobble. Let's check out back and see if CC is in the parking lot." When they went out back they found

CC and her staff preparing beautiful Vowlentine cookies and grilling pocket gophers with snake gravy and other delicacies.

Vinky looked at Vobble and said, "Hey! Maybe we can help." Vobble agreed. As they were helping to make the delicious treats, Vobble came up with another idea . . .

"CC, do you think we can cook some little meecies into heart shapes?" Vinky got a bit confused, "What's with all the hearts?"

CC explained, "Valentine's Day was a special day of love. And often, people and owls express this love by way of heart shapes." Vinky still didn't understand, "Can someone please explain this too me?"

"Well Vinky . . . See it's like this . . . We all know we love one another very much, and we play kissy face all the time, but on St. Valentine's Day we openly profess our love for one another, and . . .

we do everything with hearts. We are also going to decorate CC's Cafe with heart shaped horks, balloons, and wrap ribbons around the gag shags." Just then . . .

CC came by with Valencia Oranges, Vidalia onions, Veal Parmesan and suggested because its Valentine's Day, all her food would begin with V's. She wanted VacaDude to be a host and Zorro could explain the menu.


CC was happy that they had gathered all the supplies for the food and then she had a brilliant idea!

"Let's all go inside and make Valentine cards for all our friends!" said CC. She had a huge bag that held red, white, pink & purple cardstock, along with lacy hearts, puffy stickers, markers & glitter. Vinky didn't understand quite the big deal about the cards, but he was willing to watch while . . .

CC organized everyone. As Vinky started to go into the cafe, she suddenly saw a reflection in the plate glass window. "Wait, a minute," she thought . . .

"That's me!" And, looking more closely, she noticed that her face was shaped like a heart. "Wow!" she thought . . .

"My face is shaped just like a beautiful heart! I think this howliday really IS Vowlentine's Day!"

She then had a "chat" with the San Diego City Council, who agreed to declare February 14 International Barn Owl Day. A worldwide celebration ensued, including virtual hugz between 20 million Ustream watchers. The San Diego County barn owls led all owls around the world in an owlsome screech and hiss, followed by a rockin' rendition of The Owl  Box Rockz.

People around the world became aware of Barn Owls as they never had been before. Wesley started up a business producing "I Barn Owls" T-shirts and quickly made a fortune! Then she asked all the other San Diego area Barn owls for ideas on good ways to spend all that money. She was amazed at all the wonderful suggestions she got, such as . . .

Vowlentine umbrellas for all the owl boxes with Vinky Heart Owl pictures on them so they would all be shaded and grow up healthy.

Vinky decided that this was a superb idea! Who will be the photographer for this wonderful umbrella? Could it be . . .

"Who else, but our cherished Carlos!" At that moment Molly stood up and said, "My dear Mowlthers of the Boxes, we can send all our beautiful babies to college. Syd, Willow, Lucy we need to start a trust for them."

So they started a trust for all of them so they could send their cheepies to college. Perhaps even to the Massachusetts Institute of Technowlogy.

Then when the big Vowlentine's Day arrived, there was a great celebration, with all the Molly watchers and owls of the world. There were also other animals, including mice, rodents, rabbits, and frogs. There was even Glowz, Tauntz, and other Molly characters.

Then the Mayor came to the center of the field, followed by horned owls and ruffled feathered geese all playing marching songs.

Then Tauntz, Glowz, Zorro, Mockz and all the owl box animals came and stood next to Molly and Vinky and Vobble - we give you ❤️ pins. And . . .

so the mayor in the center of this fowlbulous crowd begins to act strangely. He pounces, pounces again, turns and pounces back. Waves his arms madly in imitation of flight.

He says, "I have laryngitis and so I cannot give my planned speech, hence the demo." (Actually, he whispers this to his wife.) Mrs. Mayor of San Marcos thinks quickly on her feet and continues to give a remarkable speech. All participants whistle and applaud her.

As Mrs. Mayor finishes the speech, she turns her head to see a group of performers coming out. The costumes are varied and beautiful. Some dressed as

local well-known Molly & McGee figures come to the front near Mrs. Mayor . . .

McGee flew in a little late with all the kids. CC was concerned. "Is Molly OK? Where is she?" McGee gave a big beaky smile. "I'm going to be a father . . . again!"

The crowd cheered! Molly and all the other Mowlthers couldn't be there because of all the eggs abounding. Max and Wesley put their heads together in a whisper . . .

They wanted to do something special for all the Mowlthers. Max piped up the idea of . . .

coloring all the eggs red while the mOWLthers were on a fly-about. Wesley quickly chimed in, "Max! You stop that right now! At CC's cafe there are already brightly colored eggs. Let's just knit them little blankies to cover our brother and sister eggs with. We can make them heart-shaped just like their beautiful faces. Oh! Isn't Vowlentine's Day great?"

At that point, Wesley decided to check with CC and make sure the food and preparations were in order. Wesley starting helping roll out more cookie dough and then . . .

Vaca came in and asked, "How is everything going?" Then Wesley said, . . .

"Everything is ready!" Carlos just brought us the finishing touch. He gathered up all the horks from his garden, made them into heart shapes and Ashley made a towlonz print in the middle!"

"Everyone is gathering to pass out their hand made Vowlentine's cards to each decowlrated sack, but most of all, we are ready for the feast!"

Suddenly . . . (we need a suddenly), Vinky noticed that she had been so busy that she was missing the action. She had been taking a nap in the Virtual Owl box and snoring (quietly) and dreaming of her handsome mate-to-be. "Where was this Big Vowlentine's celebration?!" She forgot and decided to . . .

do a quick flyabout while softly deet-deet-deeting her jubilant Vowlentine greeting to all the world. Her heart-shaped face emanated her love to everyone, everywhere.

But then suddenly Vobble realized that with all the excitement, he had

forgotten to make a Vowlentine for his best vriend, Vinky! "What to do?" With a sudden inspiration, he grabbed . . .

a piece of red card stock and ran off to find Glowz. He whispered his idea to her, and she said, "Sure, I'd be happy to do that!" So Vobble set down the piece of card stock, and Glowz spun a miniature webz, just the right size to fit. It didn't show up too well, so Vobble took some white paint and a fine brush, and painstakingly owl-lined it. It was beautiful! Vobble was so thrilled that he . . .

hopped up and down like he was on a pogo stick! "This will make Vinky my mate forever! I hope she loves it as much as I do!"

"Now to find a beautiful envelope to put it in and sneak it to CC's so it will be a surprise!" Then Vinky saw . . .

the flyer for the Vowlentine's Day Sock Hop. "Perfect, I'll invite my true love. But we need sockz." So, off he went to Tauntz to gather some soft rabbit fur to knit sockz . . . not just for him but all the owls in the Owl Kingdom. And so, all the happy owls danced their sweet little heart shaped selves all through the night.

They sang and danced to The Molly Song, The Owl Box Rockz, The Molly Bobble, and all of the other Molly songz. Then there was a great feast, with all of the rabbits, rodents, frogs, and all friendz.

Vinky and Vobble flew home to their owl box, exhausted from all the revelry, but also so full of happiness and good feelings that they thought they might burst.

Vinky turned to Vobble and said, "This has been such a wonderful day. I never knew there were so many in this world that love us so much. Who would have ever guessed?"

"Vinky, it's just like Mom (I miss her) always told us," Vobble said. "If you want to be loved, you have to give love first. Once you learned to share your love, you got even more in return."

Vinky nodded with tears in her eyes, "I know. It's wonderful and I'll remember this day for ever. But, ya' know. I really was looking forward to that special day for Vowels too!"

Vobble Asks, "What Is the Meaning of Life?"

Vobble looked puzzled. His little heart shaped face was wrinkled up like a big toe that had been in the pool too long. Vinky looked at him and asked, "Vobble? Is something wrong?"

Vobble sighed and said, "No, nothing's wrong. I'm just wondering."

"Wondering what?" asked Vinky?

Vobble sighed again and said, "I'm just wondering why we are."

"Why we are WHAT? said Vinky.

"Not WHAT," said Vobble. "Just WHY? Why are we? Why are we what we are? Why are we WHO we are? Why are we? I mean, we know mom is here to take care of us, and Dad is here to bring us food. The mice and gophers are here just to be food. I heard Carlos say once that we're here to help others. But if we're here to help others, why are the OTHERS here? I just don't get it."

Vinky looked at Vobble and said, "Vobble, you know what I think? I think you think too much. We're here because . . ."

we got sent down here to control the rat population Vobble!"

Then Vobble said, "Oh, OK." Then Vobble asked "Why do we live here??!" Then all of a sudden . . .

Vinky moved her fluffy owlet head closer to Vobble. She looked into his eyes and whispered, "Don't tell Mama and Papa, but I think we need to go on a flyabout to find out the Meaning of Life! Let's . . .

gather a few needed items like a notebook and pen and begin our journey soon after dusk." "Great," said Vobble. So began the journey for the meaning of life for Vinky and Vobble. "Where shall we go first," asked Vobble? "Well, let's start close to home and ask . . ."

Vinky and Vobble stop off first at Vaca's Google Earth to choose the best place to study the mysteries of life. "Hmmm," they think, "India might be good,

but on the other hand . . . Florence has lots of art and museumz."

So they touch wing tips, having strapped on their backpacks complete with paper, pencil and an Italian/English/Hoot dictionary. They soar over the seas and glimpse the enormous marine mammals leaping and breaching. "Hmm," says Vobble, "maybe they have the secret . . ."

Then Vinky and Vobble notice where the sea creatures are heading! On Google Earth it is a tiny island near nothing! Vinky asks Vobble, "How do you say Galapagos?" Vinky has no idea. "Should we head there? I have read that amazing creatures live there - they should know the meaning of life! Lets go!"

Vinky and Vobble stopped on the back of a whale to rest a bit and asked the whale . . .

"Mr. Whale, we are trying to discover the meaning of life. We hear things said of owls like 'Wise Ol' Owl' and we wish to become wise. Right now we couldn't even tell you how many licks it takes to get to the center of a Tootsie Roll Tootsie Pop!!! Do you think we might have some luck finding out answers in the Galapagos Islands?"

As they whooshed through the waters on the back of the very kind whale (now all THREE) contemplating the meaning of life, the whale, wise beyond his size, said, "You know, Vinky and Vobble, it matters not WHERE you are as you search. You must look in your own little owl hearts for the true meaning of life. The mystery is different for each owl - and it can change as each owl matures and adds to his 'life experiences'. The more experiences you add, the more creatures you get to know, the better idea you will have of the meaning of life for YOU. Everything got very quiet . . .

"Well," said Vinky. "If we need to meet as many creatures as possible we will start in the Galapagos Islands." With that they thanked the Whale and flew off to a small rocky area at the edge of the sea.

Vobble looked down in the water and saw a crab, a stingray, and a puffer fish. Vobble asked them, "Who among you is the bravest? Who among you is the smartest? Who among you knows the wisdom of the . . .

ancient times? We have all learned from our parents, but there are even more things to learn each day using our notes as reference. If we do as the 'Great One' says, we will prosper and keep teaching our young. Then and ONLY then

shall we KNOW . . .

even a part of the reasons for our existence." This was a very tall order, and Vinky and Vobble looked at each other in dismay, wondering what their next step should be.

Then Vinky said, "I think that the Galapagos Islands are still a good place to look for answers." So they continued on, as they came to an island, the first creature they met was a finch.

Vobble asked it, "O finch, can you tell us the meaning of life?"

The finch answered, "Look around the islands. You will see that there are many, many different kinds of finches here, all different from those found anywhere else in the world. We are all distant relations, but we changed to fill many roles here. So part of the meaning of life is to find a place you are needed and fill that need. The owlets were very impressed. Then Vobble said,

"Did you hear that, Vinky? Finch said that we should find a place we are needed and fill that need. I know where we are needed! It is where we just came from!" Vinky looked curiously at Vobble and shook her little owl head and then turned around to find their new direction - back to California!

So, once again, Vobble and Vinky headed back to where they began with a sense of peace inside their gizzard. On their way home, Vinky and Vobble stopped off at San Marcos to discuss their adventures with Molly, McGee and family.

As the Royal owl family listened intently, the lessons learned by the two owl adventurers brought tears to Molly and McGee's eyes.

"Well," said Vinky. "Vobble, let's pull out the PowerPoint presentation of our pictures! Carlos will enjoy that immensely as he is a kindred spirit!"

"Wow!" said Carlos. "I love the picture of the whale ride! . . . and the finches, the other sea creatures and the Great Wizard.

Donna said, "Excuse me, but could you please remove that from the dining room table?!"

So Carlos said, "Oops! We need to take all this into my office. Lets go!" So he

got the cables set up for the PowerPoint presentation.

Carlos asked, "What is this magical creature here that is a wizard? What does it look like? Would it have wings or fins or . . . ?"

They thought and remembered one creature they came across. They told their story of this one.

"We came across a very old tortoise and thought that a creature so old must have answers. We explained our situation to him and asked if he knew the meaning of life?

"The old tortoise replied, 'Just remember, young ones that the answers you seek will not be found at a destination, but in the journey you must take to get there.' The Tortoise said to us as we started away, 'Little ones . . . Slow and Steady will win you the answers you are looking for. Slow and Steady will win your Rat race!' The tortoise said, 'Life is what happens while you plan for tomorrow. I can tell you the greatest thing you will ever have is to love and be loved in return!'

'All you need is love, Love is a many splendored thing, Love lifts us up where we belong!', the tortoise shouted as we started off."

Vinky said, "Vobble and I looked at each other and thought, 'The tortoise might be a little TOO wise.' We thought the tortoise profound in his wisdom but we still wanted to learn more, so we continued our journey on . . .

So, they continued their journey as they relayed everything to Carlos and Donna, who were both very impressed with their little owlets and the depth of their thinking and the beautiful pictures they were painting with their explanations of all that they had experienced.

They were so very happy and realized that they indeed were experiencing the true meaning of life, the meaning of THEIR lives -- loving each other and trying to make the world a better place -- their very existence had already done this for the many MODS who were around.

Carlos leaned back in his chair with a wry little smile . . .

Carlos smiled at the owlets, looked at Donna, and said "My! After hearing of that long journey I am sooo hungry. We need to eat together and share our

food and think of all that has happened."

And so Carlos looked at Donna and said, "Well, where can we go that we can all find something to eat?"

Donna said, "Well, only one place I know of, and they serve gag shag too. It is . . .

our famous place - CC'z Cafe - the home of the Snake Gravy. Since everyone is gonna' be hungry, lets give them the whole schlemiel. We've got gopher chops with snake gravy, buzzard biscuits, honeysuckle pie . . . but . . . that's not all . . . There's pigeon peas with slug stuffed possum foot, too!"

With the scrumptious feast CC had created spread out before them, there was nothing they could do but dig in with gusto. When the very last pea, possum foot, and piece of pie was gone, they sat back, and Vobble said, "Well, I've discovered that ONE part of the reason we are here is to eat CCz's delicious dinners. But I've learned something else, too. Another reason we are here is to be a part of the fellowship of all our family and friends, and always being there when any of us needs anything."

Vobble's pronouncement was met with cheers, and then Vinky said . . .

"I've been reflecting on our journeys and all we have seen and heard. I've pondered all that we learned. I have so many new ideas running through my head . . . so many thoughts and so many new possibilities.

It seems there is no limit to what we could do or become." Vinky looked at Vobble and said, "I really thought you were nuts when you brought up this whole 'meaning of life' thing, but now - I guess it was good.

We've learned a lot and can share it with others. Maybe THAT's why we're here. Maybe we're here to help everyone realize that we're ALL a part of this big world and everyone has to pitch in to make things go right.

"We're here to help folks realize how to share! And they're all here to help us do that too - we ALL have our part in making the world beautiful and peaceful and loving."

The End

The Journal of Arachnidology: Glowz Tells All

The Journal of Arachnidology is pleased to bring you a very special feature in this month's issue. This month, we've obtained a never before seen or heard tale - straight from the horse's . . . err, that is . . . spider's mouth.

This month Glowz, that iconic spider known worldwide for her bright, sparking presence in the Owl Box, spills the beans.

So, we turn the reporting over to Glowz, who will share with us all the juicy tidbits about life among those famous Royal Owls. Glowz . . .

First off, I'd like to thank the Journal for granting me this opportunity to write of my adventures. Second, I feel it imperative to point out that the proper term is "Archnology".

There's no such thing as "Arachnidology", but that's trivial. We'll begin our tale when I first moved into my box. It was empty at that point and I was just a kid, away from home for the first time.

I was happily settling in, then one night there was a horrible storm. In the midst of the winds, a HUGE creature stumbled into MY box. I was terrified. She was drenched and madder 'n a wet hen . . .

Oh! The trip up that loooong pole was really a trip, I can assure you! One of my eight legz was very sore, so I was functioning on 7 out of 8 but finally made it.

I was nicely ensconced, planning out the pattern for my web, when that 'wet hen' creature arrived. I had to dash into a dark corner so as not to get crushed. Whew! I shook off some of her droplets, and . . .

got a good look at her. I realized it was a female barn owl. I knew that because I had my trusty combination encyclopedia/dictionary handy.

The barn owl looked at me and wondered who the heck I was. After a few tense moments, and looking each other up and down, we mutually decided that we could live together amiably.

Well, once the introductions were over . . .

I noticed that the full moon was appearing as the storm clouds blew northward. It had been quite a stormy day. I was just getting ready to weave the web for my nighttime enjoyment when I began to think about these common barn owls. I had just read that they lay eggs. I thought to myself, we spiders lay eggs, too. Now we do have something in common! Suddenly . . .

there was a clap of thunder! It shook the box and we fell to the floor laughing.

We sat by the opening in the box and talked about having our eggs hatching. We were talking about names and the food they will need when suddenly . . .

the wind picked up again and the owl whose name was Molly saw me swing across the inside of the box on one thin silky web I was making.

She put out one of her talons to slow me down and lifted me off and gently placed me in the corner of the box. Listen she said, I have an idea for us. I'll help you if you help me. I need you to . . .

make the most beautiful web you can. It has to be the perfect one for all to see when the moon shines bright, and for McGee to find us when this storm lifts up.

I was curious. "But Molly," I asked. "With this wind so fast, how can I swing and make my web for all to see, and for McGee to find? I am but just a small spider with 8 legs, and one hurt?" Molly said, . . .

"Well, for tonight, how about just a small web, and I'll stand nearby. That way, if the wind makes you swing too far, I can gently bounce you back into place with my beak." I thought this sounded kind of risky, since I didn't know for sure that barn owls didn't eat spiders, but I decided to take the chance. After all, I really wanted to be friends with Molly, and you can't have friendship without trust. So I started to spin the radius threads, those cross strands that anchor my web, when suddenly . . .

a big gust blew. I was hanging on only one small strand connected to a cross hair. It started to stretch and become thinner. I was terribly frightened when a gentle beak pushed me into the box. This was the moment that I knew I had met my new best friend. With only a tiny sparkle to alert McGee, Molly told me that with the rain to make the strands sparkle, that McGee would be able

to make it back. Then Molly . . .

said, "Well, now that we are safe and sound, how about some girl talk?"

"Sure," I answered gleefully. "So is McGee your soul mate and one and only true love?" I queried. "Of course," said Molly without even having to ponder. "Wow," I said, "My mate met with an unfortunate 'accident', but that is the way of the spider - kind of sad, but nature made us that way, that is why we have dozens and dozens of eggz to compensate."

Molly commiserated with me. After a short while, Molly could no longer keep her secret to herself. She said to me, "I'm with egg. Now you know why it's so important that McGee find the house and me."

I glowed for Molly. There was a lot of activity going on in the barn owl box preparing for the new owlets and McGee's arrival.

I want the readers of the Journal of Arachnology to fully understand how important my relationship with this common barn owl named Molly was not just for me, but for another creature who poked his white head into our Owl Box! I found out later his name was Carlos. He put a lens in our box so he could watch Molly and McGee and their eggz!

It was then that I learned about the two-leggers. Living in this box with Molly, I learned so much. The food that ALL these creatures eat is very odd . . . snake gravy and such - gopher chops and rodents. I enjoy a fat fly and I am fine. All of us, seem to center around a good meal regardless of our nature. We learn love and live in harmony with help from . . .

all the two-leggers and wild creatures who fill our lives everyday. We care for one another and have to watch out so all can remain in balance. I sat back and felt very happy and satisfied to think that I had found such a wonderful home. But all was about to change when the next strong wind blew in. Molly's feathers ruffled, I was swinging once again outside the box, and from out of nowhere . . .

flew in McGee. I was amazed at the size of that gopher. Then I knew that my journal was going to be the best. Thanks to Molly, McGee and Carlos with his lens, I was witness the most amazing owlets to be hatched: Max, Pattison, Austin and Wesley. No other spider would have this amazing story to tell. All of a sudden I saw down below . . .

a rabbit hopping around in the yard below. I thought "How nice - yet another player in this drama of life!"

But before I conclude this account of my experiences, I'd like to point out a concept that applies very well to the situation in the home that the owl and I shared - that of symbiosis, or mutualism. Both of us gained from our association, and neither was harmed. I gained a sheltered spot to spin my web, safe from enemies, and a ready source of food, from the bugs that infested the bedding in the box (I have heard that it's referred to by some as "gag shag"). Molly gained a means of reducing the (to her) pests, and a shiny spot for McGee to home in on. And both of us gained companionship and friendship. Now, to conclude my account . . .

None of us ever imagined the events that led up to the worldwide fame of the owl box. How would we have ever dreamed that one day we'd all be celebrities, with our own reality show?

But, you know? It's kinda hard living in the glow of the camera all the time, having our every little movement documented and discussed.

There were no secrets - well, except for that one time when . . . oops! We don't wanna go there! But anyway, back to my story. The life of a spider or a barn owl is often short.

Molly and I together learned to take each moment as it comes, make the most of it and cherish the memories that it creates.

We learned that life is precious and not one second of it should not be wasted. That is the lesson I have taken from my life in the owl box among the Royal Owls.

Live life to the fullest and make every moment fun and memorable.

The End

Zorro Parties at Mardi Gras

"WooHoo!!!" Zorro looked up from the magazine he was reading. That's great! It says here that there are going to be Carnivals all over the world in the next week or so! I love a carnival!"

"Hmmm. Who could I get to take me? I'll ask VacaDude to take me, but he'll want to bring Mary too. I'll need a date. Who can I call?" Zorro got out his little black book and began thumbing through it.

"No, not her. No, she won't talk to me. Maybe . . . no. Hmm . . . yeah . . . that little white mouse at the lab. I'll call her!" Zorro picked up the phone and dialed, "Hello, my sweet," he purred.

"Would you like to go to Carnival with me?" "Oh, Zorro! I love Carnival! The floats, the parades, the costumes, the. . ." Zorro interrupted, "The Ferris Wheel, the Merry-Go-Round, the . . ."

"Oh, Zorro! You're so silly! I'll find my purple and green beads and be ready to go!" Zorro looked puzzled, but decided to go with the flow. After all, a carnival is always fun and . . .

Zorro arranged for a time and picked her up. He'd also asked a friendly owl, none other than Ashley, and they were off.

Suddenly, Zorro said to them, Can you wait just a minute. I'll be right back. Zorro was thinking about a mask to wear, "What to wear?" he says out loud.

Just then Zorro spied something gleaming in the messy mishmash near the VacaComputer.. "Ah Ha!" he says, "This Ancient Yucatanian MayaPunk mask will do just fine! Zorro struggles to lift the mask onto his face. He tilts his head up and stretches his furry neck so his nose points upwards. "There!" he says with a note of satisfaction feeling so Maya Punkish, when suddenly he starts to tip and "Whoa, Help!" falls head over heels backward landing trapped with his tail in the air!

He is wondering how he is going to get out of this mess without VacaDaddy

finding out. "Uh-Oh, what IS that noise going 'Tick tock tick tock'?" he mutters. "Are those some of the clock parts that VacaDude accumulated for Steampunk stuff ticking? I thought they were just parts. How did the clocks start up?"

With Zorro trapped, he didn't know how to get out of this mess, "I've been waiting so long for this date!" VacaDaddy stepped into the room, saw the mess and said, "Have I been robbed?" VacaDaddy looked around and saw that nothing was missing, but there were a lot of broken items. "VANDALS!"

Then VacaDaddy heard this tiny squeaking, saw a little nose and hurried over to make sure Zorro was OK. Vaca said to Zorro . . .

"Are you ok? I thought some one broke in. I am glad to see it you. What are you doing here?"

Zorro said, "Sorry. I was trying to find something for the carnival, but I had accident. Can we have some gopher cheese?"

Vaca said, "Here, my leetle friend, let me help you." and "POP" off came the maladjusted mask. "What are your plans for the day, Zorro?" Vaca asked innocently. "Uhhhhh . . ." hesitated Mr. Z. "uhhh, uhhh, ummm, , well, I just . . ."

So the little white mousette says, "Can we just get this show on the road, please? By the way my name is Zorrina, in case you were wondering. And I am all dressed, beaded up and ready to roll!"

So the owlet comes around and says, "Lucky for you gutz I just ate my complete fill and you can travel safely with me." Zorro interrupts with a reminder to the leetle Zorrina that he is fully insured, lest she worry!!!

While Zorro and Zorrina are discussing their Mardi Gras Carnival plans, VacaDude is standing in the corner watching and listening. "Maybe I can make a small costume for Zorro out of cheese - he could eat his way through the carnival."

But just then Ashley flew to the window - wings fluttering - chittering away. "Hurry! Hurry, Zorro! Look in the sky there is . . ."

a heavy thunderstorm coming! I can't fly in that, so we'll have to leave right away, before it gets here!

So there was no time to make a costume for Zorro. They would have to figure something out later. They piled on Ashley's back as fast as they could, and she took off at top speed. It looked like they were going to just beat the storm, but then, wouldn't you know it, . . .

just as they were flying over southern Cowlifornia, instead of dodging a storm, they came upon a large group of barn owls. Zorro and Zorrina were terribly frightened, but Ashley, with the great flying skills she learned from Molly, was able to escape. Soon, they were heading straight toward New Orleans at top speed. On the way, they touched down just long enough to find a cheese store and made two matching vests for Zorro and Zorrina.

Ashley admired the cheesy vests, then pushed her way back into the cheese store owner's office. Pulling up a chair for Zorro and his chick, Ashley turned on the computer and tuned to the owl box and stared at the screen, with beak open, awaiting the broadcast.

Zorro waited patiently for 30 seconds and said, "Excuse me, Miss Ashley, um . . . Mardi Gras? . . ." Ashley blinked and said . . .

"Oh, I'm sorry I completely forgot . . . Carlos is having a broadcast tonight!"

Zorro and Zorrina look at one another. "But it's only another two hours flight - can't this wait?"

Ash sighs, gritting her beak but knowing she has an obligation. "OK, get on my back, my fine cheesy friends and we'll go."

Then, suddenly, Zorro remembers that Carlos is broadcasting on Monday night and Mardi Gras is on a Tuesday - Fat Tuesday - Pancakes and all that! Zorro turns to Zorrina and says "Lets stay and we can all watch Carlos together on Ustream. Ashley will be happy and we can all go out for an early morning pancake breakfast before we continue our journey to New Orleans. By the way, where are VacaDude and Mary? How are they getting to New Orleans? Weren't we supposed to celebrate together?"

"VacaDude said something about a parade and Carnival in San Fransowlsco, or something like that. Why are there carnivals everywhere? Are there that many Ferris Wheels in America?"

Zorrina says, "What are you talking about - Ferris Wheels? We are going to the Mardi Gras carnival there are no rides there. Only . . .

street parties, food, floats, and beadz, beadz, beadz."

Zorro said "If there are no rides, then why are we going?" Zorrina said, "It's a cultural event, the biggest one is in Brazil. But that is too long of a flight and I don't speak Portuguese. Trust me, we will have a lot of fun."

As the three flew over New Orleans, they could see hoards of people singing, dancing, yelling (in a nice way), beautiful floats, and beadz. Zorro said, "I still don't get the beadz." Zorrina said, "Oh, you will when we land." Zorro was frightened that with all those people that they would get squished. Ashley said, " . . .

"The people won't squish you." Zorro said, "After this we need some gopher chops, snake gravy over snake peas, with buzzard biscuits and some ice cold worm juice. In New Orleans, they don't serve snake peas, (out of season) so we will have to settle for pigeon peas. Not as good but very good for energy after our long flight." Suddenly from Bourbon Street there was a loud . . .

rush of wild wings! Everyone looked to the west. It was Molly and McGee with Carlos and Donna. "Wow, look at all their beads," Zorrina exclaimed. "Beads?" said Zorro, "but I don't understand. Where is the Ferris wheel?"

McGee said, "How kewl is this? We can all celebrate Mardi Gras together. Hey, let's all hold wings and talons and make a Ferris Wheel for Zorro!"

So Zorro and Zorrina hopped on the creative Ferris Wheel to go for a spin and guess who they bumped into there? Zorro's cousin, Stuart Little!! "What are you doing here? Zorro cried! "Oh, I get around," said Stuart.

Zorro and Zorrina were so eggscited to meet Stuart Little that they leaned over to get his autograph but suddenly the "Ferris Wheel of Wingz" became a horking, rolling, Giant Ringoz! "Oh, no!" cried Zorro, as they flew through the

Center of Ringoz. "Hold on to me, Zorrina." Stuart catapulted up and then . . .

the operator slowed the giant wheel, and the mousey friends were able to get off with a huge sigh of relief.

Then Zorrina said, "Please lets go watch the parade now." And so they did. They joined the jubilant crowds as the marching bands filled the air with festive music. They watched the horses, in full regalia parade by, and the floats! The huge, beautiful, marvelous, floats, with riders in elaborate costumes and masks throwing beads and prizes as the crowd yelled and cheered! Zorro and his group were cheering and jumping along with them, squeaking each time they caught a string of beads flying their way. They wondered how it could possibly be any more fun, when suddenly . . .

VacaDude jumped out, wearing his silly goggles and hat. "Well," he said, "this is my makeshift Mardi Gras mask and costume!" All the people and animals of New Orleans joined in the celebration - all types of birds, rodents, frogs, turtles, dogs, cats, and much more. Zorro and Zorrina became so hungry from all the excitement.

"What can we eat?" they said. "Oh!! We can start munching on our cheese vests!" And so they did.

Unfortunately, the birds, rodents, frogs, turtles, dogs, cats and much more were such enthusiastic cheese-lovers that they knocked Zorro and Zorrina down in their attempts to nibble on the cheese vest.

When Zorro and Zorrina were helped up, they found every word they said came out with a Portuguese accent, possibly because they were thinking about Mardi Gras in Brazil.

Zorro said (in a Portuguese accent), "My VacaDude, what Big Eyes you have!" and they all doubled over in laughter. Soon the festivities drew to a close and they all made their way home.

When they had all returned to Vacaville they settled in to think about all that they'd seen and done and to share their wonderful memories.

Zorro had had such a wonderful time. He had no idea such a thing as Mardi

Gras even existed and now he had been there! It was all so exciting! He gushed over all the pretty girls in costume, the floats, the girls, the parades, the girls. . . After he recovered from Zorrina punching him, he said, "Carnival wasn't at all what I expected. I thought there would be rides and games and shows and big fuzzy critters and . . . "

"Hey!! I've got an idea! I know where we can see all of those things. Let's go to Disneyland! I can get us all in free, ya' know. I've got a uncle who's a great big deal there!"

The End

Vinky and Vobble and the Wearin' o' the Green

"Vinky! Vinky! Look at this! Isn't this just the cutest thing you've ever seen? . . . But . . . What is it?" Vobble was waving a picture in a magazine over his head excitedly.

Vinky looked at the picture and said, "It's a leprechaun, Vobble. It's kinda' like a miniature two-legger or something. He's supposed to be rich and bring luck. It must be almost St. Patrick's Day."

Vobble looked puzzled (as Vobble often does). "St. Patrick's Day? What's that?" Vinky sighed, then answered with great patience, "It's a special day for big two-leggers. I don't totally understand it, but they all wear green, drink this weird green stuff, listen to funny music, have parades and then they get REALLY silly. The next day, some of them feel really sick. It's seems pretty weird to me."

Vobble looked at the picture. "He sure is cute. And he's little, like me. He'd make a great pet. I could play with him and feed him and hug him and call him George. PLEASE??" Vinky sighed, again . . .

"Vinky," said Vobble, "remember the last pet you wanted? It was so messy. VacaDude was not too happy."

Vobble continued, "Let's see what activities are being planned at the Royal backyard and at VacaDude's place."

"But, wait! I have an idea," said Vobble. "I want to try to catch one of those little thingies. I'm going to build a trap. Then we can see what else is going on."

"Try to trap a leprechaun? You can't trap one. They are really smart. If you catch them, you get a pot of gold but some only have a pot. What would you use for bait? Green snake gravy?"

"No, Vinky, I think leprechauns like that really weird green drink - go see if Carlos has some in his frig!" So Vinky flew to Carlos to ask him because she didn't want to go steal something from his frig - she is after all a nice owlet and she DOESNT HAVE THUMBS! - but when she got to the house . . .

it was all locked up with a sign saying "Human Box For Rent"!!!!!! So Vinky

thought and thought and decided to fend for herself. She went on a flyabout to the store and picked up some green food coloring and rushed it back to the owl box. Then she horked up a lovely one and decided to colorize it green.

When Vinky got back to the Owl Box she saw Vobble crying in the corner. "Why Vobble. What is wrong?"

And Vobble sobbed, "The Leprechaun took my feathers away." Vinky looked closer at Vobble and saw he was practically all pink and featherless. "Why did George do that to you Vobble?"

"I don't know," said Vobble. "Maybe 'cause I set that trap. Now what are we going to do? I can't even fly now."

"Don't worry! I have an idea!" George exclaimed. "Let's call VacaDude and find out who made Zorro's little yellow vest. Then we can get two matching green St. Patty's Day vests made for you two."

"The vests can have special built-in flying wings and jet packs. After all, if you don't wear green for St. Patty's day--you know what happens! You get pinched!"

"George!" shouted Vobble. "I thought you ran away after you stole my feathers!"

"Ah, no laddie," said George. "That was just in the way o' bein' a wee prank. Methinks you two might be a heap o' fun, so I decided to stick around abit. But first we have to get the two o' you dressed properly."

At first the two owlets were speechless with surprise. Vinky figured a leprechaun's idea of fun would be pure mischief, but then maybe that **WOULD** be fun!

Then George said to Vobble in a whisper . . .

"Look closely at your skin. It's just a costume I put on you. We leprechauns may be mischievous, but we are not mean."

Vobble was very relived to know his feathers were still there. Vobble listened to George's whimsical plan.

"So it's agreed that the three of us will go to the Royal back yard. Vinky and I will be dressed like a black pot and George will surprise all when he pops out

from it."

"That sounds like a good idea. I was just talking to Tauntz last week. He said he had some good ideas about what to do with green food coloring. He said he is an expert at coloring things.

And Molly will have the box all decked out in green. She said even McGee (who is Irish) will bring out his traditional Irish outfit and do the Highland Fling and Fly. I wonder what our friend the spider will do."

So George decides to make his list for the St. Patrick's party . . . "McGee will do his Irish Gig so he will need a Kilt of course. Vinky and Vobble's costumes have to be finished - right now they are both pink - so we need to get some boot black for coloring!

"And Molly has to finish coloring the gag shag with the food coloring that was purchased. But we still need the green drink from Carlos!

"Tauntz - go get Carlos and take that silly sign off the door! They are still there! And of course I need to spiffy up my costume. I need more sequins and gold. Oh, my gosh! Where is my gold! Where is my rainbow? Where is my . . .

"green hat? Just then Vobble remembered Irish foods . . . Irish soda bread and green cupcakes . . . cabbage, green eggs . . .

"Ah!!! We forgot the green frinks!" they cry. So they all storm the 'barricades' and raid the Royal refrigerator. And lo and behold, there is green Kool-aid in a gorgeous crystal pitcher, all ready to go. So out they go with the pitcher, and wow! There is an amazing sight above in the afternoon sky after the misty morning.

There peeking out from behind a recent rain storm was the most beautiful double rainbow any of them had ever seen.

Just then trumpets blared, tambourines tinkled, bag pipes resounded and the Marching Band of Dublin slid down one side of the rainbow and . . .

To their surprise, there was the best sight ever--the Rainbow Bridge, where there were too many creatures to count! Among them were Jody, Kelly, Angel, Dudley, and every type of creature . . . Dogs, cats, frogs, horses, turtles, mice, bunnies, and many others.

Everybody was dressed up in green for St. Paddy's Day. They were having so much fun playing with all the creatures, that they didn't notice the gigantic, sparkly, overflowing pot o' gold!

As everyone played delightedly with all their animal friends that they thought they'd never see again, George the leprechaun found himself in a quandary.

Everyone knows that leprechauns never let anyone else have any of the gold at the end of rainbows. But he was beginning to really like the little owls, and their friends too.

So in a huge gesture of generosity, he announced that he would let the others share a quarter of the gold between them (he WAS a leprechaun, after all). Even that seemed like a huge amount of gold to the others, so everyone was happy.

To mark the occasion, Glowz spun a huge green-tinted webz, with "SOME LEPRECHAUN" spelled out on it. Every one laughed and...

danced and partied until they could party no more.

The next morning, Vobble woke to the sound of moaning. He looked around and saw Tauntz, holding his head, saying, "Why did I . . . ?? Never again . . . "

Vobble looked for George, his new pet, but he was nowhere to be seen. "Vinky! Vinky!! George is gone!!! My new pet leprechaun, George, is gone!"

Vinky opened one eye and said, "Vobble! It's not St. Patrick's Day anymore! Everyone knows that leprechauns can't hang around after St. Patrick's Day is over. But did he leave you anything?"

"Well, there is a little pouch here. I wonder what's in it?" Vobble opened the pouch and poured out the contents. There was a little scroll with an Irish blessing and a four-leaf clover.

The last thing to drop from the pouch was a little note from George. It read, "Always look within yourself to find your rainbow and you'll never want for friends or happiness. I'll be back next year!"

The End

Vinky's Ready for Spring

Vinky awoke and looked out. The sun was shining brightly and sweetly scented breezes were wafting past the door. She blinked her eyes in wonder and surveyed her surroundings. What a beautiful sight!

Flowers of every color imaginable were blooming in profusion around her. Bees and butterflies were flitting around merrily. Other birds were twittering their homage to spring. It was glorious.

She breathed deeply of the spring air and felt so alive. She looked back at her owl box. Drab gray and brown met her eyes. The gag shag carpeting - the bare brown walls.

The whole scene was boring and depressing. Where was spring in the box? Vinky looked around and decided . . .

ling like the sky. and flowers, flowers everywhere. Hmm, I know VacaDaddy paints, I wonder if he will let me use some?" With that, Vinky decided to start this project, but she was going to need some help from . . .

Vobble to get the Dude's paints. So Vinky flew out of the box, tempting the early morning sunrise, to look for Vobble. As she flew over the beautiful morning flowers she was aghast to see in front of her a murder of crows attacking a small owlet. She screamed as she saw them and then deet deet deeted and all the owls from Clutch One and Two heard her. Then suddenly . . .

the crows heard the loudest noise ever - seven owls flapping their wings - like a huge jet plane. They decided that these owls were too big for them to fight off, so they left the little owlet, and flew off into the sun. Vinky and Vobble were so grateful that all owls were there to help. "Vobble," said Vinky, "how about if we . . .

go relax some spring food? Like lark's lettuce , rabbit radish , palmz leaves with sea water. It's too hot for snake gravy. We need cool spring food for energy. Just then, Vinky remembered she had some pig cheese to add to the salad when . . .

Now that they had had a yummy snack it was time to spruce up the box. She began to sweep the gag shag ("Stay out of the way, Vobble!") Vobble started jumping up and down. "I have a brilliant idea." and he whispers in Vinky's ear . . .

"Remember all the green food coloring from the Irish fling we had last week? Why don't we use all of that and color the gag shag?"

But Vinky said, "GROSS! I think we should just sweep all the old stuff out and sand the floor and revarnish it - paint the outside like our neighbor's house. But I don't like green! You know whose house I mean - the owls with the green box? Vobble, help me out here!"

Then Carrie spoke up. "You know, we're already getting conflicting suggestions, and I just know we're going to have a terrible time coming up with anything that we'll all agree on. So let's call in an expert! I think Glowz is the best decorator we know, so let's call her in to make some suggestions for us." Everyone agreed, so Carrie flew out to find Glowz. She was back in a few minutes, with Glowz riding on her back.

Glowz took a look around, and said, "I see what you mean. This place could really use some brightening up. The first thing I would suggest is . . .

I think we should clear out all the old cobwebs flying around and sand away the stains from the lively nights in the box.

Glowz said, "I think we should start at the top. I will start spinning a very special ceiling treatment. You two can go to Home Depowl and look for color samples."

While Vinky and Vobble were happily chasing after each other on the way to the store, Glowz was starting to spin her magic. She decided to . . .

create a masterpiece, when she spotted an amazing potential for a mate! As it is spring, you know.

So she abandoned the project and went after him. Vinky and Vobble came back and were stunned! No Glowz, no decors! So they decided to call in a cowlpenter to make some new windows.

They gave Carlos an emergency call in his new RV to come back immediately! Meanwhile, Vobble came down with a sudden case of spring fever and went

out on the roof to lie down and contemplate the cloudz.

While Vobble was laying on the roof, Vinky cleared out the gag shag and sat down to think what to do. "Hmm, I still want to paint. But I don't have enough money for paints, brushes, etc.

Then Vinky's eyes got big. She was so excited that a giant hork slipped out! "The paint chips. Those are free!"

As Vinky went off to the store, Vobble lay on the roof thinking "I wish I could see the blue sky all the time. I wonder if . . .

we painted the roof blue and added clouds and a sun it would look like this wonderful sky I see right now. With that Vobble flew into the Owl Box all flappy happy and looked for white cardboard to cut out clouds. When Vinky saw him she said, "No - not a sunny day! I was thinking of the Moon - and Starz - and doing a night ceiling. But Vobble reminded Vinky that it was the spring view that got her wanting to decorate. "Oh well, then," said Vinky, "let's . . .

make the sky the bluest ever, and the clouds big and white. Why not ask Vaca if he could paint some flowers on our owl box walls??"

All of a sudden, Vinky and Vobble looked at each other. "What ever did happen to Glowz??? She was supposed to spin a creative spring web!" Vinky and Vobble became worried. "We cannot finish without Glowz!!"

Then the most amazing sound was heard. "OH MY," deeted Vinky and Vobble!!

It was Glowz! She had spun a violin type web and was playing spring sing-along songs. Besides that web, she had created the prettiest web on the ceiling, showing puffy clouds and . . .

they were thrilled with the beautiful music and new puffy clouds in the box. Then they heard a noise below the box. They peeked out to see Vaca, painting some beautiful flowers on the outside of the box. Now they wondered if there was anything else to be done. What else can we do . . .

Vaca had a surprise for them all - not only the flowers he just painted, but his band, Johnny and the Horkers, had come up with a new spring song! They had decided to sing it later that day. But first they had to make sure all the owls and owlets were going to be there to join in. So Vaca asked Vinky and Vobble

to go fly around to everyone they know to make sure everyone is at the Royal backyard by 6pm that day! So they left and . . .

while they were waiting, the other owls started thinking of how crowded the box was going to be, but then Wesley suggested that the party could spill over to the outside playground (which she had enjoyed so much). So they looked outside and noticed that the playground was looking a bit shabby too. So they snatched up Vaca's leftover paints (which fortunately said "Quick-dry") and got to work. Soon the playground was all splendidly colored, and it seemed all was ready. But wait! There was still the . . .

Kestrel house. Since it was vacant now, it needed some sprucing up. Glowz gathered all of her spiderlings and together they all dipped their little spidey legs in Vaca's paint and gave the Kestrel box a paint job that was the talk of the backyard. It looked like a professional faux painter had touched it up. Now they had another box to celebrate in as well! Then Mockz came along and . . .

said, "Well, we need to spruce up the photo ledge and to stabilize it too." So the guests began arriving, listening to the violin strains of Vaca's new song. Glowz said, "OK! Everyone line up for a pic, great photo op here!"

So they squished in, dozens and dozens of them. Fortunately, they were mostly featherz, so they could all squeeze onto the ledge.

Just then, Carlos called them from his RV. "Wait a minute! The photography is MY job!!!!!"

Carlos said, "I'm sending Austin right over. Don't anyone move!" Austin arrived and photographed and filmed the entire event and posted it on YouTube for everyone to see.

After the guests had left, Vinky and Vobble sat back and looked at their beautiful box. Flowers adorned the walls and fresh petals were strewn everywhere, replacing the gag shag.

The box was filled with sweet scents. A beautiful, sunny, spring sky shone down on them from the ceiling. Glowz and her new mate, Glee, bounced merrily from string to string in the web, playing their delightful music.

Vinky and Vobble were thrilled. But something was missing. They looked

around and thought . . . and thought . . . and thought . . . Then Vinky screeched! "I know what this box needs!"

With that Vinky flew off to sneak into the Royal home and office. She got on the computer, logged into www.owlmazon.com and placed her order for a water slide, pool and fountain.

She and Vobble took turns splishing and splashing and sharing in the fun. Vobble said to Vinky, "I wish it could be spring all year!"

The End

Vinky Tells Vobble, "Go Fly a Kite!"

Vobble stood at the door of the owl box with his head cocked sideways in puzzlement. Something in the distance had caught his attention. He watched in wonder. Finally he turned to Vinky and said,

"Vinky, we have new neighbors. They're the strangest kind of birds I've ever seen. They seem to come in all kinds of different shapes and colors and they've each got TWO of the longest tails ever."

One of their tails is fuzzy and one is long and skinny. It doesn't look like it would be useful. I think it would get tangled. The birds don't do anything except just kinda dance around in the sky.

They don't go anywhere. Only two of them have landed in a tree. They don't land gracefully. Then they needed help from a couple of big two-leggers to get out of the tree. What kind of birds are they?"

Vinky watched the odd birds in the sky. "I don't know, Vobble," she said. "I've never seen birds like them before. They're really different. They do seem to love playing in the wind, don't they?"

"When Uncle VacaDude comes around tonight we can ask him what they are. He knows everything! But for now, I think I'll just sit here and watch them. Maybe someday . . ."

when we have nothing to do we can go up close and see them. But they are out in the day and we aren't allowed outside during the day." "Hmmm," said Vobble.

"I have an idea. VacaDude gets clothes for Zorro, and we have VacaPajamas. Maybe Vaca can get us some daytime clothes and we could go 'in cog nito' instead of 'in cog nite.'"

How are we going to be able to stay wake that late? We never stay up that late. Maybe we could drink coffee like the two leggers. Maybe we could ask Vaca to make a us some coffee." Just then . . .

Carrie stopped by. "Vinky and Vobble, you don't need coffee coffee coffee! or

any costumes - just wait 'til right before it gets dark and sneak out the back door. Do some wingercise and fly over to the tree and wait 'til the two leggers go after the new birds! They will tell you what kind of birds they are." So then . . .

Vobble says, "But how do we ask the two-leggers? They don't speak owl. Maybe I'll whip up some rat mousse to encourage them to tell us all about the strange birds."

Just then, Glowz crawled into the box. "What's up?" Vinky and Vobble explained their fascination with the new birds flying around in the sunshine.

"Oh," said Glowz. "I know all about those! One day I was crawling around in the neighbor's garage and crawled into a package. Before I could scramble away the neighbor grabbed the paper I was on and started running with it. I was so scared all I could do was hang on tight! I went soaring into the air just like McGee and Molly! It was amazing! But then . . ."

the thing started to dive just like McGee after a gopher, and I was sure it was going to crash to the ground, but instead, it crashed into a tree! The two-leggers came running toward the tree, and shaken as I was, I scrambled off the whatever-it-was and hid in the leaves that were just coming out. One of the two-leggers started climbing up the tree, calling "I'll get the kite." So now I know what they are - they are called kites." "But . . .," Vinky said "Kites! But when Uncle VacaDude was telling us about different kinds of birds, he told us about kites, and they're nothing like these birds!" But Glowz answered, . . .

"Hmmm. I see VacaDude may have erred. Anyway, I spun my line and made a spider line for the box and I kept spinning and spinning more and wrote "Some Kite"!!

"Wow!" said Vinky and Vobble in unison. "OK, the sun is a big red ball. No time to waste." So they snuck out and flew to the Palmz.

Just then, another kite string got tangled, they carefully loosened it for the humanz. The folks were so pleased they sent servants to bring them gopher under glass.

Vinky and Vobble looked down at the gopher under glass and seemed very disappointed. Vobble got the courage to ask, "Could we have snake gravy with our gopher? We really need snake gravy, please."

The two leggers looked puzzled. "Well," they said, but just then an announcement came over the microphone. "Ladieees and Gentlegerms. We have lost one of our kites! And not just any kite, but the kite held by our folk hero, VacaDude. He is lost and . . . oh! He is hanging on and swinging! Oh no! Oh no!" And suddenly . . .

Vinky and Vobble took off in search of missing kite. They followed the broken kite string to the end. It was lying a few feet from a pond! There, sitting on a lily pad was missing kite! "How are we going to get it?" Vobble said. And just then . . .

Vinky and Vobble saw Vaca on another lily pad! "Vaca! We're so glad you are safe - can you swim over to get your kite? Or should we fly over and lift it up for you?"

Vaca looked at them in confusion . . .

Just then a large gust of wind lifted the kite into the air with Vaca still attached! Vaca, with his quick wit, whipped out his steampunk knife and cut the string. Then there was a . . .

soft place in the grass for Vaca to land, but the kite was getting away! Vinky told Vobble, "Vobble....grab it....go fly that kite!"

Vobble was scared to get out into the sunshine, but he mustered all the courage he had and flapped his wings as fast as he could, caught the kite and flew back in the direction of the palm tree.

A crow flew by and he considered chasing after Vinky, but Vinky had a strange "bird" following him and he thought he had better not enter the competition. Vinky made it to the palm tree and there he found . . .

Vinky in tears, saying, I'm so sorry I sent you out to do something so difficult and dangerous, and I'm so glad you're back safe! And you saved Uncle Vaca too! You're a real hero!

Vobble blushed, and then collapsed in a heap, out of breath and exhausted. Glowz immediately started a new webz that said "HERO" on it. By now it was dark, and all the other owls in the Molly and McGee family arrived, all adding their congratulations. Meanwhile, VacaDude was . . .

tripping gaily along toward home when all of a sudden he stepped onto a ground spider's web! "Oh no! Glowz's not so nice cousin has me trapped!" He got more and more entangled until finally he cried out in a tiny teeny little voice, "Help meeeeeee."

Mary, the lovely Mary, came running and extricated the by now kerfuffled Vaca from the web, brought him home and made him his favorite meal.

Vinky and Vobble had been looking on in fright. They were so relieved to see that Vaca was once again safe and sound. They sat back and breathed a great sigh.

Vinky looked out at the kites dancing on the wind. "Vobble," she said, "do you think we could ever learn to fly like THAT? You know, sorta floaty and bouncy?" It sure does look like fun."

Vobble pondered this for a minute and said, "I don't know Vinky. I'm not sure our wings are right for that kind of flying. Daddy says our wings are built for speed and stealth. I don't think they bounce so well.

But I do have an idea. Vaca was able to fly on a kite. Why can't we? We could put big kites on our backs and Uncle Vaca could hold onto the skinny kite tail and we could play with the other kites."

"Vobble! That's one of the best ideas you've ever had! Let's go talk to Vaca! He's got all that stuff to make things out of! I just know he can make us some kites. With that, the two set off for Vaca's office, ready for many new adventures!

The End

The Recipes from CC's Cafe

Developed and written in the kitchen of DotRot

Beaver Buns

Buzzard Biscuits

Cheeze Fudge

Cold Worm Juice

*Gopher Chops, Snake Gravy and
Homemade Gag Shag Noodles*

Green Cupcakes

Honeysuckle Pie

Irish Soda Bread

Pig Cheese

Pigeon Peas

Scalloped Cactus

Slug Stuffed Possum Foot

Snake Peas

Veal Parmesan

Vowlentine Cookies

Zorro's Mardi Gras Pancakes

Beaver Buns

3 tablespoons warm water (105-110° F)	1 cup whole milk
3 tablespoons sugar	2 cups bread flour
¼-oz package active dry yeast (2½ teaspoons)	1½ teaspoons salt
1 stick unsalted butter	1 1/2 to 2 cups all-purpose flour
	Raisins and dates
	Slivered and sliced almonds

Stir together warm water, 1 tablespoon sugar, and yeast in a small bowl and let stand until foamy, about 5 minutes.

Melt $\frac{3}{4}$ stick butter in a small saucepan. Add milk and heat to lukewarm. Stir together yeast mixture, remaining 2 tablespoons sugar, butter mixture, bread flour, and salt in a bowl with a wooden spoon until combined well, then stir in enough all-purpose flour to make a slightly sticky dough that forms a ball.

Butter a large bowl. Knead dough on a lightly floured surface, kneading in more all-purpose flour if dough is too sticky, 10 minutes, or until smooth and elastic but still slightly sticky. Form into a ball and put in buttered bowl. Turn to coat with butter, then let rise in bowl, covered with plastic wrap, in a warm place 1 hour, or until doubled in bulk.

Butter a 13x9-inch baking pan. Divide dough into 30 equal pieces and roll into balls. Arrange evenly in 5 rows of 6 in pan and let rise, covered loosely, in a warm place 45 minutes, or until almost doubled in bulk.

Cut a small slit in each roll and stick in two slivered almonds (to resemble beaver teeth). Add $\frac{1}{4}$ of a date for a nose and two raisins for eyes. (Press them down into the dough a bit.) Add two sliced almonds for ears. Let rolls rise, covered loosely, 15 minutes.

Preheat oven to 375° F.

Melt remaining 2 tablespoons butter and cool slightly. Brush tops of rolls with butter and bake in middle of oven until golden, 20 to 25 minutes. Let rolls cool in pan on a rack 5 minutes. Turn out onto rack and cool to warm.

Cold Worm Juice

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 12-ounce can frozen limeade concentrate | 1 2-liter bottle ginger ale or seltzer water |
| 1 12-ounce can frozen lemonade concentrate | A few drops green, red, or yellow food coloring (optional) |
| 1 12 ounce can frozen orange-pineapple juice concentrate | Gummy worms |

Combine juices and ginger ale or soda. Fill two ice cube trays with the mixture. Refrigerate remaining mixture.

To each section of the ice cube tray, add one drop of food coloring (don't stir it in) and one gummy worm (with the worm trailing outside the cube). Freeze.

To serve: Place two or three frozen worm cubes in a glass. Fill with cold juice mixture. Enjoy!

Gopher Chops, Snake Gravy and Homemade Gag Shag Noodles

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 egg, well beaten | 1 teaspoon minced garlic |
| Semolina flour | 1 small snake, thinly sliced** |
| 1 teaspoon garlic powder | 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour |
| ¼ teaspoon onion salt | 1 cup beef broth |
| Olive oil or non-stick cooking spray | 1 cup chicken or vegetable broth |
| 6 six-ounce boneless gopher chops* | Salt and pepper to taste |
| 2 tablespoons butter | |

*We usually substitute pork chops

**We've found that when snake is not readily available, a thinly sliced onion works well.

Beat one egg well. Place about ¾-1 cup of semolina flour in a mound on the counter top. Make a well in the mound of flour. Add garlic powder, onion salt and beaten egg to the well. Begin mixing with a fork, slowly incorporating all the flour until the dough comes together. Add more flour if needed. If dough is too stiff, a few drops of water or olive oil may be added.

Knead the dough until it is soft and pliable. This might take several minutes. (Using a stand mixer with a dough hook simplifies the process: just add the ingredients and mix.)

Divide the dough into 3 portions. Cover two and set aside. Roll one portion thin on a well floured surface. Cut into $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch wide strips. If strips are very long, cut into halves or thirds. Set aside to dry a bit while you roll the remaining dough.

Heat skillet to medium heat. Lightly oil or spray with cooking spray (remove skillet from heat before spraying).

Add chops and brown on one side. Turn and brown on other side. Reduce heat and continue cooking until desired doneness is reached. Remove from skillet and keep warm.

Melt butter in same skillet. Sauté garlic and snake on medium heat until tender and just starting to brown.

Stir in flour. Continue to cook, stirring constantly until flour just barely starts to brown.

Slowly add broths, stirring well, until slightly thickened. Season to taste. Keep warm.

Bring a large pot of water to a full rolling boil. (A bit of salt may be added to the water, if desired.) Drop the noodles into the water, one at a time, stirring after every few noodles. Cook until tender. Drain well.

To serve: Place a mound of noodles on each plate with a chop beside them. Top with gravy.

This is good served with broccoli, carrots or asparagus.

Green Cupcakes

2 sticks (16 tbsp.) unsalted butter , room temperature	4 large eggs , room temperature
2 cups sugar	1 cup sour cream , room temperature
3 cups unbleached flour	1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 teaspoon salt	2/3 cup key lime juice , either from real key limes or bottled
1 teaspoon baking soda	Green food coloring , optional

Preheat the oven to 350°. Line muffin pans with paper liners or mini muffin pans with mini liners.

Cream the butter and sugar in the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the paddle attachment on high speed, until light and fluffy.

On medium speed, add the eggs, 2 at a time, then add the sour cream and vanilla. Scrape down the sides then add the key lime juice. Turn the speed to medium-low and beat for another minute. (The mixture might look like it's curdled a bit, but this is okay. It will all mix beautifully when you add the dry ingredients.) Stop the mixer.

Sift together the flour, salt, and baking soda in a bowl. With the mixer on low speed (stir), add the flour mixture to the butter mixture until just combined. Fill the cupcake liners to the 2/3-level with batter. Bake in the center of the oven for 20 to 25 minutes for full-size or 15 minutes for mini. They're done when a toothpick comes out clean. Cool to room temperature.

While the cakes cool, make the icing.

Cream Cheese Lime Frosting

2 sticks (16 tablespoons) unsalted butter , room temperature	1½ cups powdered sugar
2 cups (16 ounces) cream cheese , room temperature	1 teaspoon key lime flavoring (or vanilla extract)
	Green food coloring (optional)

Mix the butter, cream cheese, sugar, and flavoring in the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, on low speed until the sugar incorporates, then turn it up to high and whip for about 3 minutes. Spread the frosting generously on top of each cupcake.

Honeysuckle Pie

1 cup honey (use honey from a local source)	1½ cup slivered almonds
3 large eggs , beaten	1/8 teaspoon ground nutmeg
3 tablespoons butter	1 (9-inch) unbaked pie shell
1 teaspoon vanilla extract	Fresh, clean, pesticide free honeysuckle blossoms

Preheat oven to 325° F.

In a large saucepan, bring honey to a boil. Remove from the heat. Stir a small amount of the hot honey into the eggs. Return all to the pan, stirring constantly. Bring to a gentle boil. Gently stir in the butter, vanilla, almonds, and nutmeg.

Pour into the unbaked pie shell and bake for 25 minutes or until the filling is set.

Just before serving, garnish each slice with a honeysuckle blossom.

Irish Soda Bread

½ cup white sugar	3 cups golden raisins
4 cups all-purpose flour	1 tablespoon caraway seeds
2 teaspoons baking powder	2 eggs , lightly beaten
1 teaspoon baking soda	1¼ cups buttermilk
¾ teaspoon salt	1 cup sour cream

Preheat oven to 350° F. Grease a 9 inch round cast iron skillet or a 9 inch round baking or cake pan.

In a mixing bowl, combine flour (reserving 1 tablespoon), sugar, baking powder, baking soda, salt, raisins and caraway seeds.

In a small bowl, blend eggs, buttermilk and sour cream. Stir the liquid mixture into flour mixture just until flour is moistened. Knead dough in bowl about 10 to 12 strokes. Dough will be sticky. Place the dough in the prepared skillet or pan and pat down. Cut a 4x3/4 inch deep X in the top of the bread. Dust with reserved flour

Bake in a preheated 350° F oven for 65 to 75 minutes. Let cool and turn bread onto a wire rack.

Pig Cheese

16 ounces cream cheese -- softened	6 slices bacon -- cooked and crumbled
1/2 pound grated sharp Cheddar cheese	3 tablespoons minced fresh parsley
1/2 cup chopped green onions	Pig shaped cookie cutters (optional)
1 clove garlic -- minced	

Combine all ingredients, mixing well. Form into a ball; cover with plastic film. Refrigerate overnight to allow flavors to blend. To make it more "piglike," pack the mixture into oiled pig-shaped cookie cutters before refrigerating.

Pigeon Peas

2 cups fresh or frozen pigeon peas*	1 lemon
1/2 stick butter	Ground white pepper
1/4 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese	<i>*Green peas can be substituted</i>

Boil the peas until done, then remove from the heat and drain in a colander, saving a bit of the cooking water.

Put the peas back in the pan with some of the reserved water and add butter. Stir around, then sprinkle in the Parmesan cheese and stir again until the peas are lightly coated in the melted cheese. Add a small squeeze of lemon juice and a sprinkle of white pepper.

Scalloped Cactus

Sliced cactus* (about 1/4-inch thick)	Shredded sharp Cheddar cheese
Flour	Milk
Salt and pepper	(measurements vary according to the amount of cactus used)

**We usually substitute sliced zucchini squash. (about 7 small to medium)*

Layer half the cactus in a single layer in a large baking pan. Sprinkle with a dusting of flour (enough so the entire layer is covered lightly). Then sprinkle with a bit of salt and pepper and a thin layer of cheese. Repeat layer one more time.

Pour in enough milk to almost cover cactus. Bake at 350 degrees until cactus is soft and sauce is thick (about 45 minutes).

Slug Stuffed Possum Foot

2 smoked possum feet* weighing about 2 pounds each	1 teaspoon black peppercorns
1 quart cider	1 bay leaf
2 onions, peeled and halved	A few sprigs of thyme
2 large carrots, peeled and cut into large chunks	2 tablespoon grain mustard
	4-5 tablespoon clear honey
	2 tablespoon brown sugar

**We usually substitute smoked ham hocks*

Soak the feet overnight in cold water then rinse them. Put them into a large saucepan with the cider, onions, carrots, peppercorns, bay leaf and thyme and add water to cover them well. Bring to the boil and simmer for 2-2½ hours, topping up with water if necessary until the meat is tender and almost coming away from the bone. Drain and leave to cool a little. (The cooking broth can be saved to use as a soup or stock.)

Preheat the oven to 350° F. Mix together the honey, mustard and brown sugar.

Put the feet into a roasting tray lined with foil. Stuff small pieces of onion (yellow or green) between the meat and bones. Spread with the honey and mustard. Bake in the oven for 45 minutes to an hour, basting every 15 minutes or so until they are caramelized.

Snake Peas

½ pound snake peas*	1 teaspoon chopped fresh thyme
1 tablespoon olive oil	Kosher salt to taste
1 tablespoon chopped shallots	

**Snake peas are usually pretty hard to find at the local market. We usually substitute sugar snap peas.*

Preheat oven to 450° F.

Spread peas in a single layer on a medium baking sheet, and brush with olive oil. Sprinkle with shallots, thyme, and kosher salt.

Bake 6 to 8 minutes in the preheated oven, until tender but firm.

Veal (or chicken) Parmesan

½ pound veal or chicken , pounded thin	2 eggs , beaten
1 cup bread crumbs	1/3 cup olive oil
1½ cups grated Parmesan cheese , divided	Your favorite red sauce
	¾ cup Mozzarella cheese

Preheat oven to 350° F.

Mix bread crumbs and one cup Parmesan. Dip meat in eggs and then in bread crumb mixture alternately until a thick layer has built up.

Heat oil to medium temperature and add breaded meat. Cook until desired tenderness (both sides of cutlets) and then drain. Place cooked meat cutlets in a 9x13" baking dish. Cover with your favorite red sauce and sprinkle with Mozzarella and remaining Parmesan. Bake until bubbly and cheese is melted and starting to brown.

*Vowlentine Cookies**

2 cups unsalted butter , softened	4 teaspoons baking powder
1 cup firmly packed brown sugar	1 teaspoon salt
1 cup granulated or superfine sugar	¼ cup milk
2 large eggs	1 tablespoon vanilla extract
6½ cups all-purpose flour	¼ cup seedless raspberry jam
1 cup ground almonds	

Beat butter at medium speed with an electric mixer until fluffy. Gradually add sugars, beating well. Add eggs, one at a time, beating after each addition.

Combine flour, baking powder, and salt: add to butter mixture alternately with milk, beginning and ending with flour mixture. Beat at low speed after each addition until blended. Stir in vanilla extract.

Divide dough into 4 equal portions; wrap each portion in plastic wrap to prevent drying out. Chill.

Roll cookie dough to 1/8-inch thickness on a lightly floured surface. Cut with a 2-inch round fluted pastry cutter, and place on greased baking sheets. Cut center from half of cookies with a 1-inch heart shaped cutter.

Bake at 350° F for 8 to 10 minutes or until lightly browned.

Remove to wire racks to cool.

Spread ½ teaspoon seedless raspberry jam on solid cookies; top with cutout cookies.

**In some places, these cookies are called Jammie Dodgers.*

Zorro's Mardi Gras Pancakes

1½ cups whole milk

1 cup instant oats

½ cup sifted all-purpose flour

¼ cup sifted whole-wheat flour

¼ cup oat flour or oat bran*

1 tablespoon baking powder

1 teaspoon salt

2 eggs, beaten

2 tablespoon honey

¾ cup raspberries

½ cup chopped walnuts

Pour milk over oats. Let sit.

Sift together flours, baking powder, and salt.

Lightly stir eggs into oats mixture.

Add dry ingredients and honey, stirring until combined. When the batter is thoroughly mixed, stir in the berries and walnuts.

Ladle batches of the batter onto a preheated greased or nonstick griddle or frying pan and cook until tops are bubbly and edges look cooked. Turn over and finish cooking the other side. Makes about 10 pancakes.

**If you cannot find oat flour or oat bran at your market, just run some oatmeal through the food processor until it is the consistency of flour.*

On Writing and Story Telling . . .

In good writing, words become one with things.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Writers aren't exactly people.... they're a whole bunch of people trying to be one person.

F. Scott Fitzgerald

Keep in mind that the person to write for is yourself. Tell the story that you most desperately want to read.

Susan Isaacs

Writing is a socially acceptable form of schizophrenia.

E.L. Doctorow

I love writing. I love the swirl and swing of words as they tangle with human emotions.

James Michener

Writing is my time machine, takes me to the precise time and place I belong.

Jeb Dickerson, www.howtomatter.com

To me, the greatest pleasure of writing is not what it's about, but the inner music the words make.

Truman Capote

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