

STORY-TIME

with
Zorro the Mouse



The Summertime Collection

With yet another special addendum

Compiled and edited by DotRot

This volume of stories is dedicated to
Sarah Lewis, our beloved Slewvi

Loved by all she met
Friend to all she knew
Dedicated (and funny) story writer
and, a true MOD and VAD

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 owlet 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 thirteen funny, touching and delightful tales.

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Table of Contents

where you can find the stories!

July 3, 2011	<i>FIREWORKS!!!</i>	3
July 10, 2011	<i>Vinky and Vobble Visit The Hollow Tree</i>	9
July 17, 2011	<i>Vinky Discovers Google Earth</i>	15
July 24, 2011	<i>Momma! It's HOT!</i>	21
July 31, 2011	<i>Vobble Discovers Wagner and the Opera</i>	29
August 7, 2011	<i>Vinky Horks a Great Hork</i>	35
August 14, 2011	<i>The Mysterious Visitor</i>	42
August 21, 2011	<i>What's a Three Letter Word for . . . ?</i>	49
August 28, 2011	<i>Glowz and Glimmerz Take Up Tap Dancing</i>	57
September 4, 2011	<i>The Owlet's Time at the Beach</i>	63
September 11, 2011	<i>The Owlets Go To School</i>	70
September 18, 2011	<i>Summer's Almost Gone</i>	78
September 25, 2011	<i>Vobble Solves the Mystery</i>	87
Addendum	<i>Even More Recipes from CC's Café</i>	95

FIREWORKS!

"VOBBLE!!! Call 9-1-1!!! Call the Nationowl Gaurd!!! Call the Tyto Air Force!!! Call the Owl Army!!! I don't care who you call, but you gotta call SOMEBODY!!! And you gotta call them NOW!!!"

Vobble rushed to Vinky's side. "Vinky? What's all the fuss? What's the matter? Did you lose your "I <3 Molly" charm again? Or did somebody steal your latest issue of Better Palmz & Gardenz again?"

Vinky was indignant. "It's nothing as trifling as THAT! The two-leggers have gone CRAZY! They've declared war on us or something! They're SHOOTING at us! Just look at my tail feathers!"

Vinky turned around. Vobble looked at Vinky's tail in amazement. Three of the main tail feathers were almost complete burned away and several others were still smoldering. Vinky was in tears.

"My beautiful feathers! Why would anyone want to do this to me? Why are the two-leggers shooting missiles and rockets and bombs at us? What did we ever do to them to make them do this?"

Vobble was aghast. "Vinky, are you sure they were shooting at YOU? The two-leggers love us. I can't imagine them doing this. There's got to be a mistake. You know? There's only one thing we can do."

"We've got to find Uncle Vaca or Grampa Carlos or Cousin Austin quick and find out what's going on. I know THEY would never turn on us like this." Vinky and Vobble flew off to find some answers.

As they flew into Vaca's back yard, they were shocked to see Vaca standing there, a rocket in one hand, a lit stick in another, laughing with glee. The owlets then . . .

descended upon Vaca! Vinky grabbed the rocket thing and Vobble tried to blow out the stick thingy!

Vaca was shocked and exclaimed, "What are you doing, you silly owlets?!" Vinky showed Vaca her burnt feathers. "Vaca! See what you did to me! Why did you do that?"

And so Vaca said . . .

"Look, kidz. I will help you out as usual. I created you myself after all and will protect you with my dying breath.

Vaca took Zorro along for moral support. He then took each owlet gently by the hand and led them through the big crowd to a field. They got a fluffy owl patterned blanket and faceplanted. Vaca said, "NO! You have to look up."

Vinky and Vobble looked up and saw cardsfan shooting off fireworks and they got scared, so they hid behind Vaca for cover.

VacaDude told them, "It's OK!. It's just fireworks!" He continued, "I thought this might happen, so I came prepared."

"Vinky and Vobble, you are young owls but I think you are old enough to visit Austin, the Owl's famous library. It is right here in the Owl Box. Austin liked to learn about things first so he would not be afraid."

VacaDude, Vinky and Vobble hopped into The Owl Box to take a quick look.

"Ah HA! Here it is! The book on Pyrotechnics!"

Vinky flipped the pages open with her beak. "It says that there are four primary effects of fireworks - noise, light, smoke and floating materials - like Confetti! Yay!!! We like confetti!"

As they flipped through the leaves of the big book, they found a section showing ancient places in China where candles were set upon floating plates down river and where men with long braids and women in beautiful robes tossed flowers in the river, then as the sky darkened, they tossed lit sticks into the air and the first ever sounds of "ahhh" and "ooooh" were heard around the globe.

As Vinky and Vobble were starting to calm down, they left the library and started to enjoy the wonderful sparkles in the sky. Then all of the sudden . . . COUSINS! Large pelicans came with their mouths loaded with water. They started dousing everything in sight - dive bombing with gallons of water!

Vinky and Vobble scurried about trying to warn the two-leggers to take cover, explaining that the pelicans didn't understand the two-legger tradition of

shooting fireworks.

VacaDude and Vinky and Vobble crawled under a picnic table. Vinky called out, "Stand down! It is only a celebration. No one is under attack!"



Horace, the head pelican called his troops and landed on the top of the picnic table. "What is going on?" he asked. "We had several cousins almost shot down because of this."

Vinky explained it was just another two-legger celebration and no one was in danger. The 4th of July was a date that two-leggers declared independence.

After a moment, Horace relaxed and said, "Well, we are here now. Let's join in the celebration. Vaca gave Horace a rocket with a long fuse. He flew to the edge of the clouds and let go of the

rocket and . . .

just then a huge boom sounded, and Vinky and Vobble and Horace looked at each other, stunned and deafened by the noise. Then a huge military tank drove into view! The top opened, and a soldier in uniform rose partially into view.

"What's going on here?" he shouted. "The National Guard got word of missiles being fired in this area, and this unit was sent to defend the people of the state of California from foreign attack!"

Vinky and Vobble gulped loudly and looked at each other in dismay! "What are we going to do now?" asked Vinky. "Somehow this has gotten too big for us!"

Vobble replied, "I'm afraid we're in Biiiiiiiiig Trouble!" But just then, Vaca . . .

said, "Let me have a word with the commander, and, please, Horace, also join me."

"Now listen sir," Vaca said (being very respectful of the military leader!). "This is the first time our little owlets have seen fireworks! So we have been trying to be very careful of what is happening! Would you like to join us? The

6

commander then said . . .

"Now call off the alert and let's show these owlets how true Americans celebrate." The commander asked, "Do you gutz know of CC's Cafe?" and VacaDude said, "Let's get honeysuckle cider for every one. Lets call Carlos and Austin to bring salmon gibblers and pig sauce."

VacaDude decided to take charge of this big group. "Okay, everyone! Listen up!! I will be leading all of you to CC's Cafe! See that Harley Davidson Steampunk motorcycle with the custom side-car over there by the owl box? Vinky and Vobble will be in the side car. Follow me!!!"

Horace replied, "Our Pelican Police can fly to CC's Cafe and meet you there!"

The commander got into his lead tank to gather his troops. And off they went, down the highway!

Within 45 minutes all the characterz - VacaDude, Vinky, Vobble, Carlos and Donna, Austin, Horace, the Pelican Police leader, the US Military Commander and troops, CC, cardsfan, Crowds from Fireworks, and more - arrived at CC's. The Cafe was using their "OverFlow" room for the first time since it was built. But even that room got bursting at the seams, so CC and Cardsfan opened the back door and let everyone file out into the meadow behind the cafe.

As they stood there looking at the beautiful Fourth of July evening, they saw something terrible happening in the field.

There were sparks! Then FIRE! A brush fire had started about 100 yards from the cafe. All the patrons turned and looked at Horace. It was obvious what needed to be done.

Horace gathered his troops and headed for the lake. With gallons and gallons of water in their mouths, they flew into action and dive bombed the brush fire. Horace realized it would take much more than a few gallons of water to put this out.

Austin and Carlos filled up the RV with all the water it would hold and headed toward the fire. Hoses were hooked up from the cafe, but could hardly reach the blaze.

Again Horace and the troops filled their mouths and dive bombed the site.

After about 45 minutes, Horace and the troops, along with Austin and Carlos and most of the patrons from CC's had put out the fire. All were exhausted and ready for more ice cold honeysuckle cider when . . .

Vinky and Vobble put their heads together, whispering excitedly. Then Vinky lifted her head, laughing, and said, "Have all of you had a look at yourselves?"

So everyone looked around and started to laugh. Everyone was covered with soot and ashes!

Vobble said, "We are such a mess that we ought to make use of it. Let's have a Post Fire Parade!"

No one had ever heard of such a thing, but they all thought, "Why not?" So they all started lining up behind Vinky and Vobble, but suddenly . . .

they heard music and drums and marching feet. They all scurried back out of the road, just in time to see a huge parade full of marching bands and twirlers and floats and pretty girls go by!

They all cheered and laughed and scrambled for candy and toys tossed to the crowd. Flags were waving and then it got quiet. A group of men, all ages, were marching by in uniform. Folks saluted.

As they passed, a few wiped tears from their eyes. But they were smiling too. Then another band showed up and the cheers began again. It was such a grand spectacle. The owlets were astonished.

Once the owlets returned to the box, Vobble said to Vinky, "I have something for you. I found some tail feathers that Molly and McGee must have pulled out when they were molting last week."

"I think they're just the right size and color for you. I even had Uncle Vaca add some Super Glue to the end of them so we can attach them to your feathers that got burned. You'll be good as new!"

"Oh, Vobble! Thank you! You're the bestest owl in the whole wide world! And just think, now I've got a part of Molly or McGee in me (or maybe on me), but it's still pretty awesome either way!"

"So, what do you think of this two-legger Fourth of July thing, anyway,

Vobble?" Vobble looked troubled. "I don't know, Vinky. The fireworks are really pretty and all, and I know folks love them,

but I still worry. Just think of all the other owls out there who don't have two-legger friends to explain things. I hope none of them get hurt. I hope the two-leggers are careful and think about it."

"I've been thinking, though. Why don't we have a celebration like this? I don't mean fireworks and all that, but why don't we have a day when all the owls celebrate our heritage? We need this!

Vinky just smiled and said, "Well, with all the parties and events and celebrations we seem to have around here, ya' never know. Maybe we can come up with something!"

THE END

Vinky and Vobble Visit The Hollow Tree

"Vinky? What does 'hollow' mean?" Vinky tipped her head and answered, "I think the word you mean is 'holler'. That means yelling like Uncle Vaca does when the hammer hits his thumb.

"No, Vinky, the word is 'hollow'. Look, it's right here on Grampa Carlos' blog. He said there are some young barn owls, like us, but they live in a hollow tree. Is that like a maple or a palm tree?

Vinky pushed Vobble aside and said, "Here, let me look. You've hogged Uncle Vaca's computer long enough. Vinky took over and typed rapidly (or as rapidly as she could with such sharp talons).

Soon, she had <http://dictionary.com> open on the screen. She quickly typed in 'hollow' and hit the Enter key. "Oh, I see now! 'Hollow' means 'having a space or cavity inside - or not solid.'

So the tree those owls live in must be empty! I wonder what it's like inside. Do you think they've fixed it up like we've fixed up our box? Do you think it's all fancy or is it really dirty?"

"Vinky! I wanna see the hollow tree and visit those owls. They sound really smart, living out on their own like that. Do you know where the tree is or how to get there? Can we go now??"

Vinky had an idea. "Hey! Carlos and Austin will probably be going back there. All we have to do is follow them. Or maybe we could just ride along with them. Or hide in their camera bag or something."

With that, the owlets flew off to locate Carlos and find a way to get to the hollow tree. They found Carlos working on . . .

a video for his YouTube Channel when he said "Hey, Vinky and Vobble! What are you two doing?" Then Vinky said . . .

"Carlos, we need to get to the Hollow Tree. Wil you be heading out there for your Field and UScream adventures?"

And Carlos answered "Gee, Vinky and Vobble. Not today. We just finished signing 1,000 books and we are sooo tired."

Vinky and Vobble looked dismayed. Now how in the world would they find that hollow tree?

So they flew over the the Dude's house, where he was in supernumerary costume and Mary was singing operatically. The Dude said, "I am too hot in this ridiculous outfit!"

So, just then, he saw Vinky and Vobble at the door and said, "Look! I just built a steampunk helicopter. Let's go for a spin. Here are your goggles."

So they climbed in, leaving poor Mary all alone with her trills. They headed - guess where?? Right over the hollow tree!! Once they arrived and knocked on the bark outside the hole . . .

It looked very dark and smelled kinda funky too. There were some muffled sounds coming from inside. "Vobble," Vinky whispered, "I think there's something in there."

Meanwhile Vobble was bobbling his head all around and saw hundreds of Gopher Holes! "Wowez, Vinkie, look at all those gopher holes, we should tell CC so she can come and get stocked up on Gophers. They'll be nice and fresh for all our gopher feasting.

"Vobble! Pay attention, I said there's something in this hollow, Look! It's . . .

Vinky looked there in the hollow tree. "There are two owls in the tree and they're having snake gravy for dinner!" They shot away from the hollow tree.

Just as Vinky and Vobble thought that things could not get more exciting, a MiniVan pulled into the parking space where Carlos parked when he was filming.

In the distance they spotted four two-leggers walking along the San Marcos fence lined nature path carrying a cooler and some other things in their hands. There were three men in white cotton robes and a woman with a colorful skirt - colors of a male bluebird and rubythroated hummingbird combined. They jumped the fence - went to the Old Sycamore Tree - spread out an Afghan rug and sat down under the tree with their flute (tula), the rubab and the table

bongos and . . .

the two-leggers started playing these odd instruments, softly and everything seemed to mellow out. A sort of calm fell over the area. The two owls that had shushed Vinky and Vobble away came out of the hole.

"Hmmm," Vinky said, "those owls seem much nicer now. It must be the music." Animals of all kinds started to gather. Vaca and Austin came by - they had talked to Carlos and told him to bring the camera.

They said, "You won't believe this. Get a video of this! The music is calming all the nearby animals."

There was love in the air and the critters and two-leggers were in awe when a huge wind came up and . . .

started blowing all the leaves in the tree and the two-leggers white cloaks. Vinky and Vobble were getting blown away from the tree again! They worried that their wings weren't going to be strong enough!

"Help us, Vaca! Help us, Carlos!"

And then all of a sudden the sycamore owlets came out of the tree and rushed towards them! "We will help you cousins! Grab hold of our talonz and we will carry you back to the tree! Then . . .

Vinky and Vobble grabbed hold of the talons of the helpful owlets and held on tight. All four owlets flapped their wings as hard as they could, but the wind was still blowing them back away from the tree.

Just the, Max, Pattison, Austin, Wesley, Ashley and Carrie all flew up together. They were all big strong owls now, and they were able to pull the younger owlets back to the tree easily. Once they got back to the tree, they looked around and saw the damage the sudden wind had done. Lots of leaves and some branches had blown off the tree. The musicians were way off across the field, chasing their instruments, which were blowing away. With quick thinking, Austin (the two-legger one) had thrown himself down on top of the camera equipment, so it was safe. Things seemed mostly ok, until they suddenly noticed that . . .

on the ground hidden under the rug and lying next to the strewn instruments

was a gasping, rasping, lil' recently fledged owlet with his beak wide open and panting.

"Oh my," said Vinky, brushing off her wingz. "Oh my," said Vobble, stretching his neck. "Oh my," said VacaDude, stretching his arms. "We need to get this little owl some help."

The little owl looked up at them and blinked then stretched his wingz, stretched his neck, and kicked his legs and squeaked "I am ok, really, I am OK."

Everybody seemed happy. Nobody was hurt - just some bent instruments and ruffled feathers. They began gathering up all their things when . . .

they heard a mysterious voice from afar. "Okay, everyone get back to the tree again! It is time for holes and gardens."

There was a film crew already there to do the "Holes and Gardens" show for HolesAndGardens TV. So they all trooped back and put on beakstick (the girls, that is) and talon polish. The boys put on their bow ties. They refreshed and refreshed and were ready for the shoot.

"Welcome," they said in their sweetest deets. "We will show you the special features of our hole. You see here we have the lovely and efficient Hork Drawer designed by Dior. We just use it when we have that special urge and the hork goes down a chute and right over to the formaldehyde area and then on conveyer belts to the science classrooms, all ready with scalpels to dissect and shred horks. Yes we have every color, but the pink ones are the most fun to dissect.

"And upstairs we have the lookout ledge where we can just pop our heads up to see where the best gophers and mousies are. And here's the take-off branch (where Vaca landed his steampunk helicopter) where we swoop silently down on the hunting grounds."

Vobble was getting bored with this whole house showing thing... "I think i'm going to . . .

go on a flyabout," he said. On his flyabout he came upon some honeysuckle juice and brought it back to group. They all went to the verandah behind the hole. It was in the shade and it was very nice there. Then . . .

the Star Reporter from Better Holes and Gardens asked Vinky and Vobble if they would like to live in the Hollow of the Old Sycamore Tree, since it had so many luxuries!

Vinky said, "Well as nice as this is, it is a nice place to visit, but i would rather live in the best home of all! At Molly and McGee's Owl Box in the Royal Gardens of San Marcos - just over there! There is a certain magic in that owl box. I don't know what it is, but there is no place like it on earth - we seem to keep coming back there, too."

Vinky, Vobble and all the owlets gathered at the bottom of the sycamore tree. Carlos and Vaca , Austin and crew made a choice along with everyone that they should make the sycamore tree and special hole a landmark. Not just for owls, but for everyone. They could turn it into a Bed and Breakfast type place.

Even the gophers agreed. (Simply because then they would not have owls hunting them all the time.) So it was settled. They called the mayor and several top officials and a sign was made to show this elegant landmark for years to come. Everyone was happy and drinking their honeysuckle juice in the shade when a whimper - a whine - came from around the bottom of the tree.

It was the little owl that got caught up in the wind. He was crying and moaning. Vaca went to comfort the little guy, "Whats wrong? Everyone else is happy." The lil' guy said, "The two-leggers would shoot off their rockets again and chase everyone away. Everyone laughed and assured the lil' guy that . . .

this tree would always be his and his sisters home for all time! Everyone decided to hold hands and wing tips and stand around the tree. The decided to sing Kum Ba Yowl. But Carlos said they should think up a song especially for these owls. So they called barlycorn - but then . . .

Barlycorn turned out to be away from home, so they decided to just sing Kum Bay Yowl, for now, and get a special new song later. After they finished singing, the owls and owlets all exchanged e-mail addresses, and the visitors started getting ready to leave.

But just then, the oldest Sycamore Owlet remembered about another local owl family with owlets and told Carlos and Austin all about where to find them. Carlos and Austin started off excitedly, and of course everyone followed, accompanied over the Internet by over 9000 viewers.

They were almost to the new site, which was in an old oak tree this time, when . . .

Carlos said, "Oh my! Austin! Did you bring the backup batteries and the backup broadband stuff? We must have lost our batteries in the wind. We're about to fade out here!"

Austin and Carlos ran for the car, hollering, "We'll be back tomorrow! We've got to make ANOTHER run to Fry's! But don't tell Donna!!"

Vinky and Vobble and the Dude loaded back into the helicopter and headed home. It had been such a fun visit. "We gotta' do it again!" they yelled.

Back home once again, Vobble and Vinky looked around their box. "Ya' know Vinky, I think we need to do some sprucing up around here. A little bark, some twigs and some leaves and we could have a place just as nice as the sycamore owls!

I wonder if we can get VacaDude to add a hork chute and a verandah? And a gopher look out perch? And a whole field of gopher holes? Oh, maybe we should just be happy with what we've got. We DO have some great times here!

I hope you got the email addresses for the sycamore owls. I really wanna stay in touch with them. We can invite them to all our parties. (We DO seem to party a lot, don't we?) I think they'd have great fun with all our friends."

"Yes, I got their emails, Vobble! Before we invite them though, we need to make sure they understand about Tauntz and Mocks and all our other friends. We wouldn't want any tragic misunderstandings!

Now! What should we do for our next party? Opera? Movies? A concert? Oh, so many ideas come to mind. Let's start planning now! We've got a whole summer to fill!"

THE END

Vinky Discovers Google Earth

Vinky had snuck into VacaDude's office again. She was seated at the computer, busily clicking wildly on links and icons, ooing and ahing as each new page or program opened up on the screen.

"Wow! I never realized there were so many new things to discover! Vobble! Look at this! Did you ever know such a thing existed?" Vobble looked up from Vaca's box of toys and murmured, "uh huh."

"Vobble! I'm talking to you! Put that squeaky duck and the squid down and look at this! There are movies on here! And some of them are about owls, just like us! I even found one about Molly!"

"Vinky! That's nothing new! Austin and Carlos post videos about the owls all the time. But look at this! I think Uncle Vaca got some new stuff to play with. He's got the coolest toys."

Vinky kept clicking. "Hmmm! I wonder what this does? Vobble, what's a google?" Vobble looked up. "You mean, goggles? They're those funny looking glasses. I think Vaca's got some somewhere."

Vinky said, "Not GOGGLES. This thing says GOOGLE! It's a picture of a globe. Oh well, I'll just click on it and see what happens . . ."

Vinky said, "It's something called Google Earth!" Then she asked, "What's Google Earth, Vobble?" Vobble said, "It looks like something you could use to find something on Earth." Then Vinky said . . .

"Go ahead, Vobble, click on it". Vobble pressed his talon against the world map. A sudden breeze came up. Then a whirling cloud. Then a rocket shot out of the globe. Vinky and Vobble started vibrating. Their feathers fluttered, their beaks balked, and then . . .

the rocket shot right through the ceiling of Vaca's office, through the bedroom ceiling into the air, and then off into the distance.

"What was THAT, Vobble?" Vinky asked in wonderment as she smoothed her feathers.

"I don't know, Vinky" answered Vobble, "but I think if we get into Vaca's steampunk rocketship we can catch it!"

Vobble asked, "Should we actually get into Vaca's Steampunk Rocket? Won't we get in trouble?" "Nah," said Vinky, "Uncle Vaca loves for someone to appreciate his toys!"

So, into the rocket they settled, pushed some buttons and bounced off the same spot in the ceiling in the bedroom and out the window they flew!

"Which way did it go?", asked Vobble. "That way!" said Vinky and off they flew in a whoosh!

Vinky was amazed at the spaceship. It was going someplace they had never been. Vobble made some honeysuckle juice for Vinky.

Suddenly the steampunk rocket made a quick turn to the right followed by a sudden booster - Whoosh - again -- off they went to places unknown! "Wait, what's happening?!"

Little did Vinky and Vobble know that VacaDude had just sat down at his computer and saw that Google Earth was open. He wondered to himself, "Did I forget to shut down the computer?"

"Hmmm," VacaDude thought to himself, "While I am here, why don't I plan another trip for VacaChat". Let's see, now. DotRot always wanted to go to the Taj Mahal in India.

VacaDude selected Taj Mahal and at that very moment, Vinky and Vobble landed right in the middle of the magnificent grounds of that monument of love.

Vinky and Vobble were mesmerized with the grandness of the Taj Mahal . . . and asked in wonder, "Where are we???"

Meanwhile, Vaca, scratching his head, said, "Wait . . . did DotRot want to go to

the Taj Mahal or The Eiffel Tower??" Vaca scratched his head and exclaimed "Oui! i believe it was the Eiffel Tower," and with that clicked the Google map in the general vicinity of France!

Vinky and Vobble did not know what hit them . . . The rocket sped off again in another whoosh . . . feathers flying . . . "Hold oooooooooon Vinkyyyyyy," Vobble cried!

It only took seconds and Vinky and Vobble were gone . . . into the blue (if you have sunlight) or into the black of . . . SPACE.

Vinky and Vobble hugged together, thinking, "Now what?? We gotta do the right thing. Lookin' at where we are and been . . . the Royal's, Vaca's, the . . . geez it's time we ALL get together.

Then Vinky and Vobble stopped, stepped back, and looked at each other. "What are we talking about?" said Vinky. "You aren't making any sense," said Vobble. "Oh, no," said Vinky. "Do you think we've gotten into some sort of sort of space distortion?"

"Wow," said Vobble. "Where did you learn to say things like that?"

"Never mind that now," said Vinky. "At least we're talking right now. So we have to figure out what to do."

"I know," said Vobble. "What if we . . ."

"press this "Easy" button and see what happens?"

Vinky pressed the "Easy" button and the two of them stood back, waiting for something owlsome to happen, but all remained quiet.

Out of nowhere they heard a crash then a bang and then heard some two-legged muttering in a funny voice. "Oolalala no no no!" cried the lil' two-legged in a black beret. Vinky and Vobble burst out laughing. The door had opened and they were standing in front of the tallest ladder they had ever seen. And there, bent over some apples and grapes, was this little two-legged picking up all the fruit that had rolled off his cart. With that, Vinky and Vobble flew up the giant ladder and below them saw the most beautiful city in the world. But all was not bliss.

Back at VacaDude's, it was getting a little chilly in the Dude's office. "Hmmm . . . who turned the air conditioner on to Freeze," he wondered. He checked it, but it was not on. Suddenly, a gust of wind roared through and blew his toys everywhere, and then a twig fell on his head. "What's going on here! A hole in my roof! Wait a minute, my steampunk rocket ship is gone!"

"I think I smell a rat, whoops, I mean owlets! Vinky and Vobble must be up to something again. I'll bet I just sent them to France. Hmmm, I should send them to someplace they'll never forget, I'll send them to . . .

Africa! Vaca zoomed in the camera and saw Vinky and Vobble on top of the Eiffel Tower. He hit the button for the rocket and zoomed up the tower to pick them up.

"Oh, look, Vinky! Uncle Vaca has found us and is ready for us to get into the rocket!" They jumped in, belted their seatbelts, and hung on for dear life. The rocket zoomed quickly southward to a place they had never seen before. There were huge animals gathered around a pool drinking water and even some large gray animals pouring water on their backs with their long noses. Vaca set the Google rocket down so they could watch the animals for a bit. Just then, the Google Earth rocket flew overhead. "Look, Vobble! There is the Google Earth rocket! Let's . . ."

tie the two rockets together so we don't get lost again. I wonder what Vaca has planned for us now? I'm getting awfully hungry. Did you pack any food?"

Vobble said, "You betcha! I never go anywhere without some snake gravy and some possum peas and some frog burritos!"

After they had gobbled down all that good food, VacaDude said to Vinky and Vobble, "Let's go one more place before we go back home. For dessert!" Vinky held her tummy with both wingz and a little burp came out! Burp! Vobble looked at VacaDude on the video screen and they both laughed out loud! "Off we Go!" The next thing they knew VacaDude was landing the Google Earth ship on top of a rocky hill with a large white building on top with columns all around. "Welcome to Athens, Greece! The Goddess Athena always had a common barn owl with her for their wisdom." Now let's go get some baklava and maybe a little fried squid to take home with us."

On a mission to get baklava and squid, the three exit the rocket ship. They are amazed at the beauty of this place. and stop for a few moments to admire in

silence. After walking to the market and buying baklava, squid, spanakopita, moussaka, and yogurt . . . they got back into the rocket and set the dial for California USA!

But just as Vaca was about to push the button for take-off, the strangest thing happened! A barn owl flew out of an olive tree by the Parthenon, and pecked on the window. Amazed, they opened the hatch and jumped up and down, chattering with excitement. The Greek owl flew in and greeted them politely, and then said, "I notice that you are two young owls. Do you know other barn owls as well?"

The owlets replied that they had many friends in California who were barn owls.

The owl then said, "Would you take me there with you? I've always wanted to meet with some foreign barn owls. It would be such fun to trade experiences!"

Of course they all loved this idea. So they closed the hatch and they took off. They thought the adventure was nearly over, but then suddenly . . .

the Google Earth rocket broke free and zoomed off. Vaca quickly pulled up the control panel on his computer and tried to bring it back under control. It was quickly heading toward deep space.

Just before it broke through the stratosphere and escaped Earth's gravity, he finally found the right button to push. He sent that rocket back to Vacaville and turned the steampunk rocket toward San Marcos,

When they landed, they introduced the Greek owl to Molly, McGee and their youngunz. They figured they would be the best to introduce her to all the owls in the neighborhood.

Back in the office, Vaca held an owlet on each shoulder and tried to talk sternly to them. "All right you two, we need to talk about this latest escapade of yours! I can't believe you put holes in my roof!! Mary was fit to be tied about it until I told her that I was trying to surprise her with a retractable sun roof (which she's always wanted).

And I can't believe you took my rocket without asking me. That is a very delicate piece of machinery. There's not telling what damage you could do to it playing around like that! And besides . . .

You two are NOT supposed to have more fun than I do. I thought that rule was understood!"

The owlets hung their heads in chagrin. Small tears dropped onto Vaca's shoulders and rolled down the front of his jacket. Vaca's heart melted at their obvious remorse and dismay. He chuckled.

"Okay, enough lecture for now! We DID have fun, didn't we. I had no idea that Google Earth had such capabilities. You've got to show me exactly what you clicked on to release that rocket."

Just think of the adventures we can have in our next chat! But, please, don't let me forget to take the computer outside before we do this again. I don't think I can explain another hole in the roof!

THE END

Momma! It's HOT!

"Vi . . . Vin . . . Vinky . . ." Vobble panted, "I don't feel good. I've never felt like this before. It almost feels like somebody put us in an oven, but nobody would do that to a bird, would they?"

"I know what you mean, Vobble," Vinky replied. "I've never felt like this, either. Try flapping your wings a little bit and see if that helps. The owlets flapped their wings a few times, to no avail.

"What are we gonna' do, Vinky? We can't just sit here and melt into a puddle." Vobble panted some more and whined. "I don't like this at all! In fact, I hate it! How do other owls keep cool?"

"I don't know, Vobble. It's been just you and me for so long. We've never had it this hot before and nobody showed us what to do. We need some help. We need a grown-up to teach us!"

"I know what to do, Vinky!" Vobble stirred up a little enthusiasm. "I know! Let's call Momma! She knows everything and she'll tell us what the other owls do. She knows the way of the owl!"

Vinky and Vobble gathered all their remaining energy, drew deep breaths, and hollered as loudly as they could, "Momma!!! Moooommmmmaaaa!! We need you!!! Momma!!! It's HOT!!!!!!"

Exhausted, they sat back and waited . . .

Molly was staying pretty cool in the box with McGee. She was just about to doze off again, and she heard "Mommma" in the distance. She woke up and used her highly trained hearing to figure out who and where the calling was coming from. After she got her bearings to the situation, grumbling a little since she preferred a nap, woke McGee up to explain things to him.

McGee hissed, snorted and then horked. "Why did you wake me Molls?" and Molly replied "Vinky and Vobble are suffering in this heat"

"Oh they need to learn to gular flutter." Tell them how Molly and I am going back to sleep.

Molly blinked, frowned a beakish frown, and stared at the once again sleeping McGee. "Geesh" she said. "Could you be more helpful?"

"Oh, never mind McGee, I'll go over there myself" With that she whooshed out of the box and headed to Vinky and Vobble's box. On the way she passed a lovely bird bath with a fountain, and thought, "This is what those two owlets need, a nice cool swim!"

"Momma, you're here! You're here! Momma we are so hot we can barely breathe or hiss or even hork!" What can we do?

"I'm going to take you Swimming!" Molly announced. "Swimming? What's that?" asked Vobble.

"Vinky and Vobble, follow me and I will show you!"

So Vinky and Vobble followed molly out of the box and followed and followed and followed and followed! "Mom where are we going? I am not getting any cooler!" yelled Vobble!

"Just wait Vobble - here we are now! See that shiny stuff coming up from the ground? I want you to do what I do . . .

Molly flew down and splashed in the water. Vinky and Vobble were laughing at Molly, but thought they would give it a try.

Vinky dove under the water in the sprinkler first and immediately sang "Deet, deet, Deet" followed by Vobble who flew into Vinky too fast and crashed into her. "Wow! This feels great!"

Vinky looked up at the hot sun and thought about the Universe, the Milky Way, the Solar System, and all the planets she had seen in the Big Books in Austin the Owlet's library - Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, Pluto. Her mind wandered as she cooled down in the sprinklers.

"Wait Vobble! I just remembered that VacaDude's birthday is coming up soon!". Vinky thought a little more as she watched the drops of water run off Vobble's feathers.

"Well," Molly intervened. "First we have to have lessons in how to cool off -

part B - and then we can plan the birthday. First things first, I always say!"

"Okay," the owlets replied.

Molly led the owlets to a little glen under some trees and spread out some mats. Many other hot owls had also signed up for the class. The teacher arrived, very businesslike in a suit, and told them all to faceplant backwards. The teacher knew how to cool off already and was not a bit warm.

"Okay, so one lie down, and the other assist, in pairs, right now!" Then the teacher said, "OK, now try to think like a dog and pant - hahahahahahaha - breathe very fast. Hahahahahahaha."

After a few downward facing dogs, Vinky and Vobble squealed that they wanted to return to the sprinkler. As Molly looked on in her mothering way, the owlets danced with glee in the cool, cool water. What a party! They hooted with owl giggles as the sprinkler twirled and spurted. And Vinky even opened his mouth to catch a few of the drops.

What a party, party, party! This would be a great way to celebrate Vacadude's birthday. Of course, we would have to get Daddy McGee to wake up and join us. Let's put our heads together and plan for . . .

another get together.

Ok, the owlets had learned about finding sprinklers to get cool quick. They learned how to gular flutter by breathing the way Molly showed them. Now it was time to get McGee involved and plan a birthday party for VacaDude. They arrived back at Molly and McGee's place and, wouldn't ya know it, McGee was still sleeping.

Vinky and Vobble decided they could get him up. They went in the owl box, soaking wet from the sprinklers, and started shaking like dogs.

McGee awoke screaming "Tidal wave! Hurricane! . . . then he realized it was Vinky and Vobble. They all started laughing, all but McGee. Hissing and hissing, he finally got it together enough to be sociable.

Vinky and Vobble asked, "Can you help us plan a party for Vacadude? It's his birthday soon.

McGee replied, "OK, but two-leggers' parties are a lot more work than our parties. They would need music and food and . . .

first of all we would have to decide where to have the party."

Vinky said "Oh, that's right. Besides all of us, there would be Zorro and Tauntz and Kyle, and Glowz, and Carlos and Donna, and Austin, and then I bet a whole lot of other two-leggers would want to come - all those ones called Chatters! And ever so many more! We are gonna need a REALLY big place to have this party!

Vobble said, "Wow, you're right, Vinky. Where could we have it? Wait, I have an idea! You remember that book I had of places two-leggers go on vacations? There was one of a place that had a whole lot of sand by a whole lot of water! And lots of two-leggers were having fun there! It was called a beach. Let's have Uncle Vaca's party on a beach!"

Vinky's eyes grew big and round. "It sounds wonderful! But where do we find a beach?"

Vobble said "Well, we could . . .

ask Mom about where the closest beach is to Vaca."

So, the party plans were going full-speed. The excitement amongst the planners was contagious and put everyone in a good mood.

Finally, Vobble asked, "When is Vaca's birthday anyway?"

Vinky and the others chimed in, "Not 'til August 8th."

Vinky and Vobble looked at each other, exhausted and overwhelmed. They said in unison "Momma! It's hot."

Molly looked down at the two very bedraggled owlets and felt sorry for them. "I have a new plan, Vinky and Vobble."

Vinky just yawned. Vobble just blinked.

Molly said "Come along one last time with me today and I promise you will feel 99% better 'cause I will keep 1% for myself" and Molly giggled.

With that Vinky and Vobble said "OK Mom" and they flew once again, for miles thru the heat, and there, in the landscape saw the tallest, fastest ever, WaterOwlPark Slide.

"Wow!" shouted Vobble, and Vinkie hissed with delight. All the owl brothers and sisters, cousins, Uncles, and Aunts were there. "Where have you been V&V?", shouted Ashley, "Come have some fun!"

So with wings outstretched Vobble and Vinky sat at the top of the slide, and down they went, almost as fast as flying.. Then... SPLASH!

Their feathers were so wet they could barely climb out of the pool at the bottom of the slide. After going down the slide a few more times Vinky announced, "Momma, I'm cool! But now I'm hungry!"

Molly said "My goodness, you children - you are never happy!"

"But, Momma," Vinky whined, "all this swimming takes all our energy and we want Mousie or Ratty or - wait I have a idea - lets go to CC's Cafe!"

"OK," Molly said, "go tell all the cousins, aunts, uncles, and go wake McGee up again! He is lounging under that sycamore over there! So then . . .

Vinky and Vobble got a tub of water and tossed it on McGee.

"Hey!!!!" McGee shouted.

"Daddy McGee! We're going to CC's Cafe! I want ice cream! Lots of it!! Does CC make mice cream?"

McGee laughed a big deep belly horking laugh and said, "CC makes mice cream and vole cream and rabbitz cream and even pocket gopher cream" Come on, let's fly straight there. Now!"

All the owls gathered together and began flying when suddenly they spotted a dark cloud of big birds heading straight for them making an unusual sound, like seagulls.

"Look! Those Pelicans we met a week ago!" Vinky exclaimed! "Wow, they are flying around us in loop-de-loops! It's so cool! And then they're deep diving for fish! But we are on our way to mice cream!"

And so they continued on their way, whining as is their wont and they arrived and ate and ate and slurped and ate some more.

"Maaaaa, Moooooommmmy. Now we are tired," they cried.

So they went back to the original Owl Box. and Molly said, "Niters all," but they said, "We want a story, maaaaa."

"Oh, for heaven's sake," she said. "OK." And she pulled down a big book from the shelf Carlos had built for them. It was the second clutch photo book. A picture book and lovely at that. A book angel had sent it to them.

As they staggered wearily to the door, they found a marvelous surprise: Carlos had realized that the heat was unbearable for them. While they were out cooling off at the WaterOwlSlide, he had installed a lovely fountain birdbath just under the owlbox. It was complete with a little pool that the owlets could stand/roll in and delight in the cool, cool water. Well, they just HAD to test it out, so . . .

Molly and the owlets looked down. "What is that? Something or someone is in our new pool/fountain/birdbath!"

Molly flew out to get a closer look. Molly screeched, "Vinky and Vobble, I want you to dive bomb the pool right now. Without hesitation, they dove down to the pool with a big splash. Then as quick as they dove down they flew up again.

"Screech! Screech!" loud as could be. It was McGee, fast asleep in the pool.

There were laughs from everyone.

Carlos came running out. "What's going on around here?!"

McGee answered, "I'm not sure. I'm only sure that a guy can't get any sleep around here," and the laughs started again. Donna came out laughing not even knowing why she was laughing while Carlos tried to explain. Molly went back into the owl box and . . .

said, "All right, enough excitement for now. Time for everyone to take a rest." So they all stood or faceplanted in the gagshag, and all was quiet for a while. Then Vobble lifted his beak out of the gagshag and said, "But we never

decided on a beach for Vaca's party!"

Molly said, "Hush! Let's rest a bit more, and then I'm sure we can settle all the details.

"Ok," Vobble said. "But we didn't even decide whether the beach should be near San Marcos, or near Vaca's house."

"Later," Molly hissed softly. Before long, everyone was stirring and rest time was over. Vobble brought up his questions again, adding that the rest of the beach party wouldn't be too hard to plan -- invitations, lots of food and a big cake from CC's Cafe, music, and the fun would just happen. But there was still the big question: Where?

The owlets decided that the best one to ask would be Austin (the owl, not the person) since it seemed he had read every book there was. He would know the perfect place for a party!

They left a message with Molly to have Austin contact them when he came back from his fly-about to Mozambique (he had heard there were some fun owls there.)

Vinky and Vobble soon bid all their friends farewell and began winging their way back to their own box in Vacaville. They had thoroughly enjoyed themselves, but they liked HOME, too.

Vinky and Vobble sat back in their sweltering box. "I don't get it, Vinky," Vobble said. "The two-leggers never seem get hot unless they're outside. What do they know that we don't?"

"Come to think of it, every time we've been in that box that Vaca calls his office, it's never very hot or very cold. I wonder why. What makes his box stay comfortable when we're so miserable?"

"Well, Vobble, I remember reading somewhere about a machine called an air conditioner that the two-leggers use. It keeps their boxes cool in the summer. I think it helps keep them happy."

Vobble tipped his head and said, "I don't know about air conditioners, but I'm sure as heck gonna find out. Whatever they are, I want one for us! I'm gonna go talk to VacaDude about it!

Vaca heard their pleas and replied, "Sorry guys, they just don't make air conditioners that small, but I'll tell you what. How about if I give you a box of your own right here in my office?"

"You can come here to get cool or warm anytime you need to and Zorro will be here to keep you company. He gets lonely some days when I'm away in the city working. How does that sound?"

The owlets jumped for joy. "We're moving! We're moving! We're moving in with Vaca!!"

The End

Vobble Discovers Wagner and the Opera

"Vinky?!" Vobble looked startled. "What is that horrible, nasty noise? It kinda' sounds like what a hundred cats would sound like if they all got their tails stepped on at the same time."

"I'm not sure, Vobble, but it sounds like someone trying, not too successfully, to sing that music that Uncle Vaca and the VacaChick like so much. They call it opera. It's by a guy named Vogner.

"Opera? Does all opera sound like that? All screechy and loud and kinda painful? How can they stand to listen to it? Why do they like it so much? I just don't understand it at all."

"I think opera's not so bad when it's being sung by somebody who knows how to sing. It's not like Country and Western music where it doesn't matter if you know how to sing or not."

"But what is opera about?" Vobble asked. "The songs I like all tell a story, like 'The Molly Song' or 'Wesley's Lesson'. Is opera like that too? I wonder if there is an opera about owls?"

"I dont know, Vobble. Let's ask Uncle Vaca. He knows everything!"

The owlets headed off and soon were tap, tap, tapping on Vaca's door. He answered the door, very sleepy, as it was late at night. "Ok, come on in. What is it THIS time?"

"Well," they said, "we want to know more about opera."

Just then, they heard some very strange noises coming from the two-leggers' bathroom - a room the two-leggers seem to need, unlike owls.

"Hmmm," Vaca said. "Well, that is the VacaChick taking a late shower and going over and over and over her vocal exercises so she can sing Wagner tomorrow night on stage."

"WOW! Really??!!!" the owlets said in unison. "That is amazing!"

Vaca said, "But wait! I have a role too!"

"Ooooooh," the owlets said. "What?"

"Well, I am the official cleaner upper after the live elephants leave the stage," Vaca said. "That is the most important role, as the singers would schlipp and schliiiiide all over the place in the elephant splurtz and ruin the opera!"

Vinky and Vobble looked at each other and fell over into paroxysms of laughter. "Oh, Dude, you aren't really the Splurtz cleaner guy are you?"

VacaDude looked at Vinky and Vobble and asked, "Why do you laugh at that? Someone has to do it and I do it with special agility and aplomb."

Vinky and Vobble gulped down their guffaws and stared straight ahead. Uncle Vaca then told them to go back to their box and get some sleep. Tomorrow he would get them tickets to the Operaz.

The owlets headed back to their box to try and sleep.

The next morning, Vaca added some owl eggs to their box and presented them with tickets to the opera for that night. After a breakfast of pineapple glazed gecko chops, they said, "But, Vaca, they said, tell us about opera. What is it? What is it about?"

Vaca looked at Vinky and asked, "Now where do you go when you want to learn about something and I am not here?"

"To Carlos' computer or Austin's library", they cried.

Vaca said, "I have a surprise for you. Your very own wireless OwlPad - internet ready to go - with a GPS to find the San Francisco Opera House!"

Vinky said, "Wow Vaca! An owl pad! How nice. What is a GPS? Goose Producing Song?" Vaca smiles and says It will tell you how to get the opera, just put in the address and go.

Vinky added, "Free tickets, how wonderful". So they took a few tips from Vaca, to act nice, dress nice and be prepared to laugh as well as cry. Vinky and Vobble said, "We don't cry! If we're gonna' cry we will leave."

Vaca explained opera has drama, excitement, laughter, serious, as well as some

scary parts. Vinky and Vobble thought more and more. "Hmm . . . maybe this isn't such a good idea," but just then . . .

Vaca looked at his vacavatch and said, "Oh no, I'm going to be late!" and dashed out of the house.

So Vinky and Vobble, looked at the OwlPad, and Vinky said "I guess we'd better see what we can find out about opera."

Vobble picked it up, saying "I'll give it a try." After a couple minutes, he said, "I've been looking at a list of operas, and there's one called Die Fledermaus! Is that a way of spelling mouse? I love to eat mice!"

Vinky, looking over his shoulder, said "I don't know. All the words look really funny. Do you think there's a special language for opera? I'm afraid this is even harder than we thought!" she said in dismay. "I think we need more help to get started."

"Well," said Vobble, "I suppose we could . . ."

"... we could.. we could... uhhmm.." continued Vobble. "Oh! I've got it!" said Vobble... I have heard Mrs. VacaDude talking to Vaca about the opera and then she goes to the media cabowlnet and selects one of those round plastic things and then beautiful music starts playing."

So Vobble and Vinky checked out the cabowlnet and start reading titles: Carmen, Tristan und Isolde, Die Fledermaus, WAGNER!" "Aha!" shouted Vinky and Vobble. "We have found an opera by Wagner!"

"Let's listen to some of it!" Vobble said.

"OK, Vobble, if you insist, but, I, of course, have a better idea!"

Vinky slunk over to the window and made a soft quiet and secretive signal. The steam punk time machine sidled up to the window.

"Ahh!" said Vobble. "Cool!"

They opened the window and snuck into the machine. A bot was flying it! The bot said in a dull voice, "Where to, you gutz??"

The owlets said, "We need to go back but not too too far. Just right, right into Wagner's music studio."

They streak like lightning and Voila! Cave men stomping stone on stone, making music!!

"Oh, no bot! You went too far back!" they screamed, hollered, yelled, hissed and shrieked.

The bot did not listen, but kept speeding along. Vinky and Vobble got very nervous indeed. When they stopped screaming they looked out the window and saw flying past them great and vast villages, then they saw great gleaming pyramids and white marble parthenons. They flew past medieval churches and then with a huge crash and jarring bump they landed inside Wagner's home.

They coughed, spluttered, chocked and then in unison said "Hey Vog, how's da opera?"

The man jumped, scared! "Where did YOU come from? And WHAT are you?"

Vinky and Vobble said, "We're just two little owls from the future who want to learn about opera . Will you teach us? And we're hungry - what have you got to eat?"

Just as quickly as Vogner turned around to look in his cupboard, which was bare, the Time Machine took off in a Flash, back to the Future! Vogner turned around and said to himself, "I must be dreaming. Owls from the Future? So strange looking, too. Two-dimensional, like a drawing, but very friendly, you know. Hmmm . . . "

At the same time, in another dimension, in another year, the Time Machine landed right in front of the San Francisco Opera House! "Oh" said Vinky "Our GPS" took us right here and right on time, too!"

Vinky and Vobble walked up to the Ticket Taker, who said, "Black Tie only" - "Please return when you are appropriately dressed for this Opera House"

Vinky and Vobble looked at each other in panic. "Where are we gonna get black ties?" They looked around and saw a homeless man carrying several pairs of shoes. All the shoes had black shoes laces. They talked to the guy and he gave them each a black string. Vinky and Vobble put the strings around their

necks and they found some aluminum tabs from coke cans and made tie clips and they were off on their way looking quite debonaire.

Then Vinky and Vobble handed their tickets to the ticket-taker again, and received a somewhat disgusted glance, but this time they were allowed in. As they entered the opera house lobby they looked around with wonder. "It's so beautiful!" said Vinky dreamily. "Yes," said Vobble, "but we had better hurry and find our seats!"

So they did, with the help of a friendly usher.

Almost immediately the orchestra began to play, and the music was so beautiful and exciting that the two owlets began to think they were going to like opera after all. Then the curtain went up, and a man in a fancy costume began to sing. And Vinky and Vobble couldn't understand a single word! They looked at each other in dismay, but sat quietly through the performance anyway.

As they were walking out, Vobble said, "Well, the music was very nice, but what was it all about?" Just then . . .

The homeless guy approached them and said, "Hey, you two! Can I have my laces back? I didn't realize they were part of a collectors set from the trash of George Lucas. They're worth a fortune!"

The owlets handed over the shoelaces and jumped back in the steam-punky machine. "Home, Bot," said Vinky. They sat back for their three second ride home.

Back in the box, after a dose of Tylenowl, the owlets discussed the events of the day. "Okay," Vobble said. "We've met a composer and we've traveled in time. We've heard opera. But, still . . ."

"What is it? I just didn't understand it. It was beautiful, but I didn't know any of the words and couldn't figure out what was happening. Are we too young for opera? Is it just for grown-ups?"

Vinky said, "I wondered the same thing, Vobble. I didn't see anyone very young at the opera. They were all old, like over 20 or something! I think I'll stick with Johnny and the Horkers from now on."

"At least we know what he is saying! And he tells a good story about really interesting characters - you know . . . characters I can really relate to. I wonder if Johnny could do opera??"

"Vinky! That's a great idea! Let's write an opera about owls that Johnny and the Horkers can sing for us." With that, the owlets pulled out Molly journals and began writing their opera.

But what to call it? What should it be about? Then Vobble had a brainstorm! "I know!! Let's write an opera about a mouse who escapes from some owls. We'll call it "The Flee-der Mouse!"

The End!

Vinky Horks a Great Hork

"Ack . . . Ack . . . Ack . . ." Vinky looked as if she were in distress. "Ack . . . Ack . . . Ack . . . Vobble? What can I do? I think it's stuck!"

Vobble opened one eye and looked at Vinky with irritation. "Well, whatever it is, could you please unstick it quieter? I'm trying to sleep here."

"Ack . . . Ack . . . I'll try, but it's hard. I shouldn't have eaten that last gopher, but he was feeding on clover and tasted sooooo sweet!"

"I tried to tell you to save it for later, Vinky. Now you're paying for it, aren't you? Would you please just hork and get it over with so we can both have some peace?"

"Ack . . . Ack . . . Ack . . . Oh, gee! It just won't unstick! Ack . . . Ack . . . Ack . . . There! I think it moved!!! You'd better stand back. When this thing blows it's gonna' be a doozy!"

"Ack . . . Ack . . . Ack . . . Aaaaaaacccccckkkkkk . . ."

"Stand back!!! Here it comes!" she said quickly before she could no longer get a word out!

The enormous hork sprung across the box, rebounded and hit Vobble on the noggin.

"Ouch!!! I told you to be careful! This box is getting smaller and smaller! YIKES!!!"

"Ok, I'm sorry, Vobble, really, but we can still have fun and make some money!"

"Hmmm," Vobble said, intrigued.

Vinky pulled out her shopping bag from the previous night when she went to the two-legger 24-hour store, conveniently open late and there is a scalpel, metzenbaum scissors and tweezers.

"Wow!" said Vobble.

She also pulled out a tiny table with legs that fold up. She set up the lab and went right to work, dissecting the great HORK.

"Wait! Wait!" cried Vinky. "I have found something in here I never knew I swallowed.? Vobble just blinked and stayed away from the eewwwww mess that Vinky was making.

"NO, really, Vobble. Come here and look at this."

With that, Vobble stumbled forward, faceplanting at times, getting up and then he looked. What he saw made Vobble stand up. It was gleaming. It was shiny. It was . . . well . . . it was . . .

In the great owl pellet, there was a white crystal in there. Vinky said, "Hey! We've got hork crystal biscuits! What happened to the gravy, Vobble?"

Just then, there was a knock on the owl box wall. Vinky and Vobble turned their heads all the way around to see the face of a Turtle peeking into their box.

"Hello there, Vinky and Vobble! You don't know me, but I know you. I am the infamous TurtlePie, and I am here to collect a hork to give to Songbird for the prize she won at the slumber party!"

Songbird keeps asking me, "When will I get that Golden Hork Award I was promised for winning Owl Trivia and lasting the longest at the party?"

Vinky said, "Oh NO! We just cut into it. Sorry. Vobble may come up with one in a little while."

Vobble said, "TurtlePie, just look at what was inside. We found a weird white crystal."

Turtle slowly walked in and peeked into the open hork. "Egad, you guys! what have you done??"

Vobble said, "What? Sometimes we open the horks to see inside."

"No! I mean that white crystal, you silly owl! That is NO crystal. That is one of my eggs! Just then the tiny little egg moved and . . .

and an itty-bitty egg tooth started poking its way out of the egg.

They all watched, entranced, while the hole got bigger and bigger, until finally it broke open, and a teensy-weensy turtle tumbled out. The infant turtle looked up at the faces around it. When its eyes lit on TurtlePie, its baby voice cried "Mama!" And TurtlePie cried "My Baby!"

TurtlePie nuzzled her infant and said, "I've been looking all over for you! Who could have known I'd find you here?" Turtle Pie thanked Vinky and Vobble, and left with her baby. Vinky and Vobble were looking at each other, astounded.

"Um," said Vinky. "Shall we see what else is in the hork? We need to ask someone who know something about it." So . . .

Vinky and Vobble opened the doors to the steampunk rocket time machine once again. They were sure to carry the rest of the Great Hork with them. The pilot said, "Fasten your seat belts. Where to?"

They said, "How about the 19th century?"

"Okay," said the pilot, "but please be more specific, please."

So, the owlets whisper to him that they want to show the hork to M and Mme Curie, the French couple who were both renowned scientists. With a whoosh they sped through time and space and soon arrived at the home and lab of the Curies.

"Ah, Monsieur et Madame. What is this you have brought us?"

Vinky and Vobble looked at the renowned scientists in disbelief. "You don't know what it is?" they asked.

"No, no, Monsieur. We do not know this thing you have brought to us. Please let us look closely under our mouserescopes."

After an hour, the renowned scientists came back to Vinky and Vobble and announced . . .

"There is money in the hork!"

The owlets looked at each other and said, "Let's see if Uncle Vaca can take us

to get a swimming pool! If there's not enough money for a pool, is there enough to go see cousin Cardsfan? There's probably not enough to go see him, but we can send him a card."

"Pardon, mes petites", Doctor Curie brought them back from thinking about the money to the time travel reality of where they were at the moment - in a Lab in FRANCE!

"We need to know what you have eaten in the past 24 hours - Where do you come from you little owls? Are you from Norway? Then it might be something from a *Rattus norvegicus*."

Vinky looked at Vobble and exclaimed, "We're from Vacaville! That is in California."

"Ah oui!" said Dr. Curie. "Did you eat a pocket gopher, *Thomomys bottae*, a *Sylvilagus audubonii* (desert cottontail), a meadow mouse (*Microtus californicus*) or quoi?"

Vinky thinks and blinks, "Well, it was a roof rat, *Rattus Rattus* we found outside the San Marcos Jewelry Store!"

Dr. Curie says, (in French) such things are not allowed here and you must be quarantined for 30 days.

Vinky and Vobble looked at each other. They knew what had to happen. Vinky fortunately felt a hork coming on. "Dr.! Dr.!" Vobble exclaimed, "Get a team in here right away! Vinky may get ill at any moment."

The Dr., shaken by all of this, turned and started to get a team of specialists in. Then Vinky and Vobble took off while the Dr was distracted. They flew back to the steampunk spaceship, hollering at the pilot, "Get us back to where we belong . . . QUICK!"

"Oh no!" Vinky said, "Here come security!" They took off and . . . poof . . . without a sound they were back in Vacaville. But something wasn't quite right. They stepped off the spaceship and noticed . . .

that Vinky no longer needed to hork! They looked in the ship, but there was no hork there. "What happened to my hork?" asked Vinky.

"Well," said Vobble, "the only thing I can think of is that it was left behind with the Curies."

Meanwhile, back in 19th century France the Curies were looking at this strange object that had been left in their lab.

Back in Vacaville, the owlets were contemplating their next move.

"OK," said Vobble "we have no choice."

Vinky flung her wingz over her heart face and sobbed. "No Vobble, do we really have to? Go back there? It makes me skeered."

"No choice." And with that the Steampunk Rocket showed up at the door and they entered it once again.

"But those guards!" said Vinky. "What to do about those guards?"

Vobble felt sorry for Vinky and said, "I will go inside. You will wait in Steampunk for my getaway."

Vinky let out a last sob and then a sigh. "Oh Vobble, you would do that for me?"

And so the plan was being discussed when Steampunk landed with a crash, bang and clatter in front of the Curie Maison De Science.

But, just then, as the rocket settled down in the manicured lawn with some creaking, Vinky looked at Vobble and said, 'We have horked and horked again, and now I am hungry!'

Vobble triangulated and said to Vinky, "I hear a mouse in this grass! Do you want to get it or shall I? I'm really tired. Why don't you get it?"

Vinky started her owl vision going. Scanning . . . scanning . . . "Vobble are you sure you heard a mouse?"

Vobble said, "We learned together how to hunt mice and I am tellin' you, there is a mouse!"

Just then, all of a sudden, the red tailed hawk from Carlos' (who had stowed

away on the rocket ship) swooped down and gathered up a snake. Not just a snake, but a snake with a big mouse hangin' out of his mouth.

Vinky and Vobble, not at all happy, and still hungry, decided to head back to the stompin' grounds of the field of food they knew. Without a word they . . .

took off once more, headed for home. "I don't care what was in that hork," said Vinky. "I just want to go home." Soon they arrived back in Vacaville and found VacaDude waiting for them.

"Where have you been, and what have you been doing?" He asked with a frazzled manner. "A French couple in some weird ship just showed up, jabbering something about 'zee 'ork!' Do you know anything about this?"

The owlets' jaws dropped. They stammered, "Wwwellll, we . . ."

Vaca sighed and said, "Oh never mind. Anything you tell me is gonna be too fantastic to believe anyway. I'll deal with the French folks. Maybe they can teach Zorro how to cook with those fabulous French cheeses. You two head home. It looks like you need some rest."

Back in the box, Vinky looked at her dissecting kit and table. Then she looked at Vobble quizzically.

"Vobble?" she said. "Do you think ALL our horks have such awesome stuff in them? Should we be opening ALL of them??? I mean, just look at that last one. I know it was a Great Hork and all that, but it had a baby turtle and money in it! What if all our horks have fabulous stuff like that in them? And here we just walk around on them all day."

"I don't know, Vinky. I never thought about what was inside the things that are in our horks. What if a rat ate a silver dollar or something? When we ate the rat, we'd eat the silver dollar too."

Vinky looked puzzled. "Yeah, and what if we ate something that had eaten something that had eaten something that had . . . Oh, heck, my mind just can't grasp it!"

"Who knows what treasures we've been eating all this time? Who knows what is in all those horks. We need to hire someone to help us dissect them all! We can't do them all by ourselves. We don't have thumbs, ya' know!"

Vobble looked at Vinky and said, "Vinky, calm down. We don't have to hire anyone. We can just sell all our horks online and let others dissect them. I'm sure school kids all over the world would love it!"

"Just think . . . in no time, we'll have enough for those Dee-lux renovations to our box. We gotta get the plans from Uncle Vaca! Oh, I just can't wait for that diving board!"

The End

The Mysterious Visitor

"Vinky? Vinky? Vinky, wake up! I hear something." Vobble was shivering with fright. "Vinky! There's someone or something outside. It's midday. Who could it be? What do they want?"

"Oh gee, Vobble. It's probably Mockz. Would you just go back to sleep please?" Just then there was a strange sound outside the door. Vinky sat straight up and looked at Vobble angrily.

"Why didn't you tell me there was a strange sound out there!? There shouldn't be anyone visiting the box during the day! Geez Vobble, you gotta' be more specific about things!"

Vobble huddled closer to Vinky, drawing her into the far corner of the box. The owlets snuggled close together in fear. But then Vobble remembered what Mom and Dad had taught them.

"Vinky, we need to look and sound fierce to make whoever it is go away. Puff yourself up and spread out your wings. Make the loudest screech you can. I know you're really good at THAT!"

The owlets huffed and puffed and screeched and hollered with all their might. But then, right outside the door . . .

they heard a slight gasping for breath and they squeezed open their frightened eyes to see an unusual sight! It was small, looked kind of like a stick with lots of angles and it said, "Do you have some water, please? That trip up the pole was exhausting."

"Hmmm. What are you, anyway?" Vinky dared to ask.

"Hmmm. I am a young thing and forgot the name of my species!" the visitor said.

"Hmmmm. Let's call BugGirl. She will surely know!"

"Good thinking," said Vobble.

Vinky and Vobble seemed to trust this mysterious visitor and stopped hissing.

"Well, we don't have water in here," they said. You have to go down there again!" and they pointed their wingz at the ground.

The little guest looked very disappointed. The guest began to cry.

Vinky said "Vobble, would you be able to fly to the fountain and bring back some water on a leaf?"

"In daylight??" Vobble said. "I don't know, but I will try." He went out to the door, just missing stepping on the little visitor and out onto the ledge. But suddenly . . .

Vobble got frightened by the bright sunlight and a big mysterious bird flying toward the owlbox.

"I'm so sorry, little one. I..I...I can't go out right now. But you are welcome to stay, or climb back down, but watch out for that big bird!"

The strange visitor looked around, his eyes grew wide with wonder. "What are these strange things? And why don't you drink water anyway?"

"What strange things?" hissed Vinky looking around. "We get all our water from our food."

"Oh. Well then, is this food?" he asked as he looked around at the strange pieces lying before him.

"Of course not, these are just horks, and some fine ones if I must say so" answered Vinky. "They come from the finest voles and gopher chops available."

"Ewww!!!" responded the mysterious creature.

Just then there was another knock at the door!

It was the big bird that was flying over before! She had lost her way and decided to land on the very welcoming front porch of Vinky's and Vobble's home! So "Knock Knock?! is anyone home?" Sticky (as Vinky and Vobble had named him) looked out the door and gasped!

This was a big creature! Sticky had never seen anything like this before!

"Vinky?! Vobble?! What is this?"

So Vinky moved to the door and he saw a beautiful creature with a black face and rufous chest! "What are you?!" Vinky yelled. "Did Mom fall in a tar pit?" Then . . .

"You're not my mom!! Who are you?! You are big and scary! Why are you here?"

"I am Molly. I'm just dirty. I was hauling charcoal for the two-leggers. They are gonna' try gopher chops with snake gravy. I made pigeon peas and honeysuckle juice because they were making strange faces at the gopher chops. At least I know they like this."

While Molly was explaining all this to Vinky and Vobble, the insect named Sticky had fallen asleep waiting for that sip of water. He was dreaming that he was back in the fronds of the Royal palm tree next door where the marine layer left a few drops just for him each morning for his first sips of the day.

Suddenly Molly, Vinky, and Vobble heard a thud on the Owl Box roofus. "What a busy day!" Vinky exclaimed. "I will never get any sleep!"

They heard a shout. "Special Tickets that you must open now, from Fling and Fly Delivery Service. Tickets to the 21 Million Viewer Party in Washington, DC! Find a Way to Get there, Toot Sweet!"

Papers and fliers flew throughout the area.

"What is this . . . millions?" Vinky exclaimed. "Is that more than 20?"

"Holy Owlz!" said Vinky. "The yard is covered in fliers. That poor little insect, Sticky, is covered. He needs our help."

Fliers and paper flew into the owl box. Molly decided enough was enough. "Let's get to the bottom of this right now."

Little did they know that Sticky loved to eat paper. Molly decided, "We have to get our priorities straight. I'm a mess, let me swoop down in the fountain, get cleaned off, then we can find out more about your friend Sticky. We should call the smartest man we know."

Vinky said, "Oooohhh! VacaDude!!!"

Vobble said, "Carlos!"

Sticky said, "Wrong!! That would be Mr. Royal. He isn't just the smartest, but a great two-legger."

So they all trooped off to find Carlos. They tracked him down sitting in the shade with a cool drink. When they posed their question, he looked at Sticky, he said "Yikes! I've never seen anything like that in my life! I'm afraid you've got the wrong guy. Tell you what - why don't you ask my grandson Austin? He reads lots of stuff besides electronics and movie-making."

Luckily, Austin wasn't far away. He looked and Sticky thoughtfully, and said, "You know I've seen pictures of something like that before. Let me just look...." He quickly brought up a photo on his computer that looked very much like Sticky. "I thought so! I think Sticky is a baby Timema. They are relatives of walking sticks, and they live in California. They eat leaves.

"That's it," said Sticky. "And my Mommy called me Mimi. But then she went away, and I didn't see her again. Can I stay here with you?" The owls looked at each other, and then Vinky said, "I guess so." Just then . . .

there was a tiny tap tap tap at the open door - a polite knock - and they all said, "What is it NOW?!"

So they all rushed to the door to see who it was this time and they saw something green, with softer angles, kneeling and saying, "Now I lay me down to sleep."

"Wow!!!!" said Sticky. "That is my cousin, the praying mantis!!!"

"What are you doing here, kid?" he asked boldly.

"Well, I was thirsty."

The little mantis looked up at his long, long, long, lost cousin, Sticky, and declared, "I was just praying that I would find you and now I see you right in front of me. I need your help, Mimi. The green and brown walking sticks are being followed by an herbal eater and we can't get a good patch of grass anymore. The herbal eater has chewed, chomped and gulped his way through our territory. We don't know what to do. Please help us Sticky."

Sticky looked up at Vinky and Vobble and all nodded and set about making plans to help the green and brown sticks. When a little mousie appeared, claiming to have magic powers. "I am MousieBella, cousin to Zorro and I can . . .

do magic . . . sometimes. I know where there is lots of leaves and paper to chew, chomp and gulp, but it is far from here, you would have to leave the owl box and your new friends Vinky and Vobble.

"Oh no! But we just got here and want to stay. It's so pleasant here in the box, and I'm even getting used to the smell of the horks," said Sticky.

"Well," MousieBella thought very hard with Vaca's only blue brain cell, "Well, maybe I can come up with something else . . ."

Mousiebella asked Sticky and her cousin to go out to the front porch of the box. "I have a magical idea for both of you - but it would change you forever - do you want to know what I have in mind?"

Sticky looked at her cousin nervously! "What do you think cousin - should we try it?"

MousieBella said that they would no longer be stuck to the ground and they would be beautiful! Sticky bounced up and down on her legs. "Oh, that sounds wonderful! Let's do it, cousin!"

So MousieBella pulled out her magical steampunk watch that she had borrowed from Zorro and placed it between Sticky and her cousin. Immediately, steam began to rise up from the watch. Vinky and Vobble could no longer see either of the insects - but when the steam cleared - two beautiful creatures were standing there. They both had gorgeous red and green silky looking wings.

Vinky and Vobble looked at each other. "Could they be angels?? They are so beautiful. Should we be afraid of them or invite them in?"

"Hmmm," thought Vinky. "I think we should invite them in. They are our new friends Sticky, who's also known as Mimi, and her cousin. They just look beautiful now and a little different, too.

Vinky looked into MousieBella's sparkling eyes and asked, "Is there a reason you

gave them wingz?"

"Yes, the wingz are special for Sticky and her cousin. They have come of age and it is time for them to learn to fly."

"May we try them now?" the cousins asked.

"Of course, but be careful and know when to rise and to go close to the ground."

They stood on the porch, shakin' like leaves on a tree. "This is it," Sticky and her cousin said to each other. The wind was calm and with a WHOOSH!!! together they took off in flight.

"Wheeeeeee!!!! This is great!! We should . . ."

be able to fly all over the place with just a little practice!"

As they flitted off, Austin commented, "Well, that was interesting. Praying Mantises usually have pretty uninteresting wings, and Timemas don't have any wings at all. I guess they must be Mantis and Timema fairies!" Everyone agreed that was what they must be. Vinky commented that it had been a very strange afternoon, and could they maybe get some sleep now? But just then there was a sudden . . .

gust of wind. The newly winged cousins hurried back to the box before their wingz could get tattered and torn. "Whew!" they said. "Flying is great, but I'm not so sure about that wind!"

Vinky and Vobble sat back and stared at their new friends, now transformed into such beautiful creatures with translucent wingz. It was hard to believe that they had changed so much.

Vinky preened a bit and said, "Well, you're not beautiful barn owls, but you sure do run a close second on the pulchritude scale. I'm so glad we met. But I've been thinking about that problem."

"Problem?" Sticky said. "What problem?" Vinky said, "You know, the problem with the herbal eaters eating all your kinsfolk's food? I think I have a solution for them - plenty of food for everyone."

"Sticky, when the delivery man tossed in all those flyers, you looked pretty happy and seemed to be enjoying a good snack on them. Well, I know where there is lots of paper, for FREE!!!"

Vobble pulled out a map and made some marks on it. "Look, here and here and here and here and here and . . . oh, just all over at every big store in town, there are big bins sitting there."

"The two-leggers dump paper in them and just leave it there. There's enough for all your kinsfolk and then some! The bin says, 'Recycle Papers Here'. I think that means "All you can eat."

"You and your kin can stay here in the yard below the box and you can bring paper to them whenever they're hungry. Wingz are handy for things like that! Oh, we're gonna have such adventures!"

The End

What's a Three Letter Word for . . . ?

"Vinky? What's a nine-letter word for 'terrific'?" Vobble looked up from his crossword puzzle book with his pencil in his beak. "I can't think of anything that fits. The first letter is M. What could it be?"

Vinky looked at Vobble and said, "Have you tried 'Marvelous' yet?" Vobble started printing. "M - A - H - V . . ." Vinky groaned. "Vobble, it's spelled m-a-R-v . . . no matter how folks say it."

"Okay, that fits. Now, let's see. What's a twelve-letter word for 'Modern day treasure hunt. Gee, I have so much trouble with these big words. But it seems like I ought know this one."

"Vobble, just think! Yes, you SHOULD know this one. Remember our treasure hunt adventure a few months ago?" A light dawned in Vobble's eyes. "Letterboxing!! You're right. It just fits."

"Okay, here's another one. What's a three-letter word for 'home sweet home'?" Vinky frowned. "Only 3 letters? It can't be house. It's not residence or castle or abode. What else do we call our box?"

Vobble screeched! "That's it!! A three-letter word for home is 'box'! Okay, another one. Starts with O-three letters-means 'magnificent creature. How do you spell Ox? Does it have an E on the end?"

Vinky just shook her head and said . . .

"Did you say, starts with O or with E? hmmm. EMU!"

"Nooooooooo," said Vobble, frustrated as all get out.

"Ohhh, starts with A! Got it. ANT!"

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Vinky, do you ever listen to me?? I said, 'O! O! O!'"

"Oxe no. Obi. Not that is a Japanese sash. Hmmm, thinking here," said Vinky. "Okay, I have it on the tip of my beakie. It's coming. Hold on It is . . . (drum rolls).

Vinky flapped her wings. "What what what is the O word?"

Vobble sputtered, stuttered and spoke, "Why, an OWL!"

Vinky then looked at the puzzle and scratched her head once again. Now, here is a hard one. What's a three letter word starting with V that stands for friends?"

Vobble exclaimed oh that one is actually easy. You know all those chatters out in VacaLand. they call each other Vutz .

"But," said Vinky, "that is four letters."

"Oh," said Vobble. "We'd better go out and find VacaDude and Zorro and ask them." And with that , they went to the door of the owl box, but there below them was . . .

daylight! "Should we go out now, or wait until it gets a little darker? I know you're a little skeered of the daylight, Vinky."

Vobble continued quite confidently, "I think we could work on some other words in this puzzle. Look at this one Vink, what's a 1,2,3,4,5,phew, 6,7,8,9, 10 letter word for friends?"

"Oh," chittered Vinky. "Those big words are easy. Two-Leggers, of course!"

"Are you sure there's a three-letter word for friend that starts with V?"

"Well, that's what it looks like to me," hissed Vobble. "I just don't know. Is it getting dark yet? I just can't figure it out.

"Well," said Vinky. "I have one idea, but it makes no sense! Is VOD a word Vobble?"

"No, Vinky, that makes no sense at all! Maybe if you change the first letter to a M - a MOD is a friend, but what would a VOD be?"

"But Vobble, I can't come up with anything else! Its dark now - so lets go find Vaca and Zorro! But wait! What's under the box? Oh my! The mystery owl that visited last week is back! Maybe she will know.

Vinky and Vobble asked the mystery owl, "What is a three-letter word for friend?"

"No comprende, Senor owl. Vinky and Vobble realized it wasn't the mystery owl, it was that silly turtle. "I just got back from Mexico. Took a long time for me to get here. I heard there was some puzzle thing going on and I want to help. I love puzzles. Turtles are very smart. Slow, but very smart. I think the three-letter word is VAD."

Turtle looked up at the two owls looking down at him. "I've been standing here next to Polez and you haven't even offered me any refreshments!"

Vobble sighed and exclaimed, "Not that again! We don't have any water up here! Where do you usually get your refreshments, Turtle?"

Turtle said, "Well it is a four-letter word that starts with 'P'. The pond! Is there a pond here?"

Vinky said, "HmMMM. The closest pond is at least two hunting ground fields away."

"Hey" said Vobble, "I'm sure Uncle Vac has refreshments. Let's take a break from this three letter word game and traverse over to his home."

So, the turtle, Vinky and Vobble strolled over to Vaca's place for refreshments.

In the meantime, the word got out that there was a major three-letter word game going on. Everyone knows that owls are wise. Vinky and Vobble felt pressure in coming up with the correct answers.

So the trio stepped up to the door and rang the bell. Vaca answered, and said, "Hey, I heard you guys were doing a three-letter puzzle! How did you all get here?"

Vinky answered "AIR". Vobble said "CAR". The turtle said "SLO". Vaca said, "no--that's all wrong. And turtle, you are WAY off.

"I tell you what--I'll give you a hint. It starts with E and ends with G . . ."

"Starts with E and ends with G . . ." Vinky and Vobble looked at each other, like deer in head lights. Several minutes passed. "E . . . hmm . . . everlasting,

(not 3 letters) elation . . . " Vinky and Vobble decided this is gonna' take more than us to figure this out. "Can we go to Carlos? Surely he can figure this out. He is like the smartest two-legger we know besides Vaca."

The turtle spoke up. "Yo! I ain't traversin' that far again. Please ask Vaca to drive us or something."

Vaca said, "OK, before we leave, lets have some fresh gopher chops and snake gravy for our journey.

Vaca called ahead. "Carlos, we have an issue and need your help". Carlos replied, "Not me, buddy, we're gonna' call Austin.

Vinky and Vobble agreed that Austin had the smartz to help them with the 3 letter word puzzle thingie. While Vinky, Vobble, Vaca, Mr. Turtle and Carlos waited for Austin to arrive, Carlos showed everyone his new camera.

"Take our picture, Carlos!" squealed Vinky and Vobble!!! "We want to be famous too!"

Just as Carlos was about to take the picture, Austin walked into the back yard. and said. "I heard you needed a 3 letter word for friend! I'm here to help!"

Then Austin asked, "Has anyone guessed VAD?" They all said "Yes, Turtle did!"

"Well," said Austin, I think that's a really good answer. There are a whole lot of chatters who are VADs, and they're really good friends." "Yay!" they all cheered. "Turtle is a great puzzle guy!"

"Thank you," said Turtle. "Are there any more words in the puzzle?" But just then . . .

Donna ran over and said, "Enough, already with the puzzle. My whole family is late for dinner. We will play 'Name that four-letter word tune.'"

"Hahahaha," they shout with glee.

"For example, what is the adoration tune?"

"Ahhhh, let me think. Let us think . . . "

"Oh, I think I've got it! Love is just a four letter word!!"

"Yay!" they all yell, hiss and screech.

Turtle looked up at the singing Vinky and Vobble and rolled his eyes. "You know I am in need of wingz. It takes me forever to go from A to Z."

"Hmmm," said Vinky.

"Haaa," said Vobble. "We have an idea." And they whooped about the owl box flapping their wingz until 8 feathers fell down on the gag shag flooring.

With that Vinky and Vobble snuck over to Dude's mechanical room and found among the SteamPunk stuff a small bottle of Monkie Glue. Turtle looked up with his sad eyes again and pulled his head inside his shell.

Vinky and Vobble went to work monkie glueing the feathers to turtle's shell. When they were done they got turtle to walk up to the owl box ladder and they said, "FLY!!" Turtle really rolled his eyes, closed them and then pushed himself off the ladder into the mid air and suddenly . . .

KaThump! "Owwwww" groaned turtle. "Help me, I've fallen and I can't get up!"

Vinky and Vobble looked out and saw that their poor friend (VAD) was lying on his back with his big turtle clodhoppers (that would be feet) sticking straight up in the air. And Vinky and Vobble noticed another strange thing. That poor, groaning turtle had no tail!

Vinky and Vobble flew down to Turtle to have a closer look at him. "Where's your tail, Turtle?" asked Vobble.

"Never mind about my tail, help me flip over, I can't just rock and roll here all day". Help me!"

"You are too heavy! We need to get some help! We'll ask . . .

Carlos!" But Carlos said (as usual!), "Ask Austin!"

Vobble said, "We can't! He went to mail out his DVDs!

Vinky looked down at wiggling and rock 'n' rollng VAD and had a idea! "Let's tie

a rope to his feathers and attached it to the windmill in Carlos' garden. When the windmill turns it will lift him up and he can right himself! Do you think that will work?"

So they . . .

took some string, and looped it to Turtle, then took the other end and attached it to the wind mill and Turtle started screaming, "Wait! Wait!!!!"

Around and around and around Turtle went. Flying around like an amusement ride. Vinky and Vobble started trying to get poor Turtle stopped, but to no avail. The neighbors dog started barking, the other neighbors were trying to figure out what all the commotion was about. Vinky and Vobble ran to the wind mill and tried to stop it. They hung on to the wing and then they started flyin around with the windmill. Poor turtle flying around, and now Vinky and Vobble are hangin' on for dear life, when out of nowhere came

Donna with a pair of kitchen scissors saying, "I think you need my help." She gently grabbed Turtle with one swipe! Snip, snip, snip, and all was well.

Meanwhile, back in his office, unaware of the drama unfolding under the owl box, VacaDude was looking for the glue that Vinky and Vobble had borrowed to put the feathers on Turtle's shell.

"I know I left that glue right here next to the Mayan Steampunk Mask." His mind was wandering as he sat down in front of his computer while he looked out the window. VacaDude looked like a lightbulb went off in that Big Baby Blue Brain Cell of his. His eyes sparkled just as he finished a VacaSip.

"I think the Australian bejeebers have been overrunning the indigenous breed lately." He continued, "Of course, there is a huge difference in velocity between the laden and unladen bejeebers."

Meanwhile, back at the Owl Box . . .

Vobble, Vinky, Vad and Donna took a deep calming breath to settle their nerves. Donna suggested cool refreshing water for Vad and a juicy gopher for Vinky and Vobble.

"Well," said VAD, after drinking his delicious water, getting back to the word game.

"Oh no!" said Vobble and Vinky simultaneously. "I think we have had enough of word games for the day."

VAD slowly commented, "Perhaps . . .

we should try one of the four letter words--it might be easier. What is a four letter word meaning to cough something up?"

Vobble asked, "Uhhh, does it start with a 'B'?"

Vad replied, "No."

"Oh, thank goodness," replied Vobble. "Then does it start with an 'H'? And end in a 'K'?"

Vad replied, "Why, yes. I think you've got it!"

"HONK!" said Vinky. Vobble said, "No, silly!"

Don't you remember the bumper stickers for Molly and McGee? Remember the trips we too just for science fun? In all most every state in America they have (blank) in the classrooms and colleges. OK, lets make it simple. Disect it. Rip it apart and find and explore. HORK! What an owl does and we appreciate. Then with all the might of an Owl, . . .

Vinky interrupted with both awe and puzzlement. "You mean, two-leggers collect our HORKS? And rip them apart? Why would they do a silly thing like that? There's nothing in them but bones and fur. And maybe an odd thing or two that an owl swallows accidentally."

" Well," began Vobble, "Maybe they want to . . ." but just then there was the sound of a huge crash! And then . . .

They heard a holler. "Hola, amigos! Austin fixed my flying feathers! I, the turtle now known as VAD can fly! And let me tell you, this is much faster than walking!"

VAD joined them in the box for a nap and then he hurried on his way, being the only turtle in the world who could actually hurry.

Vinky and Vobble were laughing so hard as they thought about all the fun and

adventures they'd shared with their friends today. Vinky said, "You know, Vobble, I thought you were nuts."

"I never saw any use in those puzzles you like so much. But I do have to admit we had a lot of fun today, and it all started with that three-letter word in your puzzle. But I think I'm puzzled out, now."

Vobble said, "Aww, Vinky. Puzzles like this are good for you. I learn lots of new words and things when I work puzzles. It makes my brain stronger. It's kinda' like lifting weights with my brain."

Vinky looked startled. "Does it REALLY work, Vobble? If I work puzzles, I'll get smarter? Or will my brain just get all bulging and ugly like those weightlifter dudes on TV?"

"Honest, Vinky, it really does work. You should try it. I'll get you a really easy book to start with. I don't want you to pull a brain muscle or anything. That really hurts! Believe me, I know!!"

"But, I'm ready to start a new puzzle now. What's an eight-letter word for 'weekly online gathering of like-minded, adventurous, learning and fun loving, owl-adoring friends?'"

THE END

Glowz and Glimmerz Take Up Tap Dancing

"Vinky? Vinky?? VINKY! Wake up! Do you hear that? Is it raining or something? It's sunny out, but it sounds like it's raining. Listen, there it is again. I've never heard rain sound like that!"

Vinky awoke with a start. "What are you yammering about this time, Vob . . . ? Whoa! What's that sound? It sounds like sleet or tiny little hailstones on the roof. What's going on? Why don't you look?"

"ME?? I'm not sticking my head out there! I don't wanna' get bonked on the head again. I still have a bump on my head from last time! Why don't YOU check it out and tell me what it is?"

"Okay, Vobble. I'll check it out, but hold on to my tail feathers just in case. If there's wind, I don't wanna' get sucked out of the box again." Vinky stuck her head out the door and gasped.

"Vobble, you won't believe it. Glowz and Glimmerz are on the roof and they're wearing SHOES on 6 feet each - 12 shoes in all! And they're dancing! On OUR roof! (Well, it's kinda' THEIR roof too, I guess.)

Just then Glowz noticed the owlets watching and she said "Howldy!"

Well, Vobble came to the door and craned his neck around to see the show! The spiders were wearing sequined costumes, sparkling in the sunlight and each one had a tiny cane in one arm and a tall top hat in the other.

"OK," they say, "one two three one two three."

Suddenly the sky opened up and a furious wind threatened to take them off the roof, but their lovely silvery guide lines saved them. The rain slashed down relentlessly with thunder and lightning. One could imagine it as good stage effects, but it was not. It was SCARY.

"Come in, quick!" said Vobble and Vinky. "We will help you dry out and give you a tiny taste of meat left over from dinner. But we have no frinks here."

Vinky and Vobble stared down at their two tiny friends as they quietly munched and munched at the left over Verminos Pizza. Glowz gave Glimmerz a sidelong glance as he gulped the tiny morsel down. Glimmerz couldn't swallow it at all and felt ashamed.

So Glimmerz lifted up his tiny canes and distracted Vinky and Vobble by twirling them and threw away his rodentz pizza nibble.

"Whew," said Glowz, "you did that with grace."

But Vinky and Vobble knew what he had done and winked at each other. "Say, Glowz can you teach us how to dance?"

Glowz and Glimmerz said, "Sure, Vinky and Vobble we can teach you how to tap dance, but do you have tap shoes? We may need to have Uncle Vaca get you some from the owl shoe store."

Vinky and Vobble said they would need to get tap shoes at the store. So Uncle Vaca took Vinky and Vobble and of course Glowz and Glimmerz to the tap shoe store.

"WOW!" Vinky and Vobble couldn't believe their eyes at all the tap shoes in the store. But they wondered could they find tap shoes to fit there talons?

Then a sales person showed up and asked them what they were looking for.

Glowz and Glimmerz said, "Well we are going to teach Vinky and Vobble how to tap dance! So we need sizes to fit their talons."

The sales person showed them to a machine. "Now, Vinky you go first - please put your talons on the platform at the bottom of the box."

Vinky wasn't having any of that box! "NO! What is that thing? What is it going to do???"

Vobble just sighed and said, "Well, let me do it first."

So Vobble put her talons on the platform, but then Molly came in and said, "STOP!! Don't you know X-rays can harm you?"

All of a sudden smoke came out of the box. Molly screamed and the sales person ran out of the store. "Yikes!" hollered Molly.

After the smoke cleared, Vinky and Vobble found shoes that fit, they left money on the counter and left. Then VacaDude, Glowz and Glimmerz looked at each other as they looked around the store for Vinky and Vobble, because you see, they had gone to the music section of the tap store. Glowz and Glimmerz had spotted a poster on the store wall of Gene Kelly "Singing in the Rain" and thought that they had just done the exact same dance on The Owl Box rufus, minus the umbrellas.

VacaDude had spotted the poster from from Gold Diggers of Broadway 1929 comedy/musical film he had studied for one of his umpteen jobs. He had recommended "Tiptoe Through the Tulips" for Vinky.

They went back to Vaca's house to study the video of Dancing in the Rain. Vinky said, "You expect me to dance backwards like Ginger Rogers?"

Glowz and Glimmerz said, "Don't worry. It will all work out. Start out slow and we can work our way to the top."

Vobble looked down and said, "Aren't these shoes suppose to have steel on the bottom to make noise?" Glowz lauged and said, "You've got BALLET shoes!"

Vaca said I know a Dutch guy down the street. He can make you a pair of shoes. They are made of wood.

Vobble grumbled, "I thought we were going to learn tap dancing, not wooden clogging!"

Glowz said coaxingly, "Let's just try to learn some basic steps now. We can get you the right shoes later."

Vobble reluctantly agreed., and he and Vinky stood up facing Glowz and Glimmerz. "Okay, here's the first step," and Glowz shook a foot in the gagshag. "Oh, no! This will never do," she said. "We have to have a hard floor!"

So they went outside on the Landing Pad. "Now," said Glowz, "Lift your right

foot , tap it lightly, lift it again, then set it down." Vinky and Vobble tried this gingerly.

"Now, " said Glowz, "repeat with your other right foot, and then your other right foot...." "Wait a minute!" yelled Vobble." We don't have that many feet!"

"Oh," said Glowz. "Well then . . . "

As Glowz was talking, Vinky and Vobble looked at each other and smiled. They did not even hear the sentence before taking out a secret whistle and call the steampunk backwards time machine. They quickly hopped in, telling Glowz that they would literally be back in no time. So they pushed a button and ended up in a court salon with gorgeous dancers in wigs and long gowns, dancing the minuet.

"Ah," said Vinky to Vobble. "This looks a bit complex."

So, off they went to Vienna and saw the waltz.

Vinky was not happy with the waltz. "Vobble, we needed to lighten these twolegged waltzers up with some down home tap clogging stuff"

Vobble stared at Vinky and said, "Yeah, right! We never got our lessons."

"But," said Vinky, "we have our creative thinking so we can make it up," as she smiled ever so brightly.

With that Vinky and Vobble hobbled over to the beautiful marble hall filled with the waltzing two leggers and began one bare talon at a time to clog. They got so involved in it - back and forth, duet, stomping, tapping, clogging, jumping, twirling as the waltzers in hushed tones sighed "Oh my, oh my!" when suddenly . . .

Glowz and Glimmerz joined them on the dance floor. The waltzers couldn't believe their eyes - spiders not only wearing tap shoes but clogging. It appeared that Glowz and Glimmerz had stowed away in the time machine. Or maybe the time machine's magnetic field had locked onto their tapshoes and dragged them along.

People just stood there with their mouths open saying, . . .

"This is a disgrace! Who and what are these strange creatures taking over our dance floor!?"

One of the mademoiselles said, "Let's grab one and find out!"

So they took off her wig and headed towards Vinky! Glowz and Glimmerz and Vobble grabbed Vinky and headed back towards the time machine. Glowz sent a stream of webs into the crowd. They jumped into the time machine and Vinky shakily said, "Let's go back home! Please!"

With a whoosh, they flew home. When they got there, they found that Carlos was waiting at Vaca's door. He said, "I heard someone was giving tap dancing lessons here. I want in on them."

Carlos and Donna wanted to learn the tap dance version of the Macarena but they did not want to tell VacaDude that they wanted to dance to the Macarena. You see, they planned to surprise their family at their Renewal of Wedding Vows in Las Vegas coming up soon.

VacaDude said to Carlos, "No lessons here! We are done with that since everyone is exhausted from this whirlwind of adventures today. Carlos, can I offer you a VacaMug with a sip of something - What a hot day in VacaVille today!" "Awww Shucks" Carlos replied, "I wanted to learn to tap dance, but I will have a cool sip instead."

Vaca and Carlos were relaxing, enjoying their drinks, and heard pitty patty, pitty patty, tap tap, ratta tap tap. Across the ground came Glowz and Glimmerz.

Everyone watched them, entranced, because they really were very good. Vobble said, "I had no idea! Tap dancing is really neat! Although having 6 feet to dance with really helps. I'll tell you what," said Vinky. "Let's go get proper shoes tomorrow night, and then set up a time with Glowz and Glimmerz for proper lessons."

"Great idea," said Vobble. "I really want to learn to do that."

So they shook talons on it, and then turned back to the group. But just then, suddenly and unexpectedly and all at once, they heard more ratta tat tat - ratta tat tat. They looked and saw Zorro doing "River Dance"! It was so unexpected. Then they realized that he was standing in front of a video of Michael Flatley. They all laughed.

At the end of the day, the owlets were reclining on the gopher sofa, totally wiped out. Vinky said, "That dancing in the rain dude made it all look so easy. But it's NOT! Tap dancing is HARD WORK! I'm worn out."

Vobble said, "I know what you mean. We didn't really dance all that much, except for the two-leggers in Vienna, but I've got aches in every part of my body, even the tips of my talons!"

I'm not sure I want to continue with these lessons. I think we've got the wrong kind of legs for it (or not enough of them). I think I'll stick with my beautiful singing from now on. I can do opera really well!"

Vinky hid a little smirk and nodded. "Yeah, sure, Vobble. You keep singing until we discover your REAL talent. I'm sure there's something that you're really good at. Maybe when you get all your feathers, we'll know."

Vobble looked hurt for a minute, but then he brightened up. "I can be and do anything I want to. Or maybe it's more like I can be and do anything that VacaDude can dream up. I know someday I'll be famous."

Again, Vinky hid a smirk. "Okay, Vobble. We'll both be famous and have lots of people watching us and writing about us and taking our pictures." Under her breath, she muttered, "Yeah, like THAT's gonna happen!"

The END

The Owlet's Time at the Beach

"Vobble? I've been thinking. I was peeking through the window when UncleVaca was watching TV and they said that this is the last weekend of summer! Lots of folks have BIG plans. Do we have any big plans?"

"Like what, Vinky? Usually we just sorta' hang around on the weekends and then lots of fun adventures just kinda' happen. I didn't know you could actually plan an adventure. How do you do that?"

"Well . . . let me think. What kind of things would we like to do? What do the two-leggers do? Do you want to go somewhere? Or do something exciting? There's got to be a fun adventure out there."

"Well, Vinky, this may sound kinda' silly, but I think it would be fun. On the TV they said folks would be flocking to the beaches this weekend. (That's kinda' weird, though. I thought BIRDS flock!)"

"We could go to the beach. I saw lots of great, fun stuff we could use at the beach. Pails and shovels and floaties and balls and . . . oh let's get online and start shopping. We can have a blast at the beach."

The owlets snuck into Vaca's office and booted up the computer and headed to Owlamazon.com. They found lots of fun beach accessories. Vobble chose a swim ring with a gopher's head on it. Vinky decided that she didn't need any sunscreen, even though it was recommended. She asked Vobble, "We'll be going at night. Do you think they make moon tan lotion?"

"Night???" Vobble said, "but we will miss all the action."

"But, but, but . . .," Vinky said, "We are day sleepers. Night prowlers. It is dangerous out there in the day!"

"Hmmm," said Vobble, "let me think. I have a great idea! I saw an amazing thing on Owlamazon. It was a large plastic owlbox with could be set on the sand and tied down so we could stay inside and feel cozy, then make a quick flyabout to the sea water."

Just then, a large VEE of geese flew overhead and said, "Come with us, we will show you the way to the beach."

"But wait!" cried Vinky to the Vee Formation of Geese "we need to get an owl box first". Vander the lead gander looked down at the two owls and said, "my vfriends can lift your owl box and take it.

With that Vander and the geese dove right down and lifted the owl box into the sky - it made a terrible creaking and groaning noise as it lifted off the polz.

For what seemed like hours Vinky and Vobble flew with the geese to the beach and just as they saw the white sands and the beautiful blue ocean

They felt the owlbox beginning to fall! "What's going on?" the owlets cried.

"We're tired!" the geese holding up the owlbox called in reply. "Come on, everyone!" Vander honked. "You can do better than that. We promised to get these owlets to the beach. And geese never break promises!"

Encouraged by their leader's words, the geese flapped their wings harder, determined to make it to the beach. As they flew over one last hill, they could see the sand stretching out before them.

The geese lost their grip on the owlbox and it fell from the sky, landing with a thud! And it was upside down! The owlets hurried to the ground and looked over the situation.

"Oh no! what shall we do?" Vinky cried big owlet tears.

Just then, a strange two legger ran toward the owlets and their home. The two legger came over slowly and spoke softly to the owlets, "Are you lost? Don't be scared, I'll help you."

"Our owlbox is tipped upside down, and we can't get in it for safety," Vinkie bawled.

The two legger chuckled a friendly chuckle and flipped the owlbox right side up in no time. The owlets rushed inside to safety, and then looked outside and what a sight they saw!

"Wowza, look at that Vinky!"

The beach was packed with people. The ocean waves were big and all the people all looked hungry.

The owlets decided to make food for everybody. They started off with Crab SANDwiches and Seaweed Salad. Everyone helped when . . .

Just then, they heard a big loud cheer from a group of people near the parking lot. Vinky and Vobble looked over and saw a Big Yellow and Red Truck pulling up.

And music was coming out of loudspeakers on top - it was the "Molly Song!". A Sign on the side of the truck read "Zorro's Zany Grilled Cheese Beach Delights."

A line was forming as fast as the Truck Vendor opened the window and set up. Vinky and Vobble looked at each other and said "Zorro . . . Cheese?"

Vinky said "Wow, all of those two legged types, will we be safe" Vobble says, "We'll just fly over them all."

So, off they flew right over to the head of the line, thinking of their good friend Zorro. As they got to the window the two leggers shouted for them cutting in line. They hooted right back at the two leggers when a lady and man could be heard on loudspeaker. Carlos and Donna and VacaDude all took turns from some unknown location telling the two leggers, that "Hey, these are the world famous Vobble and Vinky."

VacaDude peeked out from the back of the big red and yellow van and said . . .

"Yes, they may be the worlds most famous owls but they have to take their turn!" So VacaDude told Vinky and Vobble to perch on top of the specially made junior owlbox and wait their turn!"

"Ok," Vinky and Vobble sighed! They flew to the top of the truck and sat on their new junior box. All the two leggers cheered and started buying delicious Zany Zorro cheese SANDwiches.

Vinky asked, "What do we do with all the food we made?"

Vobble said, "We can have our own picnic by the water. Anyone without money for the two-legger food can share with us."

The beach party was in full swing, the two-leggers built a camp fire and were singing Molly songs when a siren started screeching. Helicopters flew down and . . .

landed and out came the mayor of the beach town and other dignitaries. Carlos, Donna and Vacadude greeted them. The mayor took them to a special staging area to present them with the "keys" to the beach and all special privileges of honorees.

Vinky and Vobble were asked to give a speech to the crowd but they wanted their friend Zorro to introduce them. But where was Zorro? Everyone had seen his sandwich truck, but not Zorro himself. A couple of two-legger kids were sent over to the truck to try to find him.

The kids found Zorro well-covered with cheese from his sandwich-making venture, but he said he would come immediately. So Zorro and the kids took off at a run for the stage. But they hadn't gone far when they discovered that Zorro was now covered with sand that had stuck to the melted cheese! Now what? The helpful kids scraped off the sandy cheese with their hands and smoothed Zorro's fur as well as they could. One of them picked Zorro up and ran with him the rest of the way to the stage. When he was set down, Zorro walked to the mic with what dignity he could muster, cheesy, sandy fur and all. The crowd roared with applause, and he started his introduction of Vinky and Vobble. But just then . . .

something unusual arrived in the copse of trees behind the cheesy weesy truck. Just as everyone had let their guard down in the daytime. It was a large, spooky red-tailed hawk starting to fly right to the vulnerable owlets.

Zorro squeaked into the microphone, "RUN!! I mean FLY!!!"

Just then a tiny mosquito whispered in Vinky's ear. "Hold Vobble's hand and say, 'Scotty, beam me up!'" but all Vinky could hear was a "mnmTTTT nnnnttt" sound that was annoying him.

As the hawk's fierce face grew closer, Vinky looked up with great fright in her eyes when she exclaimed, "Oh, it is Roarke, come to congratulate us."

And Roarke flapped his wingz and pointed to a large gift. It is from the mayor and holds a magic Jukebox. Vinky and Vobble were delighted and deeted their happiness when out of the jukebox came the most horrible wailing sound the

owlets had ever heard. "What's wrong with the juke box?" Vobble asked, edging away from it.

Zorro the mouse, brave and bold as he was, decided that he would go investigate. He walked all around the juke box and then exclaimed "I see the problem! You see this gizmo here?" Zorro pointed. "This is the magical music receptor, and something is blocking it."

Zorro looked up at the sky. "From the pitch of the noise, I'd say that it's something up there. But I don't see anything. Maybe you should fly up and have a look around."

"Oh, wait a minute, It's not in the sky, it's right here, it's . . .

a cheeze Sandwich!, and all melty just the way I like it! Nom, nom, nom, I can take care of this." As he finished the sandwich, and burped, the music began. Molly songs filled the air, and the owlets screeched with delight.

It was time for the owlets' speech. They started by saying, "We've got lots of food for everyone, even some new foods. We've got the Crab SANDwiches and seaweed salad you've already tried, but we've also got Salmon Tacos and Orange-raspberry smoothies. CC helped us with the new recipes. We hope you'll try them and like them as much as we do.

The Mayor interrupted and said, "I have a great surprise for you all." In addition to the Keys to the Beach and the City, I am giving CC a special permit to sell her food on the beach." He continued, "Cardsfan is here with a special new CC Cafe Food Truck painted in her favorite colors - rainbows!" I also have a special treat for VacaDude who is here somewhere. Come up on Stage! "John," he continued. "We are giving you a permit to sell your Cafe Press t-shirts here for the whole summer season!"

"Oh wow!" said John, "give me a minute to grab my boxes! So he rushes to his SteamPunk car (just newly built!) and grabbed the newest box of Ts. All the two leggers gathered round the stage to wait for Vaca.

"Here I come!" Vaca yelled as he rushed to the stage and almost tripped! "Look at the newest one," he said as he opened the biggest box.

It was a bright yellow T-shirt with the creepy cheese girl on the front.

He had others that he was selling, but the Creepy Cheese Girl was special and was going to only one person, who would be chosen later. He also had a RUSH T-shirt that he was saving for his friend cards, but now it was time to chose the winner of the cheesy girl shirt. Just then, Molly flew in with the name of the winner and . . .

Molly decided the winner would be announced at the moonlight picnic just getting under way as the sun was now setting on the beach! VacaDude was making everyone laugh while selling his t-shirts and other steampunk wares and CC and Cards were having a blast cooking away and Zorro was making more cheese sandwiches!

Vinky and Vobble decided to head down to the beach for just awhile to search for sea shells by the sea shore while waiting on the night time festivities then . . .

Vinky turned to Vobble and said, "I just love the beach! I wish that we had come here before!"

And Vobble said, "You bet! And it's gotten dark now, and there's still lots going on, so we don't have to come during the day after all!" They walked along for a while, listening to the sound of the ocean waves and the crying of the gulls. They finally tuned back, ready to go home at last, when . . .

VacaDude said, "It's time to announce the winner of the Cheesy Girl shirt. Molly? will you do the honors?"

Molly stepped to the microphone and said, "The winner is . . . Zorro! Step up and claim your prize!"

Zorro looked up at Molly and said, "Uh uh! No way. You can just leave the shirt with the Vaca Man and I'll get it later. I'm not getting that close to your talons again!"

They all continued to party and eat and party and dance and sing and have loads of fun.

As the party drew to a close and the crowds were headed home, Vobble looked at Vinky and said, "Uh, Vinky? Those geese are gone. Did you watch to see the route we took to get here?"

"Oh, NO! I didn't Vobble! What do we do now? We can't carry our owlbox back home by ourselves. And I don't want to live on the beach forever!" Vinky began to cry and snivel and snort.

Just then, Vaca walked up and said, "Hey, you two? Are you planning on staying here on the beach forever?" Vinky howled even louder. "I don't want to live on the beach!!!"

Vaca grinned and said, "Well then, how would you and your box like to ride in my new SteamPunk roadster? I'll take you home in style!" Vinky sniffed a couple more times and then rushed to the car.

As she buckled herself in, she could be heard saying, "Home . . . home . . . home . . . I just want to go home! I'm never leaving home again. Never, ever, ever. No more adventures for me!"

But then Vobble climbed into the car and said, "Oh, Vinky, stop. You know that after a good night's sleep back home with Polez, you'll be ready for more adventures. But I don't want to plan one this time.

Let's just wait and see what happens this time. You know those adventures always show up everytime we start getting bored. Who knows what we'll do next? I'm sure something fun will happen."

Vinky smiled a tremulous little smile and said, "Well, okay. Maybe our adventures are kinda' fun, but I'm sure glad we've got Polez and Boltz back home to keep us grounded."

The End

The Owlets Go To School

The owlets were sitting on the windowsill of Vaca's living room, unseen by Vaca and Mary, quietly listening to a nature documentary on TV. They heard the announcer say,

"Here we see the school of fish swimming by, totally unaware of the danger that lurks in their path. They swim blithely on, the whole school in certain peril."

"WOW!" Vobble turned to Vinky in amazement. "I never knew fish went to school! I also never knew that going to school was so dangerous. Why do they do it?"

"I'm not sure, Vobble," Vinky said. "All the two-leggers do it too, every year for like forever. Some dogs go to school too, but that's just to learn how to be good. I don't know about other animals."

"I do remember UncleVaca talking about a family of owls who live at a two-legger school, though. School sounds kinda fun, though, even if it is dangerous. Would you like to do it?"

"Do they have owl schools, Vinky? Or would we have to go to a fish or two-legger school? I'm NOT going to school with dogs! I KNOW how to be good. Do you think we could do both?"

"We already go to hunting and sleeping school with Dad. Let's check out a two-legger school. I bet we could sneak in and hide in a classroom while it's still dark and they'd never know we were there."

"But is there a school near here? Why don't you look it up? Or you could ask UncleVaca, but I bet he'd have something to say about it being silly or dangerous or something." Vinky replied . . .

"Let's go talk to Auntie PegRod and have her Google local schools." PegRod found Vacaville elementary, middle and high schools and Special Ed up to age 22.

"Hmmm," Vinky and Vobble said in unison. "Do they sound kinda' boring?"

"Well, Vinky said, "yeah, kind of, let's keep looking!"

"Oh," says Vobble.

So, they looked in the yellow pages under S for schools and came upon CHARM school!!!

"HMMMM, I wonder what that is?" they cried. "Let's have the Dude call them."

So VacaDude called the charm school and, VOILA, due to all the owlboxes in California, they have opened a charm school for owlets.

"YAYYY!!" they cried.

"Okay, what is the curriculum?" Vinky asked.

"Let's see," said Vobble. "Preening correctly, Asking or hissing correctly for food, being grateful to parents, Allopreening with finesse, Squirts in the right direction and more.

Vinky and Vobble started checking off the courses they most wanted to find one they could agree upon but, alas, they could not. Vinky wanted to take "Indepth Studies of Rodentia Skeletal and Musculature" but Vobble said that was for graduates and not for first year students. Vobble then suggested "Wingercising for Vun and Pleasure."

Vinky said, "OK, Vobble but maybe we could take the 2 hour vocal coach class also?"

So the two flew off to vocal coach class and there were some two-leggers there! They were whispering, "I don't want to be in this class. Old lady OwlzRlynda gives me the bejeebers!"

"Yikes!" screeched Vinky, "Whoo is old lady Owlzalynda and what are bejeebers?"

Vobble looked at poor Vinky whose feathers were getting quite ruffled and her her beak was snapping. "Don't be scared. I think they are just teasing us. Look. they are chuckling now.

Vobble tried to calm poor Vinky down.

"I don't want to go in, I'm afraid of bejeebers even if I don't know what they are," said Vinky. "Let's go to this Cooking Class with CC instead."

So off they flew to CC's class.

Miss Princess Chatterchops was in fine form, chalk in one hand and skillet in the other. "Now class, we are going to start easy today. Today, we are going to learn how to stir fry. We'll be making Stir Fry Dragonfly. If you have frog friends they can help with the flies or dragonflies. But they are easy enough to catch. Just put honey on a leaf and watch them come for it. Then you need to heat up a skillet, (PLEASE ASK A FIRE CARRIER OWL) then add butterfly butter found in any NORMAL owl abode. Toss in the flies and dragonflies. Shake, do not stir."

After class was over, Vobble said, "I think we don't need any more charm school. We're already charming. I want to go to a REAL school."

Vinky just shook her head at Vobble, but understood. First of all they did not have all the kitchen equipment that Master Chef Chatterchopz had. And it was just too hot.

Vobble said, "But before we go look for another school, let's go back home and take a nap." Vinky blinked and smiled. That was enough said.

Back at the owl box in Vacaville, Vinky was dreaming about catching a desert cottontail rabbit for dinner. In her sleep her beak was clicking and her talons twitching

In the distance she heard a doorbell. "Whoo's There?!" she heard VacaDude shout!

"Fling and Fly Delivery service with a special envelope for you!"

Mary said, "I'll get it" She opened the door, took the envelope, and read the return address which said "Torrey Pines Gliderport School." She opened it and inside was a gift certificate for VacaDude and Mary to take lessons to learn to fly! She knew that Torrey Pines was near San Diego!

"Are you kidding?" Vobble said. "That is the most elite flying school in the world."

Vinky said, "Somersaults, 90 degree turns, wind foils . . . so, Vobble, you got nothing to learn?"

Vobble said, "We fly everywhere and the silly sea gulls taught us some really weird stuff, but what about learning two-legger stuff?"

Vobble said, "With the certificates maybe we could help with their streaming low or flying high. You do realize that the two-leggers aren't very smart, right?"

"Now hold on just a minute!!" yelled VacaDude coming into the room behind Vinky and Vobble. "I do believe that the names on the certificate are Mr. and Mrs. VacaDude, not Vinky and Vobble."

Vinky and Vobble looked down and scraped at the shag rug in Vaca's office with their talons. Noticing this, Vaca made a mental note to re-decorate.)

Vaca continued, "I know how exciting you were thinking about these flying lessons, but really . . . you are just a little too young to be doing these things on your own. When you are older, I'll take you, but for now . . . maybe you should find more classes suited to your age?"

Vinky and Vobble, thought for a little while and decided Vaca was right. They can still find a fun class. Now where was that catalog?

Vinky and Vobble got the catalog and started looking through the pages. Vinky squealed, "Look Vobble! We could take belly dancing classes!"

"Aw, Vinky, flying is so much more fun than dancing. Let's do something else." Then he said, "We could always take a mechanics class!"

Vinky laughed, "That would be good if we could drive a car! Let's keep looking."

Vinky turned another page and saw something that really grabbed her interest. "Look! We could take some painting classes! Wouldn't that be fun?"

Vobble said, "I bet Uncle Vaca could make some special brushes we could hold in our talons!" "Good idea!" said Vinky. Let's see what he says."

Suddenly, a strange noise filled the room. "What's that noise?" asked Vinky.

That's my tummy, saying it's time to eat," replied Vobble.

Vinky said, "I saw a class in the catalog that can help us get dinner faster. I read that one gopher is the equivalent of 10 mice and one rat is the equivalent of 16 mice. If we look hard to find gophers and rats, how many trips would we have to make???"

Vobble said, "Oh, my head hurts. Can't we just throw something together that we learned in cooking class?"

Just then, there was a knock on the door . . .

so they dashed to the door and guess who it was?? Grampa Carlos!!!

"Yay!!! Come in!! We adore you," they hissed.

"Let me see that catalog," he said. "Awww, let's just skip that math I saw Vinky trying to sneak in around Vobble's hunger pangs! Close, but no cigar! Okay, let me see . . . ahhh, here it is, lunch combined with recess for owls."

So the owlets headed to a specially protected field during the day, with a mesh cover way above.

"Okay, now swoop and hunt and eat, and have fun, fun, fun!!!"

"We love you, Grampa," they hiss.

And so Vinky and Vobble fluttered, lifted, and fluttered some more until they felt the wind beneath their wingz lift them high into the air. "Wow" cried Vinky "this is so, well, breathtaking."

Vobble was speechless. The sensation of true field flight was more than he had ever felt before. No more need for Mom and Dad to bring them food anymore.

As they flew high, wing to wing, their beaks open to taking in the sky air, there was a sudden ping, a snap and then a crash as the sky mesh protector collapsed and trapped them on the ground.

"Vinky? Are you ok?"

Vinky replied, "I fell on Zorro."

"Oh NO!" and then . . .

"That's not Zorro, Vinky, I think it's his 2nd cousin, Zozo, but wow, I think I know what bejeebers are now. I'm skeered" Vobble hissed.

"How are we ever going to get untangled and get out of here?" Vobble started to cry.

"Hey, don't worry owlets," Zozo said, "Let's make a deal, my cousins and I will chew through this net so you can get out if you promise not to eat any more mousies."

Vinky looked at Vobble, and Vobble was sniffing, and thinking . . . "no more tender delicious, mousies . . . Well, we could just eat voles, and gophers, and rats, and all that wonderful stuff at CC's cafe . . . OK we promise!" said Vinky and Vobble.

So the cousins, led by Zozo, chewed a big hole in the net for the owlets to escape.

Now out of the net, they could focus on other important things. Maybe after that, they decided, they could take karate. They could use their wings for self-defense. So they headed off for the Vacaville karate school.

"I love you Vinky," said Vobble, "because you are always there!" Vobble was entering the front door of the Vacaville Karate School, after the two of them had located it on their GPS Owlpad.

Luckily, the karate classes were at night! Just as they entered the big room, they heard a familiar voice saying "I am your Guest Instructor tonight and my name is Master Karate Champion ChatterChopz. Please take a place in the room and listen quietly.

"Due to unseen circumstances, we have decided that our Flyby with F16's will not be possible. Our Karate group will always and still be available as you can see."

"I, Princess Mascot Moderator ChatterChopz will be singing our national anthem along with the Owlet Choir."

Vinky said, "WHAT?! We can hardly hork and CC wants us to What?! The owlet choir???? Are you kidding???"

Vobble said, "Surprise!!! You are leading us in the owl version of Kung Fowl Fighting! to start off the karate class. Ready?"

"That owl was fast as lightning . . . HAH!"

After Vinky and Vobble and the whole owlet chorus finished singing, there was LOTS of cheering!

"Hey!" Vinky said. "MAYBE we should go back to look into those singing lessons again. Everyone seems to love us!?"

So off Vinky and Vobble went, after thanking CC for a great Karate class.

Vinky and Vobble walked into the music class at the school and signed up for the singing lessons. They told the teacher, The DaddyBird, that they thought they had better try expanding their singing voices to something besides screeches and hisses and that they got a standing owlvation for at the karate class.

"Okay," said TheDaddyBird. "I will be glad to give you some lessons. Do you want to learn to play the guitar as well?"

"Sure!", the owlets squealed. "We would love that!" So they started out by running their octaves and warming up. Just then . . .

Just then Vobble said, "Ow, these guitar strings hurt my wings. You know what, Vinky, I think we don't need any more classes from the catalog."

"I agree, " replied Vinky. "We don't need to cook, or fly a plane, or drive a car. Let's go home and just grow up the way owlets are supposed to -- except we won't eat mice, of course!"

So Vinky and Vobble went home with their heads all a-bobble. They knew they had made a good choice. And they laughed with delight as they thought of tonight, and began to deet-deet-deet with one voice.

As the very long and very tiring day ended, the owlets settled in on the gopher sofer and sighed. They were exhausted, exhilarated and excited all at the

same time.

"Yowzers, Vinky! I can't believe how much we managed to squeeze into one day. We went to charm school and learned to cook with CC. Then we almost got to go to flying school.

Then we had recess and got trapped under that big net. We got to meet Zorro's cousins and they helped us escape. And we got to take a karate self-defense class with CC too!

I never knew there were so many different kinds of schools. No wonder the two-leggers go to school for so many years. I guess they just want to try them all. I'm tired, and I know we said we wouldn't take any more classes, but I think I want to go again.

I still think we should try that real two-legger school. I saw that they had classes in Sowlcial Studies and Philowlsophy and even one called Owlgebra. After a long nap and a nice mouse . . . I mean, vole, for dinner. I'm gonna try to sneak in and see what that stuff is all about. I especially wanna check out that other class I saw they had. It's called "American History." I bet it goes back a long way. Maybe even to 2008 or something."

Vinky took the catalog and read it. "Wow, Vobble, it says here that today the school is having special observance of a day from way back in 2001. That is like really long ago. I want to go!"

"Okay, Vinky. It's dark enough. I think we go and watch from the trees." The owlets flew off to the school and settled in a big sycamore tree. They listened to the tributes and then they heard something familiar. There on the stage stood Johnny and the Horkers. But they weren't singing "The Owl Box Rocks." They were quietly singing "God Bless America." All the two leggers cried.

The owlets flew home, deep in thought. As they settled in to sleep, Vinky said, "Vobble, we just couldn't live anywhere better."

The End

Summer's Almost Gone

"Vinky!! It's awful! It's the worst! I just don't know what to do! My life might as well be over!"

Vinky patted the disconsolate Vobble and said, "Nothing can be THAT bad, Vobble. What is it?"

Vobble sputtered between sobs and said, "It's just horrible! I was watching the news with Uncle Vaca (except he didn't actually know I was there) and I heard them say that summer is almost over. It's over! Forever!! Isn't that the most horrendous thing you've ever heard?? What are we going to do?"

Vinky struggled to stifle a giggle. "Vobble, summer's not gone forEVER - just for now. It's time for Autumn, Winter and Spring. Then Summer will be back again. This happens every year, year after year."

"Are you SURE? You know for sure that summer will be back?" Vobble sniffled and tried to work up a smile. "But there are so many summer things we didn't do. We need to do them all now!"

"We need to . . . "

just be exactly where we are," said Vinky in a guru-like manner with a broad owlsh smile on her face. "We are now almost at the sweet solstice, the change of season, from greens to oranges, reds, ochres, golds, burnt umbers . . . "

"Whoa!" cried Vobble. "Vinky, you always cheer me right up." So Vobble snuffled one last sniff and said, "Where do we go to see all this?"

"Ahhh, that's the wonderful surprise! We go to visit all our friends in the East!"

"Not the FAR east, for sure?" queried Vobble.

"We have a problem, though, Vinky. The leaves in the East won't be turning for another two weeks. And we have one last hot weekend to enjoy at the beach."

"Oh," cried Vobble, sobbing. "But now I want to go East! Let's go to the ocean on the East Coast!"

"Ok, let's make a plan - we need to get to Uncle Vaca's and plan the trip from Google Earth - we need routes to fly above to guide us."

"Great idea Vinky. Now I am truly happy." With that they flew out of the box to VacaDude's.

When they got to Vaca's they checked out Google earth, got a good map and directions, hopped into the steampunk rocket ship and off they flew.

"I think we should start at the top, and go to Maine," said Vinky.

"Wowza," said Vobble, "it's a long trip to get there from here."

"We can eat lobster, and it's apple picking time there," Vinky said excitedly.

"Apples? Do we eat apples, Vinky? I think they are just for twoleggers. And lobster is for two leggers too! Whatever shall we eat there?" said Vobble, with tears starting to stream again.

Vobble said, "We need summer food from the East. But what do they eat?"

Vinky said, "The two-leggers eat Philly Cheesesteaks. I don't think we would like them."

Vinky said, "I talked with CC a week ago. She has a new recipe - Veggie and macaroni with soft shell crab, plus CC sent her love to you and said that if you keep eating so much you will need to exercise more and get back to her Karate Class lessons!"

While Vinky and Vobble chuckled and laughed about that, Carlos was devising a plan in San Marcos for all the owls.

"Let's get a team organized! Today!" Carlos said. "I have already ordered a set of 'San Marcos Horkers' t-shirts, custom-sized for our owls, and a few large for the Coach. We are going to have a FootBowl Team! Remember the motto 'Horko Ergo Edo'. If you eat, you need fresh air and some exercise. And I think Vobble could use a little more 'Manly' time!"

Unaware of grandpa Carlos' footbowl plans, Vobble and Vinky continue their own end of the summer road/rocket trip out East.

"Let's see," said Vinky. "This may take us longer than originally planned. So, I say let's take-in some last minute events out East and on the way home to San Marcos. This sounds like a plan. According to Fodor's travel books, there are many sites we can see. We'll start out East and view the golden colored leaves on the trees, have some wonderful apples with honey. We'll stop by in Wisconsin to try to get tickets for the Milwaukee Brewers playing in the World Series and/or head to Green Bay for Packers."

As they flew over the country in their steampunk rocket ship, the owlets became bored. After all, it was a long trip and they had nothing to do on the way.

"We could sing," suggested Vinky. "Or play 'I Spy'."

"I don't want to play I Spy," Vobble grouched. "And there's nothing on the radio."

Vinky noticed that Vobble's eyes were shut tight. "Vobble, are you all right?" she asked. "You've been grouchy all day."

"I'm fine!" Vobble replied. The rocket ship wobbled a little, and Vobble hunched over. "I just . . . don't feel so good."

Just then, Vinky looked over at Vobble and he had a weird cast of gray to his face. She said, "Vobble, what is going on?"

Vobble replied, "I think that last vole I ate tasted funny! I think, I think . . ."

In a few seconds Vobble opened his beak very wide and the biggest hork that Vinky had ever seen came flying out and bounced around inside the rocket. It came to rest on top of her head.

"Oh, yuck!" said Vinky, shaking the hork off her head. "I hope you feel better now . . . or at least you should!"

Vobble replied, "Well, yes, I think I do! I'm not sure what was wrong, but I think that relieved the sick feeling. I thought at first I was airsick. Imagine an owl being airsick!"

They both laughed so hard they fell off their perches in the rocket and were rolling on the floor. All of a sudden,

Vinky and Vobble tried to regain composure while looking out the window. Vinky said, "Where are we?"

Vobble said, "Far from San Marcos and Vacaville. All I see is corn for miles and miles.

Vinky said, "Let's land this thing and nibble a bit. Corn might settle my belly. So they landed safely, got out and flew over and grabbed an ear of corn to nibble. When all of a sudden, this huge, monstrous black flying thing swooped down and took the corn right out of Vinkys talons.

"Hey!" Vinky yelled.

Vobble said, loudly, "FLYABOUT!!"

Vinky and Vobble shot for the sky. "That was a crow," Vobble said, "and they don't like sharing their corn."

Vinky said, "Back to the ship!"

On board the steampunk ship, they headed north. Vinky said, "How about Chicago?" Vobble said, "Well, they have pigeons, but at least they share."

Then a puff of purple smoke started to fill the steampunk ship. "What now?" Vinky said?

Vobble said, "Land this thing over there in the . . . reeds by that pond!"

So they did, and they both tumbled out fast to get away from the smoke. Then Vinky saw a white bird approaching. It had a long neck, and even longer legs - so long that they were longer than Vinky and Vobble were tall! They both gasped and Vobble asked, "What kind of bird are you?"

The bird answered "I'm an egret. What is that thing you came in, and does it always have purple smoke coming out of it?"

"No," said Vinky dismally, "and we don't know why it does now. We're trying to go to the East. Can you help us?"

"Well," said the egret, "I don't know what to do about purple smoke, but maybe my friend the beaver does. He makes and fixes things. He built this pond!"

Vinky and Vobble didn't think even Uncle Vaca or Grandpa Carlos had ever built a pond, and they were very impressed. Vobble said "Let's go ask him!"

So they set out. But before they got to the beaver, a . . .

great blue heron strolled over. It was the egret's cousin, Hermie! He had a cheroot dangling from his long pointy beak, (not a sharoot, mind you).

"I see," said the heron. "You gutz are lost and confused. Hmmm . . . should I help you or tease you remorselessly? Groucho is my idol, after all. Hey! Say the secret word and win a hundred dollars! Oh well. . . "

Hermie looked at the two owlets and said, "Ya' know, ya' got wingz, so fly east, young owlets, fly east!" Hermie winked and flew up and pointed his big white wing to the sky eastward.

So Vinky and Vobble took to the air and began their silent flight eastward.

"How will we know when we are there, Vinky?" asked Vobble.

"Because we will pass the tallest, coldest mountain in the east - Mt. Washington. The winds on Mt. Washington are the fiercest winds on earth and it can snow in summer! And sure enough below them was the white capped eastern majesty and then beyond they saw the great Atlantic which they had never seen before and all the islands around the Great State of Maine.

So tired, they boarded the Annie B mail boat and took a trip to Monhegan Island where they had read about the elf homes.

"Look Vinkie!" Vobble shouted above the sound of the surf on the islands. "What is that bird? Sure looks funny with that big, bright orange beak!"

"Wowza! I think that's a Puffin, Vobble. I saw it on Uncle Vaca's computer when I was visiting with Zorro last week."

"Let's go down and meet him!" Vobble screeched excitedly, "and see what he has good to eat!"

So Vinky and Vobble went over to talk with the Puffin. "Hi! We are Vinky and Vobble from the west, headed east."

"Hiya, I am Patrick Puffin."

"We are hungry. You got anything we can eat?" said Vobble.

"All I have is leftover gopher chopz from CC's cafe."

Vinky and Vobble were very happy to know CC's cafe is every where.

"These gopher chops should hold you over," Patrick said.

Vinky and Vobble explained that it was the end of summer and they wanted to finish with summer fun in the east. Vobble asked, "What do you do in the east at the end of summer?" Just then . . .

they heard the horn from the Annie B MailBoat blow - "AwwHAAAA AwwwHAAA - last call to go back to the coast of Maine!"

Vinky looked at Vobble and said, "Suddenly, I feel so sleepy and tired."

Patrick Puffin could not believe his eyes as both owlets fell over into a Faceplant on the sand. "What is going on here?"

He wasn't sure what he should do. He grabbed both owlets by their feet and gently dragged them to the tidal pools by the Atlantic Ocean shore. While he was waiting for them to revive, he wondered, "Who should I contact? Who is their family? Do they have identification on them? What should I do?"

Patrick Puffin heard a sound that he could not identify. He looked all around him and discovered that the sound was coming from Vinky's inside wing pocket.

Patrick removed the item from Vinky's wing pocket and after a few seconds happened to push the "TALK" button. He heard some funny sound, a two-legger, speak. After he got over the initial surprise, he spoke with a nice two-legger on the phone. Patrick was thinking to himself, "What kind of barn owls are these? Carrying funny devices and speaking with two-leggers."

Thanks to the sea salt, Vinky and Vobble were revitalized. Vobble explained to

Patrick the device and everything else. Patrick gave Vobble the device and Vobble chatted with Uncle Vaca. Arrangements were made to get Vinky and Vobble back home.

After Vaca hung up the phone, he called Carlos. "I found out where the owlets are," he said. "They took a road trip to visit their friends in the East to celebrate the last of the summer! But they seem to have gotten lost. They took my steam punk rocketship, so they'll need someone else to bring them home."

Carlos laughed. "I should have known they'd be off on an adventure. I'll go pick them up. I'm the one who was looking for them."

"Of course, the footbowl team!" Vaca answered. "I bet they'll be excited about that. I don't think they've ever played footbowl."

So Carlos started east in his deluxe Rescue RV. He roamed around looking for the rocket and found it by the purple smoke waving in the air. Sure enough, it was only the uncommon hork that had caught on fire. He put it out, loaded the rocket in the RV and headed east past Mt. Washington and then up to Maine where he found Vinky and Vobble munching on all sorts of fish and goodies that Patrick had given them.

Vinky and Vobble were so happy to see Carlos! They bid Patrick a fond farewell, thanking him for all he had done.

"You two sure do get into some unusual situations" said Carlos. "Let's get you owlets home!"

Vinky and Vobble were so full and so tired, that they climbed into the RV and fell fast asleep.

So Carlos was driving the big RV, he decided to take a long cut.

"I'll take a northern route and maybe get to see the leaves on the trees turning colors."

About half way up the side of this mountain he found Redwoods starting to turn and Maples and all sorts of trees. Of course the Pines stay green but do add beauty to the mountain.

Vinky and Vobble woke up just in time to see this wonderful sight. Carlos pulled over so they could stretch their wings and, wouldn't you know it, when . . .

Vobble was reading a guidebook about eastern fall colors as they went. He told them about the Dawn Redwoods that some eastern people had planted in their yards. They were originally imported from Asia and are different from American redwoods because they drop their needles in the fall! Before they fall, they turn a splendid orange color!

Besides that, they saw oaks, and beeches, and poplars, and many other kinds of trees, dressed in rich colors of reds, oranges, yellows, browns, and even purples! Vinky and Vobble were delighted, and so was Carlos.

At last, they turned to the West and headed for home. They were about halfway there when the RV started making very strange noises indeed! Carlos pulled off the highway and got out to try to see what the problem was. After checking everything he could think of, he got back inside, scratching his head and saying he couldn't find anything wrong. He pulled out his phone and called Tripowl A to come rescue them. They came 45 minutes later (it's always 45 minutes) with a huge towtruck and took the RV to the nearest town. When they got there, Carlos found out that

unbeknownst to him, Donna had enrolled him in the super-deluxe Tripowl A program. They not only towed the defunct RV, but supplied him with a new one, completely stocked (although they didn't have any gophers for the owlets). They set off again, taking in the sights and just enjoying the trip with only a few hork stops along the way.

After they all finally arrived home, the owlets, Zorro, Kyle, Rocky and all the rest of their friends were gathered with Vaca and Mary in Vaca's living room. (Mary had finally warmed up to all these critters, but she still lined the floor and furniture with plastic and papers, just in case, ya' know.)

The owlets began to relate yet another exciting adventure. Mary broke in to ask them, "How is it that you two have all these wonderful adventures EVERY week? I just don't understand it. Do you have some connections or contacts somewhere to help you do it all?"

The owlets laughed and said, "We're not quite sure, but sometimes it really does feel like someone else is planning our adventures and we're just along for the ride. But, whatever . . . we love it!"

They all settled back, munching on soft shell crabs and lobsters and lobster rolls and all the other goodies the owlets had hauled home with them. After everyone had eaten their fill (and then some)

they all headed off to bed. Just as they were drifting off to sleep, Vinky heard Vobble muttering,

"Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring.
The seasons change and we've such fun.
We never know what each will bring.
But we love them all, every one!"

The END

Vobble Solves the Mystery

"Vobble?? Shhhhh! Listen! Do you hear that?" Vobble looked up from his comic book and asked, "Hear what? What are you talking about?" Vinky said, "Just be really quiet and listen.

"There it is again? Did you hear it that time?" Vobble looked a bit surprised and said, "I heard SOMETHING, but I have no idea what it is. It doesn't sound like anything I've ever heard before.

"I couldn't even tell where it was coming from. It was kinda' soft, kinda' scratchy, kinda' clicky and even a little bit spooky. It didn't sound like feet or claws or talons. I just don't know."

Vinky looked puzzled. "I wonder if that noise has anything to do with those weird little things we've found on top of and under the owl box lately. I still haven't figured out what they are."

Vobble looked thoughtful. "This is a job for SuperOwl, Ace Detective!! I'll be just like the hero in my Detective Comic Book! Where's my hat and my cape and my magnifying glass?"

Vobble ran off in search of his Jr. Detective Kit (a gift from Uncle Vaca) and . . .

meanwhile Vinky sat thinking of her brother, admiringly. She hoped he would also get one of those funny Sherlock Howlmes hats that goes backwards and forwards at the same time. And that funny thing that hangs from his beak - whatever it is.

Well, Vobble, the Great, returned with all his paraphenalia and slipped onto the roof of the box. He took out his magnifier and studied what looks like nothing to the naked eye, and Vinky's eye as well.

"Ah HAH!" he said.

"What?!" said Vinky. "I don't see anything at all."

Vobble said, "I Spy . . ."

"You spy what?" asked Vinky.

"Look," said Vobble. "Look at this."

But as Vinky bent down to see what Vobble was looking at, something black with orange stripes and a checkered hat scurried under the overhang of the owl box.

"YIKES!!" shrieked Vinky.

"WHOA!!" shouted Vobble.

And then they heard an enormous laugh - so loud it sent smoke up through the overhang and both were sure they saw a red tongue sticking out.

"Vobble! I am skeered! What is that?? How did it crawl up here?"

"Smoke!! Oh, my lovin' owls! How can we put it out?"

"This is something we don't know. It smells like mystery meat. This is not anything I would put in CC's cafe. It smells like honeysuckle but it tastes like . . .

"a regifted rabbit! I'm not eating that thing!" Vinky said, as she threw it out of the Owl Box door."

Vobble took the magnifying glass and was peering outside, first up to the sky where he saw the twinkling stars and then back down to the Owl Box porch where he saw a big white blob.

Vobble moved the magnifying glass away from his owlsh eyes and exclaimed to Vinky, "Look at that white blob! Without the magnifying glass, I can see it as an invitation with our names, "Vinky and Vobble," clearly written in Purple ink.

Vinky drew closer to the white-blob shaped invitation, to read the writing for herself.

"Yep," said Vinky, "the purple ink, clearly says 'Vinky and Vobble.' But, Vobble, why would an invitation be all lumpy?"

Wondering about the lumpiness or the invite, Vinky and Vobble inched their way closer and closer to the blob, when . . .

"KABOOOM!!!"

The invitation exploded into hundreds of blobbish invitations! and they all read, "Vinky and Vobble."

"What could this possibly mean???" Vobble asked Vinky. "I must consult with my Owl Spy Guidebook immediately!" Vobble ran back into the box and . . .

rummaged around looking for his book. In the meantime, Vinky picked up the magnifying glass and examined one of the blobs more closely. There didn't seem to be any way to open the supposed invitation, nor was there any more writing. Vinky was puzzling over this when Vobble returned with his book.

"There isn't anything in here about what to do when you find multiplying blob invitations." Vobble complained. "Whoever wrote this didn't know anything!"

Frustrated, Vobble reached out a talon and poked one of the blobs. It unrolled, revealing a tiny lizard, quivering with repressed laughter. All the blobs unrolled into lizards, who stood up, giggling mischievously, and bowed to the owlets before scurrying away.

"After them!" shouted Vobble, taking off in pursuit.

"Lizards! RUN!" Vobble grabbed Vinky and headed out to the only place they knew. "If only we had something to distract the lizards!"

Out of nowhere came a swoopin', screechin' sound. It was McGee!

"Y'all stay put! Molly is on her way with lots of food and entertainment," McGee said. "There is nothing to be afraid of. Lizards are barely a SNACK and if we be really nice, maybe we could make friends. It's only the right thing to do. Think, think, think. Molly wouldn't eat Zorro any more than I would. Let's make friends, serve up some mystery meat from CC's. They are bound to like something!"

And wouldn't you know it, not seconds later, without a hitch . . .

along came Molly.

"Oh, my," said Vinky and Vobble. "What does Mom have???"

As Molly flew closer, it was not what they expected.

"This can't be!" said McGee. "This is unbelievable."

Vinky and Vobble nodded their little heads.

"Oh, wait!!" said McGee. I can see better now with the magnifying glass."

All the little lizards came running to see what the excitement was about and just stood in line with their little lizard tails in the air.

Molly carefully unwrapped the package she had brought, and it turned out to be full of tiny crickets! The lizard babies squealed with excitement and ran around catching and eating the crickets.

When all the crickets were caught and eaten, the little lizards turned to Molly and said, "Thank you, Mrs. Owl. Crickets are just what baby lizards love best to eat."

Molly said, "I know. And I also knew you were coming. That's why I've been bringing crickets over every night for a while."

Vobble said, "So that's what those little things we were finding were! Well, that's one mystery solved at last! But why are all you lizards here, anyway? That part is still a mystery!"

The lizards were stunned to be asked such a question and right at dinner time too! "How rude!" they chattered and squawked and creaked.

Just then, a little guy with a red tongue and black and orange stripes and a checkered hat showed up.

"Hmmm," McGee said, "who is this now? He has a vague scent of smoke around him too. Hmmm mmmmm."

"Well," said the strange little man, as he opened his jacket to the typical male inside pocket thingy, "Look what I have here!"

The lizards peered and peeked and looked, borrowing the magnifying glass. Inside the pocket were tiny buds of amber from centuries ago. And each one had a petrified mosquito in it!

The lizards were still hungry and asked, "Is there a magic word to bring them back to life??"

The lizards stared at the glistening amber encasing the most beautiful golden

mosquitos they had ever seen. Their little tongues licked at the air as they tried to get a scent of what the mosquitos might taste like.

Just then Vinky saw Vobble turn away and fly off to a nearby branch and begin deeting. "Vobble!" she cried. "What are you doing?"

"I am looking for the hidden spider nest that McGee told me was filled with magic orbs. If I can find that nest, the secret to the amber should be inside."

Vinky and Vobble searched for the nest. They found it and it appeared to be like a hork, but it was smaller than a hork. Vobble started to move it and it made a sound. Vobble said, "Let's get out of here before it explodes."

Just then . . .

Vinky heard the little guy with the checkered hat exclaim, "Come back here right now!", so they decided to hurry back to the Owl Box and see what was up.

As he licked his little lips which now appeared to be greenish, the guy said, "My name is Toad of Toad Hall and I stopped by to make a little bargain, but you have run off with my amber!"

Vinky exclaimed, "Jumpin' Gee-Hork-a-Frog! Who ever heard of such a a thing?! And we didnt' take the amber! The lizards have it!"

Toad stroked his pointy chin and exclaimed indignantly, "Those lizards took MY amber????! How DARE they touch the amber of the great Toad of Toad Hall??!"

Then Toad said... "Oh well, i can get more amber in the Petrified Forest. I'm still here to make a deal with you anyway. By the way, what are your names?"

"I love your owl costumes", Toad continued.

Vinky said, "I am Vinky and this is my brother, Vobble, and WE AIN'T WEARIN' NO STINKIN' COSTUMES!"

"What?" asked Toad "This isn't Let's Make A Deal? Then I must go!" And Toad Vanished in a puff of smoke . . . again!

"Whoa!" said Vobble. "What was up with that guy?"

"I don't know," Vinky answered. "But I hope we never see him again. I think he was crazy!"

They turned from the spot where Toad had vanished, and surveyed the scene by the owlbox. The lizards were trying to get the amber open, while Molly and McGee looked on, puzzled.

"I still don't understand where all these lizards came from," McGee said. "They don't look like any lizards I've ever seen, and I've seen a lot of lizards. We gotta' figure this out. Molly and I are at wits end."

Molly said, "We have always taken care of owlfriends not to mention critters we normally eat. Who can we call on to get us past this situation? We always ask Vaca or Carlos. We should be self sufficient, or ask CC or Cardsfan, or . . .

I guess we can ask Vaca, but he has been so busy, and Carlos is planning their vacation.

Just then, Molly, McGee, Vinky and Vobble all shouted the same word . . .
"Zorro!!!!!! I bet he can help us!!!"

"You are right!!" said McGee. "Why haven't we thought about that before???
Let's ask Zorro right away."

"I will fly to see him," said Vinky.

Just as she was about to fly out of the owl box, Vobble shouted, "Wait! Wait!! I know!!!"

They all looked at Vobble expectantly, and he went on, "I think it all has to do with a movie Uncle Vaca showed me part of once. A scientist had an idea to make dinosaurs from something found in mosquitos in old amber like this. I really didn't understand everything he said, but I remember he said the dinosaur means "thunder lizard!" Every head turned to look at the lizards suspiciously.

McGee said to the lizards in a severe voice, "So how about you lizards tell us what's really going on here, so we can get this mystery solved once and for all?!"

But then Vobble spoke up, "I bet I know!"

The lizards are from that insurance place and they came here for their training sessions! The amber is what they use for money and rewards when they practice. That's gotta be it!

What else could it be?? They're such nice little lizards. They couldn't be mean or anything could they?"

As all the other owls shook their heads and chuckled, Vobble said, "There! Mystery solved!" and headed inside, quite proud of himself.

As Vobble hung up his detective coat and his hat that went forwards and backwards at the same time, he said to Vinky, "Ya' know. I never knew being a SuperHero Detective was so hard."

"There are lots and lots of mysteries out there. It seems like just as soon as I solved one mystery, another three or four popped up. I gotta' study up on this. Do we have any more comic books?"

Vinky replied, "I don't know, Vobble. Maybe Uncle Vaca has some. He loves comic books and toys and stuff. But you need to be nice when you ask him. He doesn't share his toys so well."

"Okay, Vinky. I'll just wait until he's in a really good mood or something and I'll see if he and Zorro will read the stories to me. They're really good at that! If I'm gonna' be a real live SuperHeroOwl detective, I need to read all the Super Hero Detective stories I can find. I know they're just full of all kinds of facts and things to learn! Oh, Boy! I can't wait!!!"

With that, Vobble curled up on the gopher sofa and went to sleep, his little magnifying glass still clutched in his wing, and began to dream of SuperHeroOwl Detective Adventures.

The End

Writers in This Volume

amb15229
BugGirl
cardsfan
ChatterChopz
DotRot
elsalynda
FinnWV
FloridaSkye
maxi23
moniq
Paula
PegRod
sewla
sharoot
slewvi
ssocenblu
texasgrandmadarlene
TheDaddyBird
twoclubs
UltraAndViolet
VacaDude
VSue
Wolfgirl

EVEN MORE
More Recipes from
CC's Cafe

Developed and written in the kitchen of DotRot

Crab SANDwiches

Frog Burritos

Honeysuckle Cider

Hork Crystal Biscuits

Orange Raspberry Smoothies

Pineapple Glazed Gecko Chops

Possum Peas

Salmon Gibblers and Pig Sauce

Salmon Tacos

Seaweed Salad

Stir Fry Dragonfly

Veggie and Macaroni with Soft-Shell Crab

Zorro's Zany Grilled Cheese Delights

Crab SANDwiches

½ cup mayonnaise	8 oz. crab meat, drained and squeezed dry
2 tablespoons dairy sour cream	1 avocado, peeled & chopped
1 tablespoon lemon juice	1 unsliced loaf multigrain bread
12 slices bacon, cooked, drained, crumbled	Butter
¼ cup finely chopped celery	Romaine or Bibb lettuce leaves
¼ cup finely chopped sweet onion	6 cherry tomatoes

Blend mayonnaise, sour cream and lemon juice.

To half the mixture stir in bacon, celery and onion.

To remaining mixture stir in crab meat, avocado and ¼ teaspoon salt (if desired).

Cut bread into slices (crosswise into 5 horizontal slices). Toast under broiler; spread with butter.

Spread bottom slice with ½ of the bacon mixture. Top with ¼ of the lettuce and next slice of bread. Spread this slice with ½ of the crab mixture and ¼ of the lettuce. Add another slice of bread and spread with remaining bacon mixture and ¼ of the lettuce. Add one more slice of bread and top with remaining crab mixture and lettuce. Top with remaining slice of bread.

Insert skewers through tomatoes and into loaf from top to bottom. Cut into wedges.

Frog Burritos

8-12 skinless, boneless frog legs *	1 tablespoon vegetable oil
2 (4 ounce) cans tomato sauce	1½ cups chicken broth
½ cup salsa	½ onion, finely chopped
2 (1.25 ounce) packages taco seasoning mix	1 fresh jalapeno pepper, chopped
2½ teaspoon ground cumin (divided)	1 tomato, seeded and chopped
5 cloves garlic (divided)	1 teaspoon chicken base**
2 teaspoon chili powder	Salt and pepper to taste
hot sauce to taste (optional)	8 large flour tortillas
1 cup long grain white rice	Shredded Cheddar
	Sour cream

Place frog legs* and tomato sauce in a medium saucepan over medium high heat. Bring to a boil, then add the salsa, seasoning, 2 teaspoons cumin, 4 cloves of garlic (minced) and chili powder. Let simmer for 15 minutes.

With a fork, start pulling the meat apart into thin strings. Keep cooking pulled meat and sauce, covered, for another 5 to 10 minutes. Add hot sauce to taste and stir together (Note: You may need to add a bit of water if the mixture is cooked too high and gets too thick.)

In a medium sauce pan, cook the rice in oil over medium heat for about 3 minutes. Add chopped onions, 1 minced garlic clove, jalapeño and tomato. Sauté for about 2 minutes. Pour in chicken broth, and bring to a boil. Season with chicken base, salt and pepper, and ½ teaspoon cumin. Bring to a boil, cover, and reduce heat to low. Cook for 20 minutes.

Divide the rice mixture between the eight tortillas, spreading it in a line down the middle. Top with the chicken mixture. Sprinkle with a little shredded cheese. Roll the tortilla around the filling. Serve with additional cheese and sour cream.

*We usually substitute 1 boneless, skinless split chicken breast for every 2-3 frog legs (since froggy crutches and wheelchairs are in short supply).

**You can substitute one cube of chicken bouillon, but you will lose a lot in flavor.

Honeysuckle Cider

2 large lemons, cut in half
2 medium oranges, cut in half
32 whole cloves
4 cups apple juice
4 cups apple cider

1 cup honey
8 cinnamon sticks
½ teaspoon each ground ginger and
nutmeg

Cut two slices ¼" thick from each lemon and orange half. Insert whole cloves into slices then set aside. Squeeze juice from remainder of fruit halves into medium non reactive saucepan.

Stir in apple juice, cider and honey then mix well. Add cinnamon sticks, spices and reserved fruit slices. Bring just to a boil over medium-high heat then serve immediately in heatproof mugs, garnished with fresh honeysuckle blossoms.. This is also delicious served cold in frosted mugs.

*Hork Crystal Biscuits**

*This recipe has been provided by our friend, twoclubs, who reminds us that, in England, cookies are known as biscuits.

¾ cup (1½ sticks) butter (prefer unsalted), softened	¼½ teaspoon ground ginger
1 cup sugar	1 teaspoon cinnamon
¼ cup dark molasses	2 teaspoons baking soda
1 egg	½ teaspoon salt
2¼ cups flour	3½ oz cyrstalized ginger sections (chips) minced fine
½ teaspoon ground cloves	

Preheat oven to 375° .

Combine softened butter, sugar, molasses and egg. Beat well.

Sift dry ingredients together then add to wet mixture. Mix well. Add crystallized ginger. CHILL at least one hour or even overnight.

Form 1" balls. Roll in granulated (or raw) sugar. Place on greased cookie sheet, 2" apart. Bake 8-10 minutes.

Makes 3 dozen cookies.

Notes from twoclubs:

I usually double or even triple this recipe because of the high demand.

Cyrstalized ginger is not always easy to find and can expensive. I actually buy mine in bags at the local flea market. Can also be found in a grocery store on the seasoning shelves but really \$\$\$ that way. Shop around.

Editor's note:

I found crystalized ginger in several forms and sizes and at fairly affordable prices at Amazon.com. They vary in intensity and flavor, so read the reviews first to get what you want.

Orange-Raspberry Smoothies

2 cups nonfat vanilla yogurt	orange juice
2 cups nonfat raspberry yogurt	1 cup frozen raspberries
3¼ cups nonfat milk	1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1½ cup nonpulp frozen concentrate	1 teaspoon malt powder

Place both yogurts in a blender. Pour in milk. Add orange juice concentrate (still frozen), frozen raspberries), vanilla and malt powder. Pulse to blend. Serve immediately.

Pineapple Glazed Gecko Chops

1 cup barbecue sauce	1 teaspoon dry mustard
1 can (8 oz.) crushed pineapple in juice, undrained	1 can pineapple rings, drained, reserve juice
½ cup honey	16 gecko chops (1 lb.)*
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon	

Heat grill to medium heat.**

Mix barbecue sauce, crushed pineapple (with juice), honey, spices and reserved pineapple juice until well blended. Reserve ½ cup sauce to serve aside the chops.

Grill chops 5 minutes on each side (since gecko chops are small, they may not take that long). Brush with some of the sauce; grill another 5 minutes or until chops are done (160°F), turning occasionally and brushing with remaining sauce often.

Grill pineapple rings with chops 2 minutes on each side or until heated through. (The pineapple rings may be brushed with the sauce also, if you want.)

*Geckos are fast and very hard to catch (besides being really cute), so we usually substitute bone-in or boneless pork chops (about ½-inch thick), chicken breasts, or lamb chops. If using boneless chops or chicken, reduce grilling time, if necessary.

**These can also be made in the oven broiler.

Possum Peas

1 pound fresh **sugar snap peas** ½ cup **seasoned bread crumbs**
Skim milk ½ cup **grated parmesan cheese**
 1 tablespoon **butter** (not margarine)

Preheat oven to 400° F.

Parboil peas; drain

Melt butter.

Add bread crumbs, parmesan and just enough skim milk to moisten everything. Add more skim milk until you have a thick paste.

Toss the parboiled peas with the paste, covering the peas well with mixture; spread into 9x13 pan.

Bake for about 10-15 minutes at 400° F, turning twice.

Set oven to broil. Broil for about 5-8 minutes, watching closely; you want the top of the peas to be brown, bubbly and crispy.

Salmon Gibblers and Pig Sauce

2 (14.75 ounce) cans pink salmon , drained and flaked (remove skin and any bones, if desired, but not necessary)	1-2 teaspoons salt
2-2½ cups unseasoned fine dry bread crumbs	Several turns of freshly ground black pepper
½ cup finely chopped green onion , including the green parts	Non-stick cooking spray
2 medium garlic cloves , minced	12 slices bacon (we use the ends and pieces from Trader Joe's)
2 tablespoons fresh chopped dill weed, or 1 teaspoon dried	4 tablespoons butter
½ cup finely minced celery	3 cups milk*
2 tablespoon flour	3 tablespoons cornstarch
½ cup mayonnaise	Pepper to taste
2 eggs	1 pound fresh or frozen peas (not canned)**
1 teaspoon sweet paprika	½-1 cup shredded fresh Parmesan cheese (not the stuff in the green shaker bottle)

Preheat oven to 350° .

In a large bowl, gently mix together the salmon, bread crumbs, green onion, garlic, dill, celery, flour, mayonnaise, egg, paprika, salt and pepper.

Form into 16 patties; each about ½ inch thick.

Spray a foil lined baking sheet well with non-stick cooking spray. Place the patties on the sheet and lightly spray the tops of the patties with cooking spray.

Bake the patties, turning them once, halfway through, until nicely browned on both sides, about 20-25 minutes.

While patties are baking, chop bacon small (we use scissors before the bacon is cooked) and brown until crisp. Drain well, reserving 2 tablespoons of the bacon grease. Set bacon aside.

To the bacon grease in the skillet, add butter and melt.

Stir cornstarch into 1 cup of milk.

Add remaining milk, pepper and peas to skillet and heat through. (If using fresh peas, steam them in the microwave for a couple of minutes first.)

Gradually stir in cornstarch mixture, whisking while pouring. Stir constantly until nicely thickened.

Just before serving, stir in the Parmesan, stirring lightly until almost fully melted. Add bacon.

Serve over salmon patties (and mashed potatoes, if desired).

*I like to use canned, evaporated milk to add extra richness. This is equivalent to about 2 cans.

**This is really good with fresh, chopped, steamed asparagus, substituted for the peas.

Salmon Tacos

½ cup sour cream	1 teaspoon chili powder
3 cans (10 oz each) diced tomatoes and green chiles	2 tablespoons olive oil
3 cups broccoli coleslaw mix	1 medium yellow onion , chopped
1½ lb salmon , skinned and cut into one inch cubes	2 limes , quartered
1 tablespoon cumin	1 bunch green onion , chopped
	12 flour tortillas

Drain one can of tomatoes, reserving juice. Stir together sour cream and ¼ cup liquid from tomatoes in small bowl to make sauce; set aside.

Stir together the one can of tomatoes with remaining liquid and coleslaw mix in medium bowl to make slaw; set aside.

Toss cubed salmon in cumin and chili powder. Set aside.

Heat large skillet over medium and cook yellow onion 2 minutes, until it begins to soften.

Turn heat up to medium high. Add salmon to skillet. Lightly sear salmon cubes for about 2-3 minutes, turning gently (don't break the salmon into pieces!).

IMPORTANT: Do not over cook the salmon. This juicy recipe will keep steaming the salmon. The salmon should still be firm in the middle of the cube when you proceed to the next step.

Remove salmon from skillet. Set aside.

Return heat setting to medium. Add remaining two cans of tomatoes and chilies and green onions to skillet. Cook until a good bit of the juice has evaporated and it's slightly thickened. Add salmon back to skillet. Gently incorporate and heat through.

Squeeze quartered limes over the salmon mixture, give it a quick stir, and remove from heat.

Divide salmon and tomato sauce among warm flour tortillas. Top with ¼ cup slaw and 1 tablespoon sour cream sauce. Fold tortillas in half; serve immediately.

Seaweed Salad

<p>¼ cup olive oil</p> <p>3 tablespoons cherry vinegar (see recipe below) or white wine vinegar</p> <p>2 tablespoons minced shallot</p> <p>1 teaspoon prepared horseradish</p> <p>1 teaspoon sugar</p> <p>¼ teaspoon sea salt or salt</p> <p>⅛ teaspoon pepper</p>	<p>1 pound fresh sweet cherries, pitted</p> <p>8 cups fresh young seaweed*</p> <p>1 avocado, halved, seeded, peeled, and cut into chunks</p> <p>1 firm pear, peeled, cored and cut into chunks</p> <p>1 small red onion, cut into thin rings**</p> <p>½ cup slivered almonds, toasted</p>
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For dressing, in a screw-top jar combine oil, vinegar, shallot, horseradish, sugar, sea salt, and pepper. Cover and shake well; set aside.

Halve cherries, if desired; set aside ¼ cup of the cherries.

In a large salad bowl combine the greens, remaining cherries, avocado, pear and red onion. Toss with dressing. Top salad with almonds and reserved ¼ cup cherries.

Cherry Vinegar

Mash ½ cup pitted sweet cherries. Place in a clean, heatproof jar.

In a small stainless steel (or other non-reactive) saucepan heat ¼ cup white wine vinegar to boiling.

Pour over cherries in jar. Cool slightly; cover with a nonmetallic lid. Let stand at room temperature 3 to 5 days.

Strain out cherries; cover and store vinegar in a cool place up to 3 months. Makes 4 to 6 servings.

*Since we don't have an ocean handy, we usually use mixed greens, such as shredded napa cabbage, torn romaine, and/or torn spinach.

**If the red onion seems to have too much "heat", lay the rings on a microwave safe plate and microwave them for about 30-45 seconds.

Stir-Fry Dragonfly

1 pound dragonflies*	2 carrots thinly sliced
1 pound flies**	6 green onions chopped
5 tablespoon corn starch, divided	4 stalks celery, veined and cut in half, then thin sliced.
$\frac{3}{8}$ cup soy sauce, divided	2 tablespoon grated ginger
2 tablespoon rice or any white wine	1 cup roasted peanuts
2 tablespoon light brown sugar	1 pinch red pepper flakes or to your taste
1 teaspoon sesame oil	
2 teaspoon white vinegar	

Mix the dragonflies and flies with 3 tablespoons corn starch and $\frac{1}{8}$ cup (2 tablespoons) soy sauce and marinate for $\frac{1}{2}$ hour.

To make the sauce, combine remaining $\frac{1}{4}$ cup soy sauce, wine, brown sugar, remaining 2 tablespoons corn starch, sesame oil and vinegar. Stir well and set aside.

Heat a little oil in a wok and stir fry the dragonflies and flies until they are light brown, remove and set aside.

Heat a little oil in a wok, stir fry the veggies until they are slightly tender.

Add the fresh ginger and stir fry for about 10 seconds, stirring constantly.

Add the seasoning sauce, stirring until thick.

Add the dragonflies and flies, stir until thoroughly heated.

Add pepper flakes if desired and cook for 1 minute.

Turn off the heat, add peanuts, mix well and serve over white steamed rice.

*Dragonflies are a lot of work to de-wing, de-scale and clean and there's very little left by then. I usually substitute crawdad (crawfish, crayfish, mudbug) tails.

**Flies are even more work than dragonflies (even if you get the great big horseflies) so I usually use small shelled shrimp.

Veggies and Macaroni with Soft-Shell Crab

<p>1 pound small eggplant $\frac{3}{4}$ pound small, thin zucchini $\frac{3}{4}$ pound carrots 3 red onions Olive oil Ground coriander Cumin Smoked paprika Juice of one lemon Salt and pepper to taste</p>	<p>$\frac{1}{4}$ cup extra virgin olive oil 3 or 4 cloves garlic, slivered $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon crushed red chili flakes, or to taste 4 soft-shell crabs, cleaned (have the guy at the fish market do it!) Salt and freshly ground black pepper 1 pound macaroni or long pasta, like spaghetti or linguine $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped fresh parsley leaves</p>
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Preheat the oven to 450° F.

Cut the zucchini into half-inch thick rounds. Cut the eggplant into pieces roughly the same size as the zucchini rounds. Slice the carrots into thick diagonal slices. Slice the onions into very thick slices - do not separate into rings. Put the vegetable pieces into a roasting pan or baking dish. Sprinkle fairly liberally with salt and drizzle with olive oil. Dust with coriander, cumin, and paprika, tossing to coat.

Roast in the oven for about 30 minutes, stirring a couple of times, until the vegetables are tender and just a little bit browned on the edges. While the vegetables are cooking, prepare pasta and crabs.

In a very deep skillet or broad saucepan, warm oil, garlic and chili flakes over low heat; do not let garlic brown. When garlic just begins to sizzle and is soft – at least 5 minutes – add crabs (keep heat low to medium low; liquid in pan should barely bubble) and cover. Meanwhile, bring a large pot of water to a boil and salt it.

Let the crabs cook until they give up all their liquid and become firm, about 15 minutes. When crabs are almost done, begin cooking pasta. When crabs are done, use tongs to remove them and hold them while cutting up with scissors. Return to pan.

Drain pasta when it is barely tender - not done, but VERY al dente, reserving some cooking water. Add pasta to crabs and toss together over medium heat with pan juices and black pepper, adding some cooking water and a little more oil if necessary. Add parsley, taste and adjust seasoning as necessary. Remove from heat when pasta is perfectly cooked. Put the vegetables into a bowl, toss with lemon juice and additional olive oil to taste, and season with salt and pepper. Serve and enjoy.

Zorro's Zany Grilled Cheese Delights

8 slices thin-sliced whole-wheat
bread

Butter

Raspberry fruit spread (no-sugar
added)

Tart apples (like Granny Smith),
cored and thinly sliced

Gruyere cheese, in thick slices

Sliced almonds

Toast bread until dry and firm (but not burnt!)

Spread with butter and raspberry fruit spread.

Top with a layer of thinly sliced apples.

Cover apples with a layer of Gruyere cheese.

Sprinkle cheese with almonds.

Place under broiler, just until cheese is melted and starting to bubble and brown.

Serve and eat immediately.

On Writing and Story Telling . . .

If you don't know the trees you may be lost in the forest, but if you don't know the stories you may be lost in life.

Siberian Elder

There have been great societies that did not use the wheel, but there have been no societies that did not tell stories.

Ursula K. LeGuin

If stories come to you, care for them. And learn to give them away where they are needed. Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive.

Barry Lopez, in *Crow and Weasel*

Those who do not have power over the story that dominates their lives, the power to retell it, rethink it, deconstruct it, joke about it, and change it as times change, truly are powerless, because they cannot think new thoughts.

Salman Rushdie

Australian Aborigines say that the big stories—the stories worth telling and retelling, the ones in which you may find the meaning of your life—are forever stalking the right teller, sniffing and tracking like predators hunting their prey in the bush.

Robert Moss, *Dreamgates*

Because there is a natural storytelling urge and ability in all human beings, even just a little nurturing of this impulse can bring about astonishing and delightful results

Nancy Mellon, *The Art of Storytelling*

