



The Fifty- Fifth issue of a sort-of letter substitute, kinda thing. Maybe weekly, maybe not. Available from:

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Available via the World Wide Web, or as an email attachment. I recommend the Portable Document Format (pdf) or, if you insist, a word or Rich Text Format (rtf) can also be emailed. Get in touch and we'll sort something out. You are going to [TorCon III](#), aren't you? Dated, already, 13/08/02.

Visa Hell

"Been on holiday? Anywhere nice?"

I think it is a workplace thing. Working in the education sector you are expected to go off somewhere nice for two months on end – after all, we're getting paid so much. And so near the end of the summer it is the classic hairdresser question.

My answer this year was yes, been to the United States twice, the Republic of Ireland once and I'm off to Crete in October..."

"Christ, how many holidays do you get Tommy?" is the standard reply.

Well...

Leslie Altic and I are getting married on 26 September 2002 in Belfast (you're all welcome to attend our evening 'do' - basically a big party in the hotel where the wedding reception is – email for more details...) However as a 'one of those yanks' as my mother puts it, there is the matter of legal residency to be accounted for.

Previous to this Leslie had been in Northern Ireland on a Volunteer visa, working for the Brethren Church in a Quaker children's organisation. Don't ask. The UK government will only allow one person to do two years volunteering in the UK and then it is off back where you came from. So Leslie had to go back to the States, which put a bit of a strain on our relationship – I'd been in a transatlantic relationship before and didn't like it.

However where there is a will there is a way and for the last two years Leslie has been here on various student visas whilst she studied at the Hotel and Catering College in Portrush and, last year, did her specialist work in Patisserie and bakery at the college where I work: the Belfast institute of Further and Higher Education. All well and good,

she could even work part time to keep me in the style to which I've become accustomed.

But after the proposal comes the reality. We needed to get Leslie a 'leave to remain in the UK until marriage,' visa – more commonly known as a Fiancés visa. Phones calls, emails, letters and trips to various British consulates finally revealed what we'd known all along but tried to circumvent, that Leslie would once again have to return to the United States to get this visa – you have to apply for the visa in the country of origin – which is then stamped upon entry to the UK. Hence the leave to remain bit.

So off we packed on our holiday/visa search over the Easter holidays 2002 to Washington DC, national capital, big British embassy and all that. Only to find out that whilst Leslie was still a student she couldn't be a fiancée – not according to the IND she couldn't. What to do? Come back in six months when you are no longer a student but before your student visa runs out.

So we did. A couple of weeks ago. Got new forms, new backup information and all the bits and pieces we knew would need. Our tickets went from Dublin to London to New York to Washington with a connecting Amtrak the following day to Richmond. All paid for by her Grand parents, who really don't want her to leave the States at all, but realise I know where they live. After a horrendous day of travelling and getting to and from DC hotels late on a Sunday night we arrive at the embassy first thing on Monday morning.

"I'm sorry we stopped processing those visas from this office two weeks ago. It is up on our website..." Not as of one week ago it wasn't... Although when we checked it had, somehow, been corrected. What or where do we go now?

"There are other offices in the US that will process these visa. Ah, the nearest one is New York..." From where we'd just flown... Screams, shouts and tears got us no further, so we took the Amtrak train (which was so delayed that day we got the train that was supposed to leave three hours before ours.) A day to rest up in Richmond and a 9-hour is drive to New York, which got us there, via some weird and wonderful X-Files scenery in Maryland, at 10.00 am.

Two days later, after phone calls to my employers (during a Public Holiday in NI,) faxes from Leslie's bank, faxes from my employer, 8 hour waits in queues, \$140.00 dinner and some ungodly New York hotels taxes we finally got the visa.

So she is legal. We're getting married and if you're in our neck of the woods on 26 September the party starts at 8 pm.

After all that, the New Jersey turnpike was a breeze.

Locs

Mark McCann: "I don't know if it's just my eyesight but my £900 Iiyama 19" 0.26mm pitch 1600x1200 resolution FST monitor with 64Mb nvidia video card is having real difficulty distinguishing between the black text of your website and the very dark (almost black) blue of the background page colour. Could you not change it to something with a less eye-crushing contrast? - Perhaps say green on red?" ***This is one of the more obvious replies on technical issue with the web site, which I have already tried to address. As you can tell from my web site, I'm still trying to iron out a few glitches that appeared. Planning – the key to any good web site. Must remember that.***

Steve Green: "So sorry to hear about your dad. My own is now nearing his 69th birthday, but remains surprisingly fit (whilst I remain unnervingly unfit); I also (from his second marriage) have an eight-year-old brother, Michael, which has somewhat focussed his attention these past years (with my approval: I have even begun to suspect I'm being groomed to take over as the mentor figure, given the mother's lamentable IQ).

Tomorrow, he's giving me a lift from the garage fixing my car window; next week I'm hoping to spend a day with Michael. Elsewhere, my sister (at 36, six years my junior) raises my newly born nephew, whilst my mom travels the Mediterranean with her partner of 10+ years. As with life, families evolve." ***Ain't that the truth!***

Lloyd Penney: "TommyWorld 51...Ah, the class nerd...sounds very familiar. I remember getting chased, too, for much the same reasons...if I wasn't fast running from someone taller, bigger and much stronger, I would be dead. A burst of adrenaline often got me away from my potential attacker, but all of this running and bursts of adrenaline are just a few of my unpleasant childhood memories. I didn't take up running; I decided that if I waited long enough, I would graduate, and I would leave my assailants behind, and that's exactly what happened. Community college on the west coast, and university in Toronto, proved that I could escape and forget my tormentors. I don't run, and I look like I could certainly use the exercise. My downfall comes from my job...when I'm bored, I eat, and my job is very boring. If I had more time, I would walk long distances; that was my delight in my younger years. But, is there time? Not usually.

I was at a convention this past weekend, the enormous Toronto Trek that I know you'd hate. Attendance was about 3500, and I enjoyed it because of all the usual friends in attendance, and for once, reuniting with many old friends I thought had disappeared for good. It does feel good to hear that even if I thought I'd never see them again, they knew I'd be there. (P.S. It arrived today.)

There's been some discussion online about whether it's a fan lounge or a fanzine lounge... I prefer fanzine lounge, myself, to define what you're likely to find in there, but this is splitting hairs over very little. On this side of the Atlantic, the only person I know who attempts to stage a fanzine room at a small convention are Garth Spencer at Vcon in Vancouver. That usually means that Garth spends his convention largely by himself, but at least he makes the attempt.

WAHF: Murray Moore, James bacon (more from him next time round), Dave Langford (with some technical queries), Garth Spencer, Mark McCann (again), Joyce Katz, Debbi Kerr, Linda Krawecka, Shelia Lightsey, Michael J. Lowry, Joyce Scrivener, Damian Kearney, Bill Bowers, Maureen Kincaid Speller, Nic Farey. More later - Tommy

This is being distributed to a whole bunch of friends on the net, if you received this and would NOT like to be on the mailing list please accept my apologies for this intrusion and let me know so that you will not be bothered by further ramblings. If you know someone who would like to be on the mailing drop me a line.