

Summer Shorts: UNCG's new civil rights website; EMFfringe kicks off at the Weatherspoon

Kitty Campbell

Posted: 6/27/06

University Libraries launch website documenting civil rights movement

University Libraries have launched a website in collaboration with Greensboro Public Libraries that houses transcripts of interviews documenting the civil rights movement in Greensboro and Guilford County. The Greensboro VOICES website (Voicing Observations in Civil Rights and Equality Struggles) currently has about 50 transcripts.

Between the 1970s and early 1990s, more than 100 interviews were conducted by the Greensboro Public Library and the UNCG Department of History. The original interviews can be found in University Archives & Manuscripts at UNCG. According to the project website, "The recordings, collected over the past thirty years, provide a rich resource for historical research concerning the Civil Rights Movement in the Greensboro area." The interviewees describe specific events in Greensboro, including the Woolworth's sit-in, the Nazi-Klan shooting in 1979, and other local events that were important to the civil rights movement in Greensboro from the 1950s into the 1980s.

The project was made possible by grants from the Community Foundation of Greater Greensboro totaling \$17,500. The web site was created by UNCG employees Anders Selhorst, special projects archivist; Betty Carter, university archivist; Cat McDowell, digital projects coordinator; Justin R. Ervin, database consultant; Richard Cox, digital technology consultant; and Jeff Smith, archives intern. Helen Snow, North Carolina Librarian at the Greensboro Public Library, also assisted in the project. The project website recognizes the following people for contributing to the project by interviewing, transcribing, editing, or reformatting the interviews: Michael Adams, Kathleen Carter, Sherry Chavis, Kevin Costello, Mark Dorosin, Cathy Hester, Kathleen Hoke, Glen Jordan, William Link, Jody McKay, Jan Pegram, Eugene Pfaff, Robin Welborn, and Mark Wingerter.

For more information about the project, contact University Archives & Manuscripts at (336) 334-4045 or visit the website at <http://library.uncg.edu/depts/archives/civrights>.

Weatherspoon's Summer Solstice party kicks off EMF-Fringe Festival

Thursday evening, June 22, the Weatherspoon Art Museum hosted a concert by The Iguanas, a R&B-influenced rock band out of New Orleans, La. The Summer Solstice Party was a pre-festival event leading up to the Eastern Music Festival and EMFfringe series, one of Greensboro's fastest-growing summer concert series. With \$15 and proper ID, tickets could be purchased for a night of beer, wine, and food, as well as self-guided tours of the Weatherspoon's collections.

The Eastern Music Festival, now in its 45th year, is dedicated to nurturing talented American youth. The EMF focuses on classical music, and the 2006 season features several bright stars such as violinist Joshua Bell, mezzo-soprano Frederica von Stade, the Canadian Brass, pianist Andre Watts, Pinchas Zukerman, principal conductor Gerard Schwarz, and many others.

The festival's Fringe series features everything from alternative country and blues to jazz. Upcoming EMFfringe features include "heavy metal organist" Anthony Newman (June 27) and singer/songwriter Dar Williams (June 30), both at The Flying Anvil in downtown Greensboro (219 Lewis Street). Tickets are \$15 and \$19 respectively. For more information or to buy tickets for these and other events, visit www.easternmusicfestival.org/fringe.

A Midsummer night's dream in the Greensboro Arboretum

Community group Joie de Vivre organized GSO's Summer Solstice festival for the second year in a row

Kitty Campbell

Posted: 6/27/06

Greensboro seems to be experiencing a resurgence in feminine energy. At least, that's what Joie de Vivre was going for with their second annual Summer Solstice festival in the Arboretum near Lindley Park on June 21- but I'd say the energy was more than just feminine. Men and women, children in strollers, grey-haired grandparents, all gathered in the beautiful gardens a few blocks west of UNCG to contribute to a gathering of positive, masculine, feminine, community energy. The humidity was oppressive, but the air felt alive.

Joie de Vivre is a design group fostering a "goddess movement" in Greensboro - celebrating feminine energy and making women feel beautiful and whole. The group organizes various outreach projects in Greensboro, such as donating creative hats to cancer patients - and orchestrating their own "Midsummer Night's Dream." With donations from the community and local businesses, the group pulled together performers such as fire dancers, numerous drummers, belly-dancers, and musicians. There was also face painting and "Glitter Glens" for children. Even four-legged Greensboroians were allowed to roam amongst the revelers - on leashes, of course.

I arrived at the gathering late, unfortunately missing the 7:00 butterfly release and harp-playing. By the time I entered the gardens, the sun was setting behind me - but the party was far from over. As I tried to get my bearings, I passed by the drum circle, where dancers of various races and ages were moving to the rhythmic beating of numerous drums. Brightly-colored fairy wings could be seen everywhere, on the backs of children and adults. One man even sported a pair of feathery white angel wings and gold shorts - and not much else.

This was my first time at the Arboretum, and I spent some time simply looking around me. Greensboro, in case you haven't noticed, really is a green city. The Arboretum is made up of sprawling gardens and lawns with walking paths, and many plants and trees are clearly labeled so the average passerby can identify them. Walking along the paved pathway toward the grassy area where the fire dancing was planned to be, I saw the

first fireflies of the evening popping out of the grass, and children racing to catch a few. I even passed Mayor Keith Holiday on the path. Later, I spotted him watching the belly dancers from the edge of the crowd.

I crossed a small bridge and joined a growing crowd of people around a gurgling fountain, where one dance was wrapping up and the first fire dancing performance of the night, BURN, was getting ready to begin. Though all races, ethnicities, and ages were represented in the crowd, I wouldn't call the tone of the event "multicultural" - it was more like the community was coming together to create its own culture, without boundaries. Some were dressed in faery costumes, corsets, and petticoats, others in polo shirts and khaki shorts - and it was all okay.

I could hear a woman's voice announcing the next performance, but it took some looking before I finally realized she was high up above us, standing under an arch set up on top of a hill behind the grassy clearing. Before the fire dancing began, she offered a "light blessing" for the crowd, a nondenominational prayer asking that all present maintain "balance" of mind, body, and spirit, and that we be reminded "to love one another."

Seeming to respond to silent direction, the crowd circled around a patch of grass beside the fountain. Within minutes, drumming began and a woman wearing twisted-wire wings and antlers entered the circle. Another began lighting the tips of the wings and antlers on fire, and the dance began. They circled the clearing rhythmically until the flames slowly went out. Applause replaced the sound of drumming.

More fire dancing performances followed, as the two women danced a duet, embracing each other while holding flaming poi. Aten Doukas, a central figure in May's "Elements" show, danced with flaming poi, twirling them by his sides so fast the flame created a blue tail through the air, seeming to swirl like a snail shell. Four young women, introduced as the "Flaming Fairies," danced next while Loreena McKinnert's "Mummer's Dance" played over loudspeakers. Following the Fairies, a burly man in a Utilikilt and with Pan horns sewn into his bandana, twirled poi expertly as he moved around the circle of watchers.

Finally, all of the dancers came out together, dancing to music that sounded strangely like it could be heard at a rave. The energy of the dance built up, faster and faster, until suddenly, they all dropped their poi to the ground in a circle. The dancers crouched as helpers rushed to extinguish the poi, and the crowd clapped and whistled.

With the flames extinguished, I suddenly realized it was dark. The sun had set while I watched the dancers, my focus only on them. The glowsticks moving through the grass attached to children and adults seemed like giant fireflies. A few of the brightest stars managed to peer down from the hazy, city-lit sky. As I wandered my way back up the path to the road, I didn't say much. I enjoyed the feeling of walking in the city at night, without harsh streetlights, surrounded by people from my community who I had never spoken to, yet felt more connected to after this night. Though I know various religious

beliefs were represented that night, I feel like we all shared something spiritual, as we welcomed in the summer and celebrated the longest day of the year.

To be surrounded by hundreds of fellow city-dwellers in such an earthy setting was both grounding and refreshing. As I left the gardens, I dropped a couple dollars in the donation basket held by a volunteer at the gate, as he explained to another attendee that the donations were for next year's event. Smiling at the thought that this young tradition is planned to continue, I headed for my car - and back to reality.

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Dispatches from the Edge: One writer reviews Anderson Cooper's best-selling memoir

Elizabeth A. Terry

Posted: 6/27/06

Dispatches From The Edge

Anderson Cooper

212 pages

HarperCollins Publishers

\$24.95 USA-hardback

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"My mother once said she survived the traumas of her childhood because she always felt that inside herself there was a crystal core, a diamond nothing could get at or scratch. I'd felt that same rock form inside me when my father died. In New Orleans, how ever, it started to crack."

It is with that line and many others, that Anderson Cooper has secured the #1 position on the New York Times' Best Seller List the last couple of weeks, with his memoir, *Dispatches From The Edge*.

Cooper landed the cover of *Vanity Fair* last month, with pages galore of only excerpts from his new memoir and pictures from New Orleans. There is so much emotion in *Dispatches From The Edge* that it is hard not to get completely submerged. With his Emmy award winning style of journalism and novel approaches to telling the stories he sees, it is a must read!

Dispatches From The Edge is a memoir that will haunt you in your dreams and renew your passion for reading. From the beginning to the very last page, it is a poignant symphony of stories collected through a journalist's life; a life that has been around the world and has been devastated by losses, like his father's death at a young age and his brother's suicide, that haunts him to this day. He writes, "I worry I've forgotten what's important about my brother, what's not. I recall looks, images, arguments... I knew his laugh, his smell. I knew the sound he made when he walked through the front door, the jingle of his keys, the particular way his shoes scraped on the floor... I knew what I observed, I knew his surface, but clearly that was not enough."

This memoir is a personal account of his life before he became the well-known, sought after star of CNN's *Anderson Cooper 360*. It is Cooper's life before and after he became the household name, from his in depth coverage of New Orleans last year.

It starts with the death of his father and his struggle to find his own purpose after graduating from college, a year after his brother's suicide. It is with the advice from his designer mother, Gloria Vanderbilt, quoting from the author Joseph Campbell, "Follow your bliss," that Cooper takes a home video camera and heads to Thailand with a fake press pass that his friend made on a Macintosh (being computer illiterate and unable to make it for himself). He then makes his unconventional and unorthodox start into journalism.

Dispatches From The Edge is intense and gripping. With the focus on war and disaster, the reader will be in the midst of the stories as they unfold. From the caption underneath the title, "A memoir of war, disasters, and survival," the stories of not only of Cooper's life, but of the thousands that he's seen, their bodies on the streets of Louisiana, Niger, Iraq, Sri Lanka, and the humanity of trying to convey their stories. He writes of the dying in Sri Lanka, "There are no headstones, no markers. The bodies are carried in by bulldozers and dumped into pits. New graves continue to be dug. No one knows for whom. The dead have no names."

His thoughts on his job being a journalist, he describes himself as a shark for being always on the hunt for a story, "Hurtling across oceans, from one conflict to the next, one disaster to another, I sometimes believe it's motion that keeps me alive." Later in the book he says about anchoring news, "You can easily falter, easily destroy your career in a sentence or two. The key is to keep going, keep moving, never forget you're running on sand." He talks about trying to vacation and how he visits these countries to match the pain that he feels inside.

It is a memoir that reminds people not only why we watch the news, but why we read books. These are the stories that nature tried to destroy - the Tsunami swept their corpses into a watery oblivion in 2005; the stories that Katrina tried to wipe away in the storm, and the tales of countless people that Anderson Cooper has encountered in the past 18 years of his journalist career. It is with his writings, through pieces of his journals, taped interviews, and previous telecasts over the years that he weaves seven chapters that will leave the reader with a call to action.

Cooper wrote of reactions to the aftermath on Katrina, "In Sri Lanka, in Niger, you never assume anyone will help. You take it for granted that governments don't work, that people are on their own. There's a different level of expectation. Here [the US], you grow up believing there's a safety net, that things can never completely fall apart. Katrina showed us all that's not true."

"In normal times you can't always say what's right and what's wrong. The truth is not

always clear. Here, however, all the doubt is stripped away...Relief is either here or it's not. Corpses don't lie."

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"Click": Click it off

Summer movie review

Roger Priddy

Posted: 6/27/06

*** (Out of 4), 98 Minutes, PG-13**

Click is dreadful. It's the epitome of a bad summer movie. It doesn't work on so many levels that I don't know where to begin. I guess I'll just say what every other critic who's seen *Click* has probably said in some way or another: watching what happens when Adam Sandler gets a universal remote is so painful that it'll make you wish you had your own universal remote so you could hastily fast-forward through this drek and get back to your life outside the movie theater ASAP. And, *Click* is a flick that just doesn't "click." The previous two sentences are corny and punny and perhaps made you cringe. But you don't know the meaning of the word "cringe" until you watch this movie.

Click centers on workaholic architect, husband, and father Michael Newman (Adam Sandler). Newman gets tired of not being able to tell the difference between the remote controls for the ceiling fan, the garage door, and the TV, so he decides to go out and buy a "universal remote" for the TV. He stops at "Bad Bath and Beyond" to find this remote. He can't find it in the main section of the store, so he passes through a door marked "Beyond," where he finds mad scientist inventor (ultra-weird Christopher Walken) Morty. Newman asks Morty for a "universal remote," and Morty gives him one alright. But this remote doesn't just control the TV, it controls Newman's life. A plethora of cringing ensues.

I'm not an Adam Sandler fan. I remember watching *Billy Madison* during a school field trip on the bus ride home and laughing with my friends literally for hours at some of the scenes (particularly the one where Sandler throws his sandwich at the bus driver). And *Happy Gilmore* with the butt-kickin' Bob Barker was like "the" movie at my high school. But most of the Sandler movies I've seen have been really stupid, repetitive, and not too funny. Add *Click* to the top of that list.

What's more unbelievable? That Adam Sandler is a workaholic? That the field Adam Sandler is a workaholic in is architecture? That he's married? That the woman he married is the (rockin' hot bodied) Kate Beckinsale? Or that he's a father who deeply cares about his children? All five of the aforementioned scenarios are about as believable as Shaquille O'Neal being a midget.

Sandler is nearly 40 years old, but he's made a career out of not growing up. He tried to venture out with more serious movies like *Punch-Drunk Love* and *Spanglish*, but both were financial failures. So Sandler, with *50 First Dates* and now *Click* is back to pleasing his core fans and doing his thing. Maybe this will delight neo-Sandler fans, but it was absolutely abysmal to me. In *Click* Sandler just comes across as a kid, a jerk, and a (little) prick, and he still can't act worth a diddly. His character is neither likeable nor believable. For that matter, Sandler, the writing, and the whole movie are way too juvenile for anything to be convincing or of substance.

I did find three redeeming qualities from the movie, however. One: Some parts are just so unabashedly stupid you can't help but chuckle (as you roll your eyes). Like, of course, a big fart scene with Newman's boss, David Hasselhoff. Two: Christopher Walken's usual oddball, "out there" character. Walken makes the character work, but can't save his character from a ridiculous "deadening" near the end. And three: Kate Beckinsale, a beautiful lady whose presence and skintight black leather outfit made *Underworld 2* watchable. She's pretty here too even if her performance isn't inundating and her being Adam Sandler's wife is about as believable as O.J. really being innocent.

Ultimately, the sad thing is that there's a really cool idea here that somebody who's talented could do something with. It's such an awesome concept; having a remote control that operates your life like a DVD, enabling you to pause and fast forward events and also to rewind and look back at your fondest memories. There are so many neat things and intriguing ideas you could play with using the concept. Instead, *Click* settles for Sandler's usual and interminable dog humping, little penis, fart and fat jokes.

Click isn't the worst movie I've seen all year (*When A Stranger Calls* receives that honor), but it's close. It's a gargantuan disappointment. It aspires to be a modernized Frank Capra classic like *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* or *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*. Instead it just ends up being more like "It's a Wonderful Life... for a jackass."

SemAntics: Chivalry for a whore?

Does our culture reserve common courtesy for "ladies"?

Katie Rose Guest

Posted: 6/27/06

Back in the spring of this past school year, I published a column in which I talked about the way men and women treat women that they perceive to be sexually promiscuous ("Hey Whore!", 4/18/06). I received many responses to this column, but some of them really perplexed me.

Shortly after my column was published, *The Carolinian* published a response by a guest writer ("Have We No Respect?" 5/2/06). This response was a call to action "to all the men out there" to be cautious about what they say to women. This writer warned men that if they weren't careful with their words, they might "emotionally scar a female." He expressed anger towards some behavior that I described. He wrote, "I have a mother and three sisters whom I would fight for if they felt disrespected by men."

I recently received another response to my column, via email, that went like this: "...I was very touched by your first column for *The Carolinian*. Chivalry is not stressed today. That should change."

I am disappointed, probably more than I should be, that my column has been so misunderstood. I hardly intended it as a call for "chivalry." I certainly didn't mean it as a call for men to protect women with violence. In fact, I stressed that the mistreatment of women that I have witnessed occurs at the hands of men and women. Fortunately, since I have this column, I have another chance to get this right.

Here's the point that I should have made more explicit the first time around. The mistreatment of women that I observe is *cultural*. It is not some particular men acting like idiots. It stems from a value-system that places higher worth on women who are perceived by *both men and women* to be sexually unattainable and a lesser worth on women who are perceived to be sexually available.

Our culture puts women into the role of "gatekeepers" of their sexuality. A woman's decision to have sex extends far beyond the private bedroom: in our culture, it is a decision that affects her public *character*. So she must be constantly on guard,

compelled to be vigilant about who to let through her gate and who to keep out.

Men (in heterosexual relationships) are placed in the role of stormers of a woman's gate: sometimes they are granted peaceful entry - sometimes the gate is taken by force. This is the dynamic that young men and women encounter in high school and college. And it sucks.

Now, here's my issue with the meanings that attach to the word "chivalry." Under a traditional system of chivalry, the gatekeeper's role is taken from women and placed in the hands of men. Women lose this small bit of control over their sexuality. Under a system of chivalry, men fight duels to protect women's "honor"- because women are considered incapable of protecting their own. Under chivalry, rape is a crime against a man's property: against his wife, his sister, his daughter - not against a woman's body. Chivalry is hardly a position I would advocate.

You might argue that, under today's usage, the word "chivalry" has changed to mean politeness and respect. I certainly believe that all people should be treated with politeness and respect - including those people whose sexual activities you might disapprove of. The problem with "chivalry" is that too often it's selective. Chivalry is for the "lady," not the "whore."

There are some questions I wish I could ask my respondents:

If chivalry really means courtesy, do "sluts" deserve this courtesy too?

Is it only okay for a woman to complain about being called a "whore" or "slut" *as long as she doesn't act like one?*

Historic Calvinism

Posted: 6/27/06

Having read Luke McIntyre's open letter to Fred Phelps, there are a few points that should be mentioned. The first at the very outset being the ironic fact that Phelps himself was almost totally unknown outside the homosexual movement until recently. When I and my friends initiated Morals Week there at UNCG, it was widely rumored that we in the College Republican leadership were going to invite some guy we had never even heard of: Fred Phelps.

"Who is that?" we asked, not knowing that the whole story was purely to fire up campus homosexuals and their so-called "straight allies." Phelps' church consists largely of his own family and he has no influence with anybody. He's just an annoying, mean, and crude old man. But that's exactly why "gay rights activists" love him. Phelps fits the mold of the kind of enemy the homosexual movement would like to convince the public it's fighting. He is a half-crazed bigot with scarcely a drop of Christian love in his veins. He does not preach that Jesus Christ died to save sinners from the penalty and power of sin - he seems to rather God not bother. For him, sinners should just get what they deserve.

It also doesn't do justice to historic Calvinism to characterize it as sanctioning a slouchy, fatalistic well-God-controls-everything-so-why-bother attitude. That's the most serious gaffe of McIntyre's article. How can Luke appreciate the sovereign God of John Calvin that pardons sinners if he's busy bickering with the authority of the Judge? Luke's past columns show he makes no effort to hide that he sees as harmless the most brazen forms of perversity, i.e. homosexuality. Apart from divine intervention, his disdain for God's clear commandments will bar him from any humble appreciation of the grace and mercy that flows from that atonement that Christ's sacrifice made. That is a very grave concern!

Jason M. Crawford
UNCG Alumnus

Slow-pitch softball: Serenity in the summer

Brad Howell

Posted: 6/27/06

During my internship at the News & Record this spring, I ran across an email inquiring if anyone wanted to come out for the softball squad. I'd always heard of the proverbial "company softball team," but I didn't really know that they existed. Having played baseball all my life, I jumped at the opportunity just to have something to do over the summer.

I showed up at our first practice the youngest guy by ten years. Our squad was made of numerous personalities...the cocky dad and his son, the fun-loving borderline alcoholic, a couple of computer nerds, the savvy 18-year veteran, an actual sports writer, guys from HR...the list went on and on. An interesting cast of characters doubled as the least athletic, most uncoordinated human beings I had ever been around.

Fast forward thirteen games into the season. We sport a 1-11 record but are winning 8-0 after the first inning of play in game two of the double elimination tournament. The lead was not safe however, as we had proven several times over the course of the season that extremely poor defense and inconsistent hitting led to few victories.

"Move back in the box! I'm telling you, if you ever want to hit worth a damn you gotta step back in the box," came the advice from wise man Jim, standing in the on deck circle as I dug in for my second at bat of the game. Jim had played the last 12 years on the team although he didn't even work for the News & Record.

The last four games had seen me get a hit in every at-bat, so I wasn't quite sure why Jim decided to play hitting instructor at this point. Maybe the beers were talking...no, there was no "maybe", they most certainly were. See, instead of waiting to drink *after* the contest like usual, Jim had decided to pre-game it.

Just to spite the guy, I stepped up as far as I possibly could in the box and blasted the first pitch into the stiff wind and off the left-centerfield fence. Standing at second base with a double, I yelled at Jim to scoot up in the box if he wanted to get a hit. After grounding out weakly, I never let him hear the end of it.

We managed to push a couple of more men across the plate, but errors, pop outs and

base running gaffes far outnumbered the runs put on the scoreboard. Bottom line - we were horrible. No one seemed as if they had ever played softball or baseball in their life and it showed.

The young opposition hell-bent on winning looked at us as if we were crazy, but they didn't have near as much fun as we did; mainly because they didn't have cheap beer and candid conversation waiting to flow in the parking lot after the contest. It was a little painful at times to watch us struggle so much, but the more I hung around the guys, the more I realized that they didn't need victories, they just needed a good time to cut loose.

The laid-back approach to the game was not only something the fellas looked forward to - it was something they needed. Thirty and forty something's showed up twice a week to try and disrupt the monotony that had slowly crept into their lives. The wives, kids, and jobs slowly took their toll, and coming out and playing horrible, unfundamental softball was their way to get away from it all.

Being just 21, I definitely still enjoy acting like a kid. But spending two nights a week for the past month and a half with a bunch of self-proclaimed old guys made me realize that having fun is something you have to continue to make time for no matter how old you are.

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Renting 101: What every renter needs to know

A guide to renting, surviving, and possibly fleeing from an apartment

Luke McIntyre

Posted: 6/27/06

Of the many mistakes and follies a college student can make, one of the worst but still most common is renting or putting up with a crummy apartment. Whether it's actual problems with the apartment or an absentee landlord that is never there to fix them, there is one thing that you need to know from the start: You do not have to put up with it.

When you signed your renting contract, you entered a legal agreement with your landlord. You pay the rent, and he or she (I'll say "he" for brevity) fulfills the duties of a landlord as mandated by the state of North Carolina. The limits of what you as a resident can do differ greatly depending on the apartment (e.g. can you paint the walls, can you have pets, etc.), but what a landlord is required to do is standard for everyone.

LANDLORD'S RESPONSIBILITIES

The most frequent requirement for a landlord, and probably the most important skill, is to be the resident's handyman. The landlord must attend to any problem with the electricity, plumbing, heating, air conditioning...basically anything that came with the apartment. The landlord must also install and repair smoke detectors, something that should be brought to their attention immediately if they are not doing so. You're responsible for batteries, though.

It is a very good idea to walk around the apartment before moving your things in and take account of any pre-existing damage, taking photographs if possible. This will come into play later.

The only thing that a resident must do is notify the landlord of the problem - and this cannot be stressed enough - in writing, and keep a copy for yourself. No matter how friendly you and your landlord are, you must maintain the mindset that this is a legal agreement, and treat it as one. If the air conditioning goes out while you're heading off

to class and don't have time to pen a request, call your landlord, but always follow up with a written note.

A landlord must also maintain all areas outside of the apartment that are allotted for renters' use, such as driveways, parking lots and laundry rooms. You aren't required to inform your landlord of any problems with these areas the same way you are with private areas inside the apartment; the landlord should be able to maintain these without your reminding.

If you ever incur any personal cost for apartment repair (if you have to pay a plumber to fix the toilet, for example), keep the receipt and your landlord should reimburse you either through direct payment or a deduction in next month's rent. Just keep the receipt. Always, always, always.

Now that you know what to expect - no, to demand - of your landlord, we should address the areas that your landlord isn't responsible for, starting most importantly with...

RENTER'S INSURANCE

As with any form of insurance, it is up to you whether you want to insure yourself or save the money and opt out. Your landlord is not responsible for your personal belongings being destroyed by a fire or anything else equally out of their control. Some companies require renters to acquire some form of renter's insurance before they can sign off on the lease, but most simply recommend it.

According to the website RentLaw.com, about 75% of renters do not have any renter's insurance. Of course, about 46 million Americans don't even have health insurance, so maybe we just like betting on the cheaper horse. The site also recommends that, if you do get insurance, sign up for the "Replacement Cost" option, meaning that your insurer will pay you what it actually costs to replace the property that was destroyed, rather than what it was worth at the time. Think of the cost difference between a new and a used textbook - that's about the difference in what you'll get from the insurance company.

However, in the event of a disaster that renders your apartment unsafe to live in, your landlord must provide a place for you to stay. If the apartment is indeed unfit to live in, you may actually be able to get out of your lease before it runs out. That depends on a few things (what lawyers would call mitigating factors), so contact your local Health Department and consult your lease.

DEALING WITH A BAD LANDLORD

If your landlord isn't fulfilling his end of the bargain, there are a number of things you can do about it. But, the thing you must make sure you do *not* do is withhold rent. Withholding rent opens you up to eviction, and evicting you may be easier for your landlord than fixing all the things you keep complaining about.

Ways to terminate the lease due to landlord negligence differ from lease to lease. If your lease does not allow for this sort of termination, the final stop for most renters' disputes is small claims court. Cases in this court are usually very simple. If you saved all receipts and written notices, and your landlord did indeed violate the contract, you should turn out okay - minus the cost of losing your time sitting in a courtroom.

Small claims court should obviously be the last resort between you and your landlord, and you two should usually be able to find a solution to a problem through negotiating. If all goes well, sooner or later you'll be...

MOVING OUT

The real concern with moving out is that you get back your security deposit, and don't ring up any additional fees. After you've moved all your things out, your landlord will be doing a walkthrough to make sure there are no damages. You should walk through with him and ask him to inform you of any damages he notices. Here's the moment when you, the clever renter, can bring out the pictures you took before moving in and inform your landlord that the damage he is looking at isn't your fault.

Also be aware of normal wear on the apartment, meaning things that are out of your control. Paint fades, things get dusty, it happens. The small hole in the wall from the doorknob because there was no doorstop on the wall? I've got one of those too, and I'm not paying for it.

Assuming your landlord doesn't try to pin you with any fees, he is required to give you back your deposit within 30 days. It shouldn't be a problem for him, since he's also legally required to put the money in a bank account separate from his personal account. However, you should keep in mind that there are a number of fees other than damage that can drain from your security deposit, such as unpaid rent or bills owed to other companies that are now billed to the property.

Living in an apartment is a fairly comfortable arrangement. Not only do you have a place to live, you don't have to fix anything. Just be smart: keep records, read your lease, and keep your landlord honest.