

# Where I've Been the Last 10 or More Years

*by* Stephen Stark

Dear Classmates:

It's been so long since I've been in touch with any of you—if I ever was in touch with you—because my family and I took up residence in the local Wal•Mart. I'm really not sure how long we were there. It was years.

We didn't intend to do this, exactly. I went in one day. I think it was Automotive. I was gone a long time and my wife and kids came looking for me. We moved to Bedding to be more comfortable. (Did you know those little, shortened beds they display the sheets and other bedding on are not beds at all?) No one noticed. It was a regular life. Predictable as a catalog. Here we are on page 3, a five-piece set.

We spent a lot of time in Garden. The kids played in Toys. Almost immediately, they began to refer to us as the Special Associates—which may have had something to do with my telling the manager a little white lie about the Home Office, Mr. Walton, and my own Special Mission. After that, we wanted for nothing.

People were darned friendly, wanting to make sure that we were aware of the bargains and having a really chipper, fulfilling and above all happy shopping experience. They were so darned friendly that we stayed throughout most of the boom of the 90s, living on seasonal products and meeting a lot of just salt-of-the-earth friendly people who went out of their way to see that we were finding what we were looking for.

I have to be honest with you, though, it got a little mind-numbing, spending day after day wandering the aisles, hypnotized by the vastness of it all. I couldn't write. And the selection—despite the oceanic size, there really isn't one when that's where you are and there is nothing else. The repetition—the aisles, the days—was like

the ticking of a clock. I knew that something was coming. Like weather, perhaps. Even though there wasn't any.

I began to get irritable. I lived in New York too long be able to stand for people to be that nice. And so, as these things happen, we had to leave paradise.

So there you have it. We're out now. Back to a more or less normal life. Don't forget to sign the guestbook.

