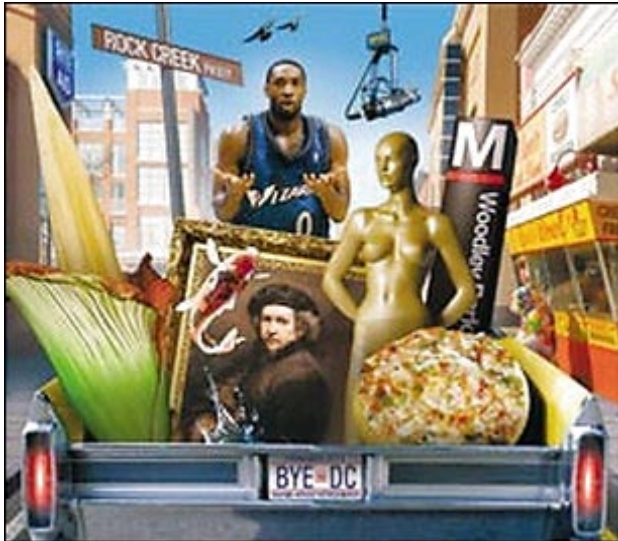


## D.C. You Later

Landing my dream job? Amazing. Leaving Washington to take it? Excruciating. With a week to say goodbye, here are the things I had to experience one last time.



(Photo illustration by Randy Mays For The Washington Post)

*By Chris Richards*

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How D.C. am I? I was born here. Raised in the 'burbs. Went to GW and lived here ever since. I own a framed portrait of [Gilbert Arenas](#). My heart beats go-go breaks and Fugazi drum fills. Trace amounts of chili from Ben's Chili Bowl can be found in my bloodstream.

And now I've left. I've landed *that* perfect job in that neighboring city four hours north, forcing me to say goodbye to a place I still can't imagine growing tired of.

But I didn't spend my final days in the District packing boxes and sitting on hold with the oh-so-helpful folks at [Verizon](#). No way. I squeezed in some time to visit my favorite spots in town -- a goodbye to the weird and wonderful sites that, for me, capture the boundless energy and intangible beauty of [Washington](#).

### 'The Donnie Simpson Show' Theme

My first stop is on the FM dial to hear a tune that has been bouncing out of my clock radio for as long as I can remember: "Donnie [Simpson](#) show, Donnie Simpson show, Donnie in the morning! Get up! Everybody get up!" More than the Easterns Motors jingle, Simpson's morning show theme song on WPGC (95.5 FM) is the local ditty I'll miss most.

Weekdays from 6-10 a.m., <http://www.wpgc955.com>.

## Rembrandt's 'Self-Portrait'

[Rembrandt van Rijn](#) and I are locked in one final staring contest, and it looks as if he's going to win . . . again. But don't blame me for trying. This self-portrait from 1659 in the [National Gallery of Art](#)'s West Building is one of the most arresting paintings ever slopped onto a canvas, conveying such vitality, such life, I'm convinced old Remy has to blink someday.

Fourth Street and Constitution Avenue NW, 202-737-4215, <http://www.nga.gov>.

## A Jog on the Mall

Every time I hear someone chomping on ice cubes ( *crunch-crunch-crunch*) or crumpling gift wrap ( *crunch-crunch-crunch*), I feel the irrepressible urge to go jogging on the pebbly paths of the [Mall](#) ( *crunch-crunch-crunch-crunch-crunch*). It's a beautiful morning for a run, and I leave my [iPod](#) at home, knowing that no song can eclipse the motivational sound of gravel crunching underneath my cross-trainers.

Between Third and 14th streets, and [Madison](#) and Jefferson drives, <http://www.nps.gov/nama>.

## American Indian Museum Cafeteria

I enjoy astronaut ice cream as much as the next dude, but aside from that the Mall has never been kind to hungry tourists. Thankfully, the [National Museum of the American Indian](#)'s Mitsitam Native Foods Cafe has changed that, serving some of the tastiest plates a sightseer could ask for. On the day I visit, the cafeteria is mobbed with young families, a fleet of [Cub Scouts](#), even a few loners like me -- all gleefully gorging on corn pone, tamales and mashed yucca.

Fourth Street and Independence Avenue SW, 202-633-1000, <http://www.nmai.si.edu>.

## Vace Italian Deli

Ah, Vace. It just smells so . . . *crusty*. Makes sense: The [Cleveland Park](#) eatery boasts the best pizza crust you'll ever bite into. Are the folks milling around the deli counter this afternoon waiting for their pies or just basking in the best-smelling room in Washington?

3315 Connecticut Ave. NW, 202-363-1999, <http://www.vaceitaliandeli.com>.

## Window Displays Outside Rite Aid

Can you imagine a mannequin nursing a bottle of [Pepto-Bismol](#)? Neither can the folks at the [Rite Aid](#) at [Connecticut](#) and [Florida](#) avenues NW. But outside the store near [Dupont Circle](#) are

mannequins oddly enjoying products *not sold at Rite Aid*. It's midwinter and the manne-kids are still gathered 'round a yule log wearing stolid expressions and pleated khakis (not sold at Rite Aid). A month earlier, mannequin families were on a fishing trip wearing life preservers (not sold at Rite Aid) and tossing footballs (not sold at Rite Aid).

It turns out the scenes have nothing to do with the drugstore; they're done by the building's management. And though these folks admit they're merely trying to spark nostalgia for old-school department store displays, I've always found the scenes funny, pathetic and incredibly endearing.

### **Palak Chaat at Rasika**

"Are we eating incredibly delicious paper?" my girlfriend asks in disbelief. No, we're eating incredibly delicious crispy fried spinach at Rasika. The dish is called palak chaat, and as its savory flavors dance like [Soulja Boy](#) on my taste buds, I can't help but wonder if there's a God and whether he owns a FryDaddy.

633 D St. NW, 202-637-1222, <http://www.rasikarestaurant.com>.

### **A Drive Down Rock Creek Parkway**

When does a '98 [Honda Accord](#) feel like a [Porsche 911](#)? When I'm navigating the twists, turns and tunnels of Rock Creek Raceway, er, Parkway. Sure, [Rock Creek Park](#) (<http://www.nps.gov/rocr>) provides scenic routes for joggers, walkers and bicyclists, but nothing feels quite like getting behind the wheel and hugging those curves on a sunny afternoon.

### **Cloud Watching In Meridian Hill Park**

The billowing puffs of cumulonimbus seem within arm's reach as I lounge near the fountains of [Meridian Hill Park](#). This ideal spot for Sunday daydreaming feels like a sacred secret -- a place where the city and the heavens intersect.

16th and [Euclid](#) streets NW, <http://www.nps.gov/mehi>.

### **The Newsroom**

This Dupont Circle magazine rack is my favorite in town, stocking reads from Art forum to Archie Comics, punk fanzines to French fashion mags. It even has a machine that prints copies of newspapers from around the world. And on my last visit, there is plenty of what I always come to the Newsroom for: peace, quiet and elbow room.

1803 Connecticut Ave. NW, 202-332-1489. , <http://www.newsroomdc.com>

## **Koi at the U.S. National Arboretum**

In summertime, these enormous beauties will greet you at the pond's surface, flapping their fins and blowing big-mouthed kisses. (They make the pandas look like such prima donnas.) But now it's winter, and the koi are being coy, huddled at the bottom, trying to keep warm. I'm happy to blow some farewell kisses, even if I don't get any back.

3501 New York Ave. NE, 202-245-2726, <http://www.usna.usda.gov>.

## **Wizards Beat Celtics at Verizon**

A nasty reverse dunk from [Caron Butler](#)! A clutch three-pointer from [Antonio Daniels](#)! A fourth-quarter rally against the best team in the [NBA](#)! On a Saturday night in January, the Wizards' thrilling victory not only makes for the perfect send-off, it also silences the obnoxious [Boston](#) fans surrounding me in Section 432.

601 F St. NW, 202-397-7328, <http://www.nba.com/wizards>.

## **Gene Davis Street Painting**

One of the coolest paintings in Washington is in complete disrepair -- and it still looks pretty great. Created last summer as a tribute to Davis, the Washington color-field maestro, this street painting's technicolor ribbons zip down the pavement of Eighth Street NW, its stripes marvelously pockmarked from the friction of countless braking Michelins.

Eighth Street NW between D and E streets, <http://www.colorfieldremix.com>.

## **U.S. Botanic Garden**

People will pay good money to see something that stinks: "Snakes on a Plane" or the 2007 [Washington Nationals](#), for instance. I enjoyed a stinky freebie at the Botanic Garden in 2005 with the titan arum, a majestic flower that blooms quite pungently only every few years. I return to this building's gorgeous interior to find that the big stinker is in storage at a satellite greenhouse. I swear I can still smell it.

100 Maryland Ave. SW, 202-225-8333, <http://www.usbg.gov>.

## **Fort Reno Park**

Most of the music venues I frequented as a punk-obsessed teenager have been moved, closed and/or bulldozed into condominium fodder. Thankfully, the stage at [Fort Reno Park](#) still stands.

I've been dancing in Fort Reno's summer grasses for more than a decade, watching Washington's best rock bands make some fantastic noise. On this soggy winter afternoon, however, the only sound coming from the stage is the drip-drop of heavy rain on plywood.

Nebraska Avenue and Chesapeake Street NW, 703-318-2197, <http://www.fortreno.com>.

### **Burrito Cart At 17th and K NW**

How many lunches have I eaten here? Two hundred? *Three hundred?* Carlos Guardado's burrito cart has provided me with some incredibly delicious meals, not to mention sweet reprieve from my workaday world. I ask him to douse my final burrito in extra Cholula. If I start getting weepy, I can blame the hot sauce.

### **Plant Life in Woodley Park Station**

Need some hope in your life? Head to the [Woodley Park-Zoo/Adams Morgan](#) Metro station. As the escalator descends to the platform, look down and to your left. You'll see clover and moss growing out of the station's light fixtures! Even in a city bursting with flora, nothing compares to the beauty of these little weeds -- photosynthesizing underground, silently surviving in a concrete tube. As the train glides into the station, the plants do a little dance in the subterranean breeze. I say goodbye and step onboard.

*Doors closing.*

2700 24th St. NW, <http://www.wmata.com>.