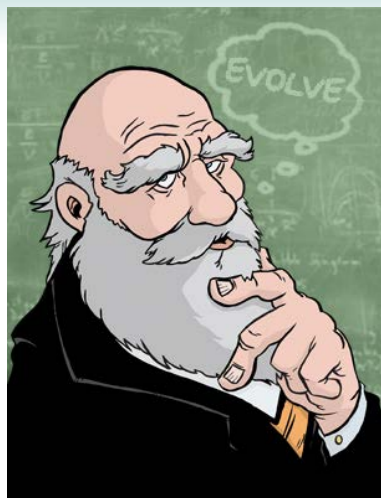


## 2000 Personal Accounts

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The Darwin Awards salutes the spirit portrayed in the following personal accounts, submitted by loyal (and sometimes reluctant) readers.

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One Cool Dude  
2000 Personal Account

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Slush Pile

2000 Personals

- One Cool Dude
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- My Friend John's Testis
- Why I'm the Last of Nine Children
- Eat the Young
- Feces Pieces
- A Clean Toilet
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- Final Flick of Bic
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- Robot Reaper
- Bug Repellent
- Bicycle Blues
- Brush with Stupidity
- Prop Arc Safety
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- Pop Like a Grape
- A Darwin Dog
- Round Lake Short Cut
- Man Versus Mower
- Tourist Trap
- Testing the Waters
- The Egg Factory
- Bye Bye Birdie
- Brewery Mishap

(June 1998) A letter from Michael.

My senior year of college opened with the customary research projects, grad school applications, and the like. But that all changed two months ago. Some of you may have heard rumors of some bizarre accident that I was involved in. Here is the truth, unabridged, for those who actually want to know.

In the second week of school, the society of physics students held a roughly annual welcome back party. As tradition dictates, we made our own ice cream with liquid nitrogen, 77 Kelvin, as a refrigerant and aerator. We spilled a little liquid nitrogen onto a table and watched the tiny little drops dance around. Someone asked, "Why does it do that?" That may have been the point of no return.

As is traditionally my role, I answered that the nitrogen evaporates at the surface of the table, which creates a cushion of air for the drop to sit on, and thermally insulates the drop, which minimizes further evaporation. That's why a drop dances around without boiling, without touching the table, and without spreading out like a pool of water.

Then I continued. I mentioned that the very same principle makes it possible to dip one's wet hand into molten lead, or drink liquid nitrogen without injury. I had done the latter several years earlier in a cryogenics lab, and remembered the physics of how it worked.

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Naturally those around me were skeptical. "It will freeze your whole body. Remember Terminator 2?" But I was sure of myself. I had done it before, and I believed in the physics behind it. So I unhesitatingly poured myself a glass and took a shot. Simple. Swallow, blow smoke out my nose, impress everyone.

Within two seconds, I collapsed to the floor, unable to breathe or indeed do anything except feel intense pain. The ambulance arrived. The police arrived. The journey to the hospital. The attempt to explain to baffled ER staff how something like this could happen. Then I passed out.

I woke up the next morning connected to beeping machines. It turns out that, in accordance with popular belief, you really should not drink liquid nitrogen.

I subsequently learned a few things about liquid nitrogen. While you can safely hold it in your mouth and blow neat smoke patterns, you should never, ever swallow. The closed epiglottis prevents the gas from escaping, so expanding gas is forced into your body. And your esophagus naturally constricts around anything inside it, so even though there is a thin protective gas layer, the esophagus will manage to make contact with the liquid nitrogen.

I also learned that my memory was flawed. When I had done the trick six years ago, I put it into my mouth and didn't swallow. Over time, that fine line between parlor trick and fatal accident must have blurred.

I was badly burned from epiglottis to stomach bottom. The gas expanded to fill my chest cavity, and the pressure collapsed a lung. After what I'm told was a grueling all-night surgery, they removed part of my stomach and ran my entire digestive system on a machine. I was on a breather for a day until my lung was restored. There are a few considerably uglier details which I will spare you.

They were impressed with my recuperative skills. I could breathe on my own after a few days. I could sit up in bed after a week, and was walking and eating in two. At eight weeks, I'm virtually healed

except for a number of unsightly scars.

And there's good news! I am the first documented medical case of a cryogenic ingestion. Read the New England Journal of Medicine. Three articles are in review now, and will be published soon.

My little adventure leaves me with the nickname Nitro-Mike, a tendency to tell bad physics jokes at department meetings, and an occasional blurb in the school paper. "Let's make Mikey drink it. Hey! Mikey likes it!"

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Submitted by: **Naomi K. Kritzer**



Can this story possibly be true? **Phil Hypes** from the Los Alamos National Laboratory works with liquid nitrogen, and makes an unofficial statement: "If the epiglottis doesn't allow gas to exit, *how do we burp?* I once heard of an individual who tried this and burped for an extended period time, an involuntary response that rid his body of gas produced as the nitrogen changed phases. He was concerned that he might burp long enough to be harmed by the lack of oxygen. That sounds more plausible to me. But I can believe portions of the digestive system might be frozen by the liquid nitrogen."

**True or Sham?**



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