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## Book: Factory tours tasty treat

By **Darren Garnick** / Working Stiff

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I can recall very few details about a not-so-recent business trip to Kentucky. Who I met, why I met with them and what I accomplished have long been blurred in a nebulous haze of other corporate assignments.

However, I can remember every footstep of the Louisville Slugger Factory Tour.

I know it's not polite to brag, but I happened to be strolling by the production line while a batch of Lou Merloni baseball bats were being chiseled out of blocks of white ash. If I had so desired, I could have pressed my fingerprints on soon-to-be-swung bats destined for the former [Red Sox](#) [\[team stats\]](#) supersub, aka Nomar Garciaparra's best friend.

I also could have stuck my fingers in one of the woodworking machines and shut down the factory floor for at least 10 minutes of mopping and OSHA paperwork. What delighted me most about the Louisville Slugger tour was being inches away from the workers.

Real workers. No glass partitions. No elevated walkways. And the assembly line guys seemed miraculously immune to gawkers. Best of all, you could inhale as much Major League sawdust as you wanted.

Unfortunately, for insurance and quality control reasons, few public factory tours allow visitors to breathe down the necks of employees.

But there are numerous opportunities to catch a behind-the-scenes glimpse of the manufacturing world. Many of them are documented in "Watch It Made in the U.S.A.," a travel guide by Newton authors Karen Axelrod and Bruce Brumberg.

"We love experiencing the 'wow factor,'" says Axelrod, who was partially inspired by childhood visits to the Corning Museum of Glass in upstate New York. "Everyone becomes a 5-year-old again when they go on these tours."

Married for 16 years, the authors have spent many of their family vacations and long weekends prowling the country for fortune cookie bakeries, pineapple plantations, kazoo factories, frozen yogurt creameries and automobile manufacturing plants that welcome tourists.

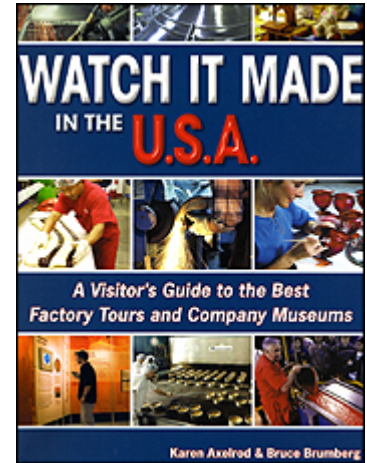
Their children Hilary, 11, and Gregory, 8, are now essential contributors to their fact-finding missions.

The book's recently released fourth edition includes a "By Kids For Kids" section covering the "coolest parts" of Hilary's California visits to factories run by Jelly Belly (Fairfield), Mrs. Grossman's Stickers (Petaluma) and the Basic Brown Bear Factory (San Francisco).

Promoted as a guide that "kicks the tires of the American economy," the travel book is broken down by geographic region with suggestions for various themed roadtrips. New England is well represented with 34 tour reviews including: Poland Spring, Samuel Adams, Finagle a Bagel, Cape Cod Potato Chips, Hebert Candies, Yankee Candle, Ben & Jerry's and Stonyfield Farm.

Some industries are notably absent in "Watch It Made." High-tech companies and defense contractors are naturally paranoid about corporate espionage or terrorist attack. For philosophical reasons, the authors also left out tobacco companies, firearms manufacturers and meatpacking plants, but they do include a few breweries and distilleries.

Some companies (Kellogg's, Hershey, Crayola) have also discontinued factory tours and built visitors' centers instead to accommodate the heavy volume of



"Watch It Made in the U.S.A." is written by Karen Axelrod and Bruce Brumberg.

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tourists. Before opening its "Hands-on Discovery Center" in 1996, Crayola Crayons' tour had a one-year waiting list.

So is there any extra stress on employees forced to tolerate an endless stream of gawkers?

On the contrary, Axelrod suggests that company tours may actually have a morale-boosting effect.

"People think 'Wow, my job is that important or interesting that people take time out of their vacation to watch what I do!' " she says.

Darren Garnick's "Working Stiff" column runs every Wednesday in the Boston Herald. Stories or rants from the workplace are welcomed at [heraldstiff@gmail.com](mailto:heraldstiff@gmail.com).

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