

# The Nit-Picker

## Picky, Picky

By James Gaddy, *Boston Magazine*, October 2004

TO MOST PARENTS, THEY'RE AN EMBARRASSING PEST. TO THE NIT PICKER, THEY'RE A LIVING.

Twelve years ago, Helen Hadley found her calling crawling through her daughter's hair. Her little girl had head lice, which Hadley proceeded to banish with a dispatch she'd later view as the basis of an entrepreneurial opportunity. Now the Nit Picker, as Hadley markets herself, makes house calls for \$80 an hour and maintains a busy practice in the upper-class suburbs around Boston. During the back-to-school months, she says, she could work as much as seven days a week.

Hadley travels to her appointments carrying a black bag resembling an old-fashioned doctor's kit, full of combs and hair clips that have been boiled and sealed in plastic bags. Wearing magnification glasses, she starts at the bottom and makes her way to the top of the head, "where the live bugs tend to congregate." She checks behind the ear and along the neckline, then divides the hair into sections with the clips and methodically combs through it a few strands at a time. Scraping eggs from the follicles with her fingernails, she transfers them to a lint roller. She has a surgeon's precision and a stylist's flair for small talk.

Hadley would prefer to work outside during daylight hours, when it's easiest to see her quarry. But she understands why most of her clients insist that she treat their children in the privacy of their homes. "They're always grateful," she says, "that I don't have a big sign on my car."