**Home & Contact****Curriculum Vitae****Research**

- Computer arithmetic
- Parallel processing
- Fault tolerance
- Broader research
- Research history
- List of publications

Teaching

- ECE1 Freshman sem
- ECE154 Comp arch
- ECE252B Comp arith
- ECE252C Adv dig des
- ECE254B Par proc
- ECE257A Fault toler
- Student supervision
- Math + Fun!

Textbooks

- Computer arithmetic
- Parallel processing
- Dependable comp
- Comp architecture
- Other books

Service

- Professional activities
 - Academic service
 - Community service
 - Industrial consulting
- Seeing, for the first time, several locales and historical monuments was educational and awe-inspiring. Paris was, of course, a delight, but so were our other stops: Nice, Avignon, Carcassonne, and Bordeaux. The experience went a long way toward correcting the skewed and incomplete version of French history I had learned in Iran.

Files & Documents**Useful Links****Personal**

- Blog & books

Behrooz Parhami's Blog & Books Page

Page last updated on 2015 December 31

This page was created in March 2009 as an outgrowth of the section entitled "Books Read or Heard" in my personal page. The rapid expansion of the list of books warranted devoting a separate page to it. Given that the book introductions and reviews constituted a form of personal blog, I decided to title this page "Blog & Books," to also allow discussion of interesting topics unrelated to books from time to time. Lately, non-book items (such as political news, tech news, puzzles, oddities, trivia, humor, art, and music) have formed the vast majority of the entries.

Entries in each section appear in reverse chronological order.

Blog entries for 2015**Archived blogs for 2014****Archived blogs for 2012-13****Archived blogs up to 2011**

Blog Entries for 2015

2015/12/31 (Thursday): Here are five items of potential interest.

- (1) Photographer Angela Pan's fantastic capture of the Vietnam veterans' memorial in Washington, DC.
- (2) Muslim sufis play traditional **Christmas music**.
- (3) Media circus about Bill Cosby: I am so very glad that Bill Cosby has finally been charged with sexual crimes. I am not glad at all that an ugly media frenzy and trial by pundits has already begun. It was okay to discuss the issue earlier because years of accusations by dozens of women were not being taken seriously. Now that formal charges have been brought against the disgraced comedian, we should let the case proceed and the man to have his day in court.
- (4) It was bound to happen some day: Late tonight, twin girls were born in Ventura's Community Memorial Hospital 4 minutes apart, but in different years.
- (5) Returning to my normal life after a memorable trip: I traveled with some family members in France, DURING cember 20-29. Here are some general impressions about the 10-day trip.



- It was reassuring to see Bordeaux, the city where my daughter has been studying for the past 4.5 months and to share in her experiences: the neighborhood where she lived, the cafes and shops she frequented, and the rich culture she interacted with daily.
- Spending time with family, including my younger son Sepand and my daughter Sepideh, as well as my youngest sister Farnaz, along with her husband Armin and daughter Kimia, was very pleasurable and also served to strengthen our bonds.
- Extensive walking to visit historical sites, or to get from one place to another, was a welcome change in my routine. I now understand why the French stay slim and fit, while indulging in rich food. All the walking to get to the metro or train station, within the station to get to the platform or from one train to another, and from the last station to the final destination does add up.
- Our enjoyment was maximized by the weather being unseasonably warm and there being no precipitation to

[Favorite quotations](#)[Poetry](#)[Pet peeve](#)[Virtual retirement](#)[CE Program](#)[ECE Department](#)[UCSB Engineering](#)[UC Santa Barbara](#)

speak of. Interestingly, we missed the rain by a few hours on several occasions. For example, Paris became rainy just as we were leaving France.

- For many years, Paris was synonymous for us with Fakhteh Borhan, a long-time family friend who lived there. Her passing away in 2013 deprived us of the opportunity to meet and spend some time with a treasured friend. My aunt Tal'at, a long-time resident of Montpellier, is no longer with us also. However, we did get to meet her older son Kia and his wife Linda, who kindly drove long distance to Carcassonne to dine with us.
- Now it's back to teaching/research for me, back to work for Sepand, and getting resettled at UCLA for the final two quarters of the neuroscience program for Sepideh. Farnaz and her family face similar transitions. We will all remember France fondly!

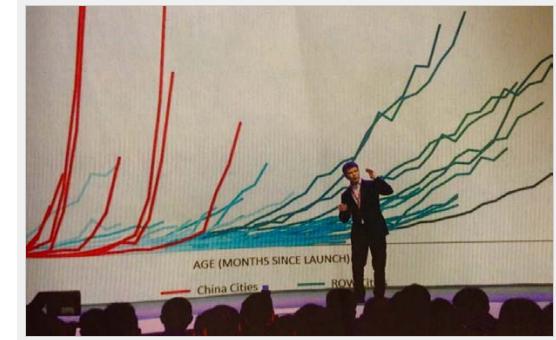
2015/12/19 (Saturday): I will be off-line until December 30. Here is a math puzzle as my signing-off post. Discover the rule and fill in the right-hand-side of the last equation below. When visiting a friend in Palo Alto today, we each produced a distinct solution for $x + y = f(x, y)$, but the two solutions proved the same, given that $y = x + 1$ in all the instances provided. $1 + 2 = 7 \mid 3 + 4 = 31 \mid 5 + 6 = 71 \mid 7 + 8 = 127 \mid 9 + 10 = ?$

2015/12/18 (Friday): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Uber's meteoric rise in China: In this image from *Time* magazine, issue of December 21, 2015, Uber CEO Travis Kalanick displays a chart at a tech conference to show how much more quickly Uber has risen in Chinese cities (red lines) compared with the rest of the world.

(2) *Time* magazine's top-10 hashtags for 2015 (I had to look up some of these): January (#AskHerMore, #JeSuisCharlie); June (#LoveWins); August (#YouStink, #StandWithPP); September (#RefugeesWelcome); October (#IAmAChristian); November (#ConcernedStudent1950, #ItsJustACup); December (#PorteOuverte).

(3) Quote of the day: "Everything becomes a little different as soon as it is spoken out loud." ~ Hermann Hesse



(4) UCSB partners to bring large **solar installations** to campus: "Six new solar arrays will be installed at UCSB as a result of the agreement with Silicon Valley-based SunPower, a global solar technology and energy services company. SunPower will erect, operate and maintain the arrays and sell the harvested green power to UCSB at a significantly lower rate than what the campus currently pays for electricity. UCSB estimates the project to net the campus savings of nearly \$270,000 in its first year, with the potential to save some \$14 million over 20 years."

(5) Pharma CEO arrested for **securities fraud**: Martin Shkreli, the CEO who recently increased the price of a 62-year-old drug for treating a dangerous parasitic infection from \$13.50 to \$750.00 upon taking over the company that made it, has been accused of running his companies essentially like a Ponzi scheme. There are speculations that Shkreli may have needed increased income from the drug to pay back investors, a typical occurrence in Ponzi schemes before their collapse.

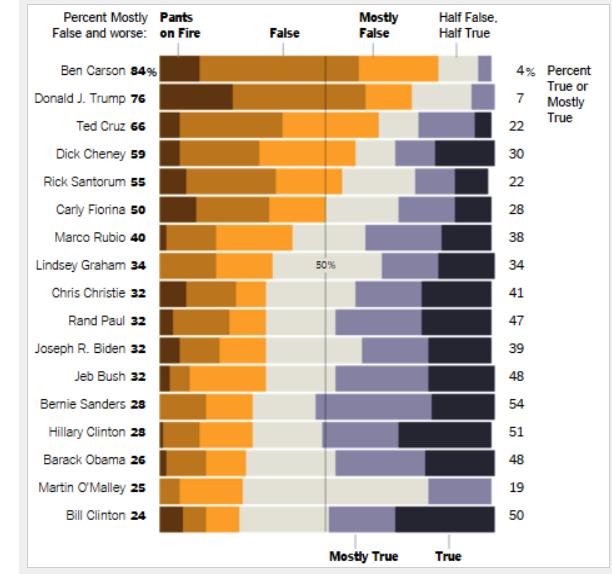
2015/12/16 (Wednesday): Here are four items of potential interest.

(1) How much do politicians lie? A lot it seems, but some lie more than others. Here is a *New York Times* chart posted on-line on December 11, 2015. I am not claiming that the chart is totally accurate or unbiased, but the numbers appear to be in the right ballpark. Please keep in mind that not all lies are malicious or designed to deceive. Some may be due to misinformation or covering up for lack of information.

(2) Cool product of the season: A **smoke detector** that sends notifications to your cell phone. I'll wait until the price goes well below the current \$99. The Nest Company also offers a cool learning thermostat.

(3) A great graduation speech at University of Western Australia: **Nine life lessons** from alum Tim Minchin.

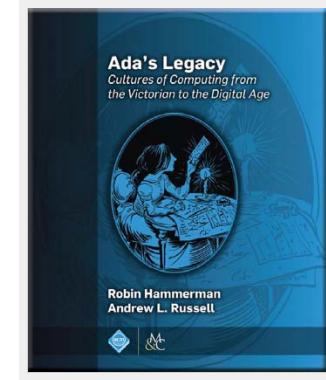
(4) I have not seen much karaoke music for Persian songs. These instrumental piano versions by Mohsen Karbassi may serve the purpose. Some come with lyrics; for others, enter the song name plus "lyrics" on Google.



[Ageh Yeh Rooz](#) | [Ashegham Man](#) | [Ashegh Shodam Man](#) | [Cheshm-e Man](#) | [Daryacheh-ye Noor](#) |
[Do Panjreh](#) | [Dokhtar-e Boyer Ahmadi](#) | [Ghogha-ye Setaregan](#) | [Gol-e Pamchal](#) | [Gol-e Sangam](#) |
[Ham-Khooneh](#) | [Jan-e Maryam](#) | [Kieh Kieh Dar Mi-Zaneh](#) | [Komakam Kon](#) | [Masti](#) | [Morgh-e Sahar](#) |
[Nemisheh Ghosseh Ma Ro](#) | [Sang-e Khara](#) | [Shab Bood Biaban Bood](#) | [Shahzadeh-ye Roya-ye Man](#) |
[Soghati](#) | [Soltan-e Ghalbha](#) | [Zemestoon](#)

2015/12/15 (Tuesday): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Ada's Legacy: This is the short title of a book published by Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) to commemorate the bicentennial of Ada Lovelace's birth in December 1815. Lovelace is widely recognized as the world's first computer programmer and is given credit for inventing several programming constructs, including subroutines. The full title of the book, written by Robin Hammerman and Andrew L. Russell, is: *Ada's Legacy: Cultures of Computing from the Victorian to the Digital Age* (Morgan & Claypool / ACM, 2015).



(2) A video I found on the NRA Web site: [It responds](#) to the slogan "God Isn't Fixing This" (used to impart the notion that prayers for victims of gun violence aren't enough and that we must also enact sensible gun laws), as the "God-less left" trying to tear apart the foundations of America, the rights to believe and to survive. Very typical of the hateful rhetoric propagated by the extreme right!

(3) How well do you know religion? Well, there is an easy way to find out. This [New York Times article](#) by Nicholas Kristof contains 14 multiple-choice questions that ask you to attribute a particular statement or fact to one or more scriptures (various books of the Bible or the Quran). Here is a sample question. Who had 700 wives: King Solomon, Joseph Smith, or the Prophet Muhammad? The author admits to cherry-picking the passages, but goes on to say that "faith is complicated and ... religion is invariably a tangle of contradictory teachings—in the Bible, the difference between the harshness of Deuteronomy and the warmth of Isaiah or Luke is striking—and it's always easy to perceive something threatening in another tradition. Yet analysts who have tallied the number of violent or cruel passages in the Quran and the Bible count more than twice as many in the Bible. ... When I hear Americans stereotype Muslims, when they don't actually know any Muslims, it seems to me an odd echo of anti-Semitic comments I sometimes hear in Muslim societies. ... In international relations, extremists on one side empower extremists on the other side. ISIS empowers Trump, who inadvertently empowers ISIS. He's not confronting a national security threat; he's creating one." One NYT commenter quoted Shakespeare in agreement: "The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose."

(4) Iranian women [arrested in droves](#) for improper hijab: There are reports of millions of women ticketed per year, their cars impounded, taken to police headquarters for signing a confessional, and generally treated like criminals, up to and including being handcuffed. And these human rights violations take place under a government that labels itself moderate and reformist for external consumption.

(5) Final thought for the day: "Let me never fall into the vulgar mistake of dreaming that I am persecuted whenever I am contradicted." ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

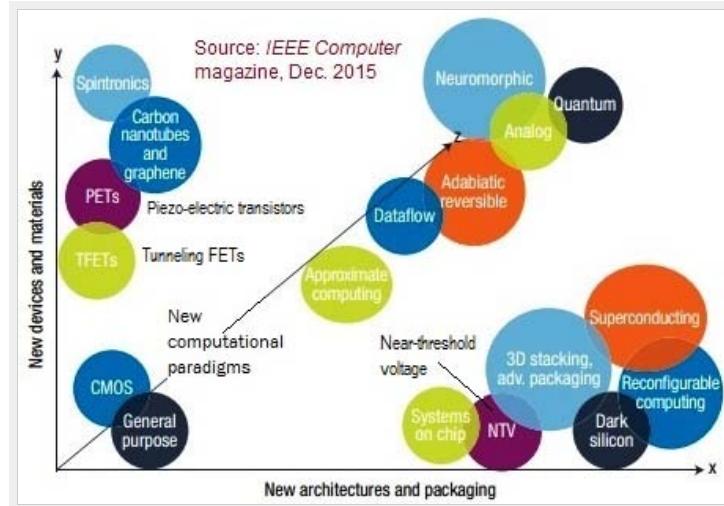
2015/12/14 (Monday): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Strategies for dealing with computer performance growth beyond Moore's Law: Candidate approaches are shown along three scales that are not mutually exclusive.
 The X axis: New architectures and packaging

The Y axis: New devices and materials
 The Z axis: New computational paradigms

(2) Iran's top officials discussing the selection of the next Supreme Leader: Rafsanjani, Rouhani, and their allies are trying to gain more seats and influence on the 82-member [Assembly of Experts](#) (charged with electing or disqualifying the Supreme Leader) during the upcoming February elections, in anticipation of the need to replace the ailing 75-year-old Khamenei.

(3) Paris climate summit sets a framework for international action: The agreement has many problems, but the very fact that it was reached is remarkable. World Bank President Jim Yong Kim reacted thus: "It was a

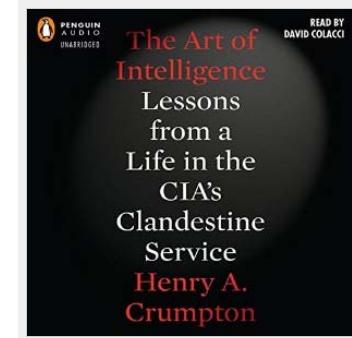


wonderful surprise that after the incredible disappointment of Copenhagen, these 195 countries could come to an agreement more ambitious than anyone imagined."

(4) Persian piano music from 2008: This oldie but goodie song is called "Yadegar-e Omr" ("Life's Mementos"), performed by Anoushirvan Rohani on the piano and Mahyar Bahraminasab on tombak. [[10-minute video](#)]

(5) Brief book review: Crumpton, Henry A., *The Art of Intelligence: Lessons from a Life in the CIA's Clandestine Service*, unabridged audiobook on 11 CDs, read by David Colacci, Penguin Audio, 2012.

The author, who has served as a CIA operative and in various other positions in the US intelligence and homeland security organizations, provides insightful observations about the war on terror, along with its successes and failures. He joined the CIA in 1981, following an obsession with spy work since his childhood. He rose in the intelligence community ranks, serving as Deputy Chief of CIA's Counterterrorism Center from 1999 to 2001. We learn that during the years leading to 2001, the Agency's hands were tied in fighting Al Qaeda, and terrorism in general, by overly cautious politicians.



In the fall of 2001, after the 9/11 terror attacks, Crumpton was asked to lead the initial special-forces operations in Afghanistan, a spectacularly successful mission that led to the elimination of thousands of Al Qaeda and Taliban combatants. The author's narrative provides not just insight into counterterrorism operations but also a comprehensive account of how the US intelligence infrastructure changed over the years.

(6) Final thought for the day: "The task of the modern educator is not to cut down jungles, but to irrigate deserts." ~ C. S. Lewis

2015/12/13 (Sunday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) How to stump Facebook's tagging algorithm!

(2) Tse-Yun Feng (1928-2015): A pioneer in the areas of pattern recognition and parallel processing, Feng initiated the Segamore Computer Conference on Parallel Processing and later founded the International Conference on Parallel Processing (ICPP), the oldest continuing conference of its kind, now in its 44th year. Feng was a past President of IEEE Computer Society and held many other volunteer positions. Penn State has established a fund in his memory.

(3) [Michelle Obama raps](#) to encourage kids to go to college: Results are more important than looking "First-Lady-like" (whatever than means).



(4) France's top soccer scorer [suspended on extortion charges](#): Karim Benzema is accused of acting as a liaison between a teammate and unnamed extortionists trying to blackmail the teammate about a sex tape.

(5) Thinking in the negative: Painting with glue and sand. [[3-minute video](#)]

(6) Behind *Time* magazine's "Person of the Year" selection process: Apparently, there were four other finalists in the process that led to the selection of Angela Merkel, "Chancellor of the free world"; No. 2 was Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, "the terrorist"; No. 3 was Donald Trump, "the firebrand"; No 4 was Black Lives Matter, "the activists"; No. 5 was Hassan Rouhani, "the dealmaker."

(7) Driving mishap: A man's car [was impaled](#) on Friday 12/11, 2015, by a large I-beam that flew off from a truck driving in front of him on I280 near San Jose, but the man miraculously escaped with only a scratch.

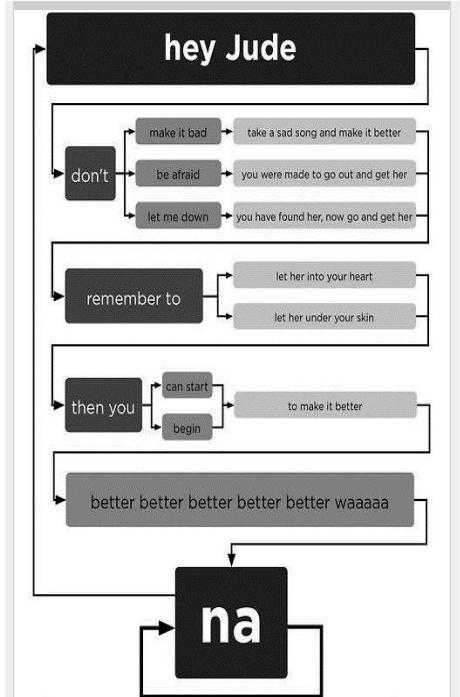
(8) The slogan "Never Again" does not mean just for Jews: Over 10,000 American Jews have signed [a petition](#) condemning the suggestion that all Muslims be banned from entering the US. "The idea that any group of American citizens should be singled out, profiled and discriminated against isn't only profoundly un-American. It's against everything that we stand for as American Jews."

(9) Six books recommended by Bill Gates: On his [Web page](#), Gates provides brief descriptions, a video introducing the books, and links to longer write-ups. I have placed on my to-readlist all six recommended books (*Eradication: Ridding the World of Diseases Forever?*, by Nancy Leys Stepan; *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, by Carol S. Dweck; *The Road to Character*, by David Brooks; *Being Nixon: A Man Divided*, by Evan Thomas; *Sustainable Materials with Both Eyes Open*, by Julian M. Alwood; *Things Explainer: Complicated Stuff in Simple Words*, by Randall Munroe) on my to-read list.

2015/12/11 (Friday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) The Beatles' "Hey Jude" lyrics illustrated.

(2) Ten [philosophical one-liners](#): My favorite is #2 by William of Ockham, whose statement "Entities should not be multiplied unnecessarily" is known as "Ockham's razor." In modern terms, he



maintained that all things being equal, the simplest explanation is more often correct. When we think about a subject, we should use the simplest reasoning possible, unless the evidence compels us to include an extra agency.

(3) A list of [twenty covers](#) that improve on the originals: I don't quite agree with all 20 selections here, but most of them are spot on. Aretha Franklin's "Respect" is definitely better than the original by Otis Redding, as is Janis Joplin's "Me and Bobby McGee."

(4) The Hunting Ground: This is the title of a documentary film about sexual assaults at US colleges that combines recollections of victims with disturbing statistics demonstrating the depth of the problem. Campus officials continue to downplay the problem because of the financial implications of scaring off potential students and ruining the school's image along with its multimillion-dollar athletics and alumni fundraising programs. I got the documentary from Netflix and watched it last night. I think all college-bound girls should watch this film. This [11-minute clip](#) that I found on YouTube contains "Erica's Story," a representative sample narrative from the film.

(5) Quote of the day: "While reading this sentence, 25 million of your cells died. But don't despair, your body made 300 billion new ones today." ~ Anonymous (via IFL Science)

(6) Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's speech in a [ceremony to welcome refugees](#) to Canada.

(7) On Justice Scalia's [racist comments](#): Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia has made comments to the effect that black students cannot compete with whites at elite universities, so admitting them is futile and perhaps even harmful to blacks. Unfortunately, one cannot change the mind of a racist, and the higher up the racist sits in the power structure, the harder it is to change him. Our best hope is to educate future generations and rely on attrition to get rid of old bigots.

(8) Final thought for the day: "You can tell whether a man is clever by his answers. You can tell whether a man is wise by his questions." ~ Naguib Mahfouz [I guess he did not mean to exclude women; it's just an unfortunate feature of our language that makes it difficult to write gender-neutral statements.]

2015/12/10 (Thursday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) Angela Merkel named "Person of the Year" by *Time* magazine.

(2) Quote of the day: "If you don't read the newspaper, you are uninformed; if you do read the newspaper, you are misinformed." ~ Mark Twain

(3) We do have grammar hardwired in our brain: New research at NYU confirms linguist Noam Chomsky's decades-old theory that our amazing ability to process language stems from an '[internal grammar](#)' mechanism.

(4) Zebra exhibits the Hanukkah spirit in its stipes. [[Image](#)]

(5) Top 25 news photos of 2015: [This compilation](#) is from *The Atlantic*. No doubt other lists will emerge as we near the year's end. The top two photos, a wide line of people walking and a dead child on a beach, depict the plight of refugees. One troubling aspect of the first photo is that it shows mostly young men, which muddles the stories of families fleeing destruction in war zones.



(6) Amira Willighagen, the winner of "Netherlands Got Talent," sings "[O Mio Babbino Caro](#)" in a live concert with Andre Rieu. The amazing talent of this young girl brought tears to many eyes and led to a standing ovation.

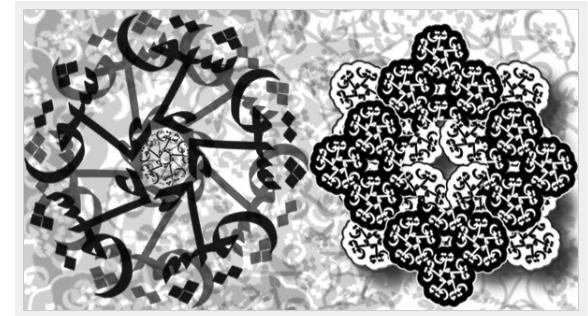
(7) Here is a [heartfelt essay](#), in Persian, by Parnian Kazemi, a married Iranian women, who writes about her experiences on the streets and at home. The caption of the photo accompanying the essay reads: "Iran is the Africa of the sexually starved."

(8) Nazanin Amini's [open letter](#) to Donald Trump: She reminds the GOP hopeful that educated, independent Muslim-American women are what ISIL fears most. They should be used as resources in the fight against ISIL, not be stigmatized.

(9) Final thought for the day: Remember the good old days when Sarah Palin was the scariest thing the Republicans could throw at us?

2015/12/08 (Tuesday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Persian calligraphic art: The word "aashegh" ("lover") is repeated in this piece by someone identified only as SKS.



(2) A feathered Elvis fan. [[Musical clip](#)]

(3) Lexi Brown [gets a surprise](#): Hospitalized at UCLA for cancer treatment, the Santa Maria pre-teen makes a connection with a frat house across the street and is then surprised when she sees her name in holiday lights on the roof of their building.

(4) Is double-dipping as bad as it is made out to be?

Short answer: Yes. [[Article](#)]

(5) Quote of the day: "[Y]our morality is deeply lacking if all you want is a child born, not a child fed, not a child educated, not a child housed." ~ Sister Joan Chittister, on some pro-lifers

(6) Tiny chip draws power from radio waves: Energy scavenging has been known to allow electronic devices to operate with no need for an electric plug or battery. Two things needed to happen for the suggestion to become practical: more efficient energy scavenging methods and ultra-low-power electronic circuits. The methods are now becoming practical. Dutch scientists have revealed a tiny sensor that is entirely powered by radio waves. The [new sensor](#) stores the power it draws from an antenna and once it has enough power, it measures and transmits the temperature. Other kinds of sensors can be built based on the same principle, removing one of the hurdles to widespread use of such sensors in the Internet of Things.

(7) Iran in pictures: This [6-minute slide show](#), set to music, depicts many niceties of Iran. Even though problem areas are hidden in this promotional video, there is little doubt that Iran is head and shoulders above many countries of the region in terms of workforce education and cultural sophistication.

2015/12/06 (Sunday): Here are three items of potential interest.

(1) Iranian Women

Writing Transnationally: This was the title of a roundtable discussion in Persian held this afternoon as part of the UCLA Bilingual Lecture Series on Iran, under the able directorship of Dr. Nayereh Tohidi.



After Dr. Tohidi's opening, which included the introduction of the new UCLA Center for Near Eastern Studies Director and remarks by the latter, the actual program began. A noteworthy feature of the panel was the inclusion of three generations of writers of diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds. For bios of the panelists, please refer to the [on-line announcement](#) for the roundtable.

- Roundtable moderator, Nasrin Rahimieh of UC Irvine, indicated that she will keep her introduction to a minimum, asking each panelist to provide biographical information as part of her 10-minute remarks. After remarks by panelists, the moderator asked them to elaborate on how they came to choose the language in which they write (Persian or English) and how the choice was influenced by their target audience.
- Mahnaz Attarha, a relative newcomer to the US, divulged that she has trouble with thinking in linear time, which is a kind of disability, so she often writes in scoops ("chamcheh," literally meaning "spatula") composed of chunks of text with no temporal relationships. She then proceeded to read a couple of such scoops.
- Mehrnoosh Mazarei read her short story "The Old Whore of Ensenada." In the past, the author has written short stories in Persian, but she has just published, after a 10-year effort, a novel in English entitled *Mina's Revolution*, which is available from Amazon.
- Sheida Mohamadi, Poet-in-Residence at UC Irvine, read a few of her poems from the collection "Yavash-haye Ghermez" ("Crimson Whispers"). She indicated that cities and geographic locales punctuate her memories and, as a result, have special places in her writings.
- Paxima Mojavezi presented a discussion of "immigration literature," outlining the types and characteristic of stories and poetry created in diaspora. In the case of Iranian authors, such works often do not see the light of day in Iran as published books. However, the Internet has opened up a channel between Iranian authors in exile and readers in the author's homeland.
- Nasrin Mottahedeh read from her humorous writings, including descriptions of a couple of phone conversations she carried out, trying to sell magazine ads to typical Iranian male businessmen, and a cake recipe that began by buying an already baked cake, followed by staging a scene in the kitchen that led the husband or visitors to

think the she baked the cake herself.

- Gina Nahai, an author with five English novels to her credit, read a passage from her latest work, *The Luminous Heart of Jonah S.* The author has tried to introduce the realities of Iran and its culture to Westerners. She also described "The Pearl Cannon," a failed project of Fath-Ali Shah Qajar, who aspired to confront the Russian artillery with a creation of his own army.

- Mahdokht Sanati's presentation was no doubt the most touching of the afternoon. She described how she finally set herself free in old age by writing about sexual abuse she experienced as a child. She wishes that this work of hers is published in Iran to expose the widespread problem and to provide support to countless victims who dare not break the taboo of discussing sexual abuse. The author went back to school in the US to learn about children and their emotional and educational development.

- Sholeh Wolpe, an author and translator, read her poem "The Painted Sun" and other works. She related that she feels despair due to the world having been taken over by dark forces, but she sees some light as well. Wolpe minimizes the importance of nationality in writing and poetry, stating that, "My country is Iran, but I stand under the flag of literature." [2-minute video]

The question-and-answer period was rather unsatisfying. There were very few genuine questions. Instead, people stood up and editorialized instead of seeking the panelists' opinions. One questioner, after posing his question in a roundabout way, proceeded to outline possible answers, in effect turning his question into a multiple-choice one!

For me, the roundtable was well worth the 2-hour drive each way, from/to Santa Barbara. I'd be happy to correct factual errors in this report if they are brought to my attention.

(2) Fifteen unique libraries around the world: All 15 are truly amazing, but St. Catherine Monastery in South Sinai, Egypt, is also the oldest continuously operated library in the world. It was built around 564 AD by the order of Byzantine Emperor Justinian I. Let's hope ISIL does not get its hands on this pre-Islamic gem. Egypt has a second entry on the list: the marvelous Biblioteca Alexandrina, a worthy replacement for the great library of Alexandria, which was destroyed by fire sometime between 50 BC and 400 AD, according to different accounts. Here is a prequel to this list, with 15 amazing libraries of the world.

(3) Happy Hanukkah to all my Jewish readers! This Peter, Paul and Mary Hanukkah song, titled "Light One Candle," was performed at their 25th anniversary concert in 1986 (reproduced in this 84-minute audio file). Here is Pink Martini's Hanukkah song, "Ocho Kandelikas," with lyrics in Ladino, a Sephardic language rooted in Spanish and Hebrew.

2015/12/05 (Saturday): Book review: Morris, Richard, *Time's Arrows: Scientific Attitudes Toward Time*, Simon and Schuster, 1985.

The question "What is time?" might sound silly to many. A simplistic answer describes time as the thing that goes in one direction, marking events and separating the past from the future by a point called "present." Yet, the question is one of the deepest ones in science/philosophy today, creating disagreements and paradoxes, instead of answers. This book tries to explain the roots of the difficulty, in a way that is understandable to a literate person with minimal background in science.

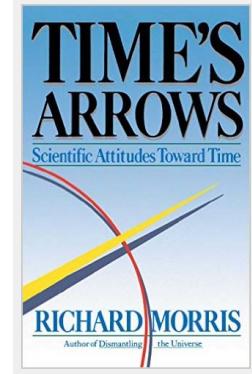
Besides the main question addressed, the book contain a great deal of useful material on physics and philosophy. For example, I learned that the universe is made up of two elements for the most part: hydrogen (H) 75% and helium (He) 25%; all other elements appear in negligible quantities.

As another example, we get clear explanations of special and general relativity. Special relativity describes situations where observers move relative to each other at constant velocities. General relativity explains what happens when observers accelerate with respect to one another. To an observer, the effects of acceleration in space are indistinguishable from those of gravity. So general relativity can be viewed as a theory of gravity as well. Both special and general relativity predict changes in times and lengths, but changes resulting from general relativity are more far-reaching.

Discussion of time-keeping devices and attempts at establishing the age of the universe are also quite interesting. Mechanical clocks were invented in the 1200s; they were accurate to within 15-30 minutes per day. In 1345, the hour was divided into minutes and seconds. Early clocks did not have hands; they would strike a bell periodically. Minute hands did not appear until the 16th century. With the ability to measure time, came the notions of saving and squandering of time. Estimates for the age of our universe began with numbers that were way off the mark (less than 1M years). It wasn't until the late 19th century that Lord Kelvin (William Thomson) derived his "upper bound" of 500M years based on laws of thermodynamics.

Now, going back the book's main focus, one can divide the question "What is time?" into four fundamental questions, discussed in the rest of this review.

(a) Does time have a direction? The word "Arrows" in the book's title refers to various directional explanations



of time. In addition to "the subjective arrow" that we all use without thinking, there are "the thermodynamics arrow" based on natural increases in entropy or disorder, "the expansion of the universe arrow" which reflects the fact that the universe is expanding and is unlikely to go back, "the beta-decay arrow" based on the extreme difficulty of reversing particle decay, and "the electromagnetic radiation arrow" reflecting the general agreement that radiation is not emitted into the past. There are, of course, theories contesting each of the time arrows just named. A "yes" answer to our question about time having a direction isn't as easy to justify as one might think; most natural phenomena can go in either direction. For example, if a glass is dropped and shatters into tiny little pieces, it is conceivable, though very unlikely, that the pieces might then come together under suitably applied forces, to form the intact glass, in essence making time go "backward."

(b) Does time flow uniformly? Clearly, saying that time flows at a rate of one hour per hour is unsatisfactory, because the statement is circular. What does the flow of time really mean? It turns out that time, like space, is relative and it passes at different rates depending on the observer's speed and acceleration. In fact, the view of time with a "now" point that moves along at a constant rate and always separates the past from the future, as natural as it may seem, isn't uncontested. An alternative is to view time as a dimension like other dimensions. There is no "now"; just earlier and later. The time at which distant events take place can be ambiguous, since each observer will "see" a different time. In fact, there is really no such thing as absolute simultaneity of events. If two events are so close in time or so far apart in space that light cannot reach from one to the other before the latter takes place, the order of the two events is ambiguous. However, causality is not violated. No observer will see a basketball fall through a hoop before it is released by the player who shot it. So the statement "Time is relative" is a tad too strong. To make things worse, it is possible for an event to occur in the past of one observer and in the future of a second observer.

(c) Does time have a beginning? Did time begin at the Big Bang, or was the Big Bang simply a point on the infinite arrow of time? One of the grand pursuits of physics is to unify the notions of gravity, electromagnetism, strong nuclear force, and weak nuclear force. The latter three have been unified (by Steven Weinberg and Abdus Salam), but gravity has defied unification. At Planck distance ($\sim 10^{-33}$ cm) and Planck time ($\sim 10^{-43}$ sec), all known physical laws break down. So we have no idea what went on in the initial Planck time after the beginning. At that time, the universe was unimaginably hot (10^{32} C) and dense (10^{18} tons per cubic cm). We don't even have the tools to discuss time and space right after the Big Bang.

(d) Does time have an end? Whether time will end depends on the ultimate fate of the universe. It will not end if the Universe continues to expand forever or comes to a halt. However, if there is a Big Crunch, causing the universe to collapse back in on itself, spacetime as we know it would be destroyed and time could be considered to have ended.

The latter two questions about the beginning and end of time do not arise if time is viewed as circular. The circular time view was held by many ancient civilizations, including the Chinese, the Aztecs, and the Mayas. Plato and others believed in the notion of "Great Year," a time after which things begin to repeat; for example, the planets return to their original starting positions and things start over. The notion of circular time almost goes hand in hand with fate and destiny: humans have free will only to become virtuous, not to change their fates. The church repudiated theories of circular time (as well as astrology), promoting instead the notion of linear time, with a clear beginning at creation and an equally clear end. Nietzsche believed in infinite time and finite universe, which led him to the conclusion that events must recur.

To recap, we do not yet have an answer to the question "What is time?" However, readers of this book will develop an appreciation of the question's inherent difficulty and will learn a great deal about steps that have been taken in the direction of finding a satisfactory, noncircular answer.

2015/12/04 (Friday): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) Good for a chuckle: "The Last Supper"; 2015 edition.
- (2) Hila Sedighi recites her [new Persian poem](#) entitled "The Wind Blew Your House Away."
- (3) Known or suspected terrorists can [still buy guns](#) legally: So, why not close this loophole in the US gun laws by having gun background checks include checking terror watch lists? Because NRA and its political cronies don't like the idea!
- (4) The complete [114-minute video](#) of the memorial program for Rahim Moeini Kermanshahi, held at UCLA on Sunday 11/29/2015.
- (5) On the Iranian-Israeli standoff: In an [insightful article](#) entitled "Iran and Israel: Intimate Enemies," Dr. Mansour Farhang opines that Iran's taking up the Palestinian cause and painting Israel as an enemy of Islam is, in good measure, to deflect attention from the Shi'i-Sunni conflict, a centuries-old enmity that has been made worse by Shi'i Iran's claim of Islamic leadership in a largely Sunni Muslim world. Sunni Muslims do not even consider Iran properly Islamic, let alone look up to it as their leader, yet Iranian state-controlled media keep



referring to Khamenei as "Leader of the the Islamic World."

(6) NASA's Earth Observatory **satellite images from Iran**: The expanding collection includes images of various historical sites, duststorms, floods, snow blankets, salt domes, lakes, and many other phenomena of interest.

2015/12/03 (Thursday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) The book mountain: Located in The Netherlands, this pyramidal structure, serving both as a commercial attraction and an invitation to reading, contains 5 floors of bookshelves, connected by 480 meters of staircases and pathways that lead to its apex. The book mountain is housed inside another barnlike pyramid with glass facades.



(2) Quote of the day: "Computers are incredibly fast, accurate and stupid. Human beings are incredibly slow, inaccurate and brilliant. Together they are powerful beyond imagination." ~ Albert Einstein

(3) Let me be who I am: **A charming example** from the collection of photos posted by Iranian women, with and without mandatory hijab.

(4) Kobe Bryant's retirement is bittersweet for Los Angeles: Physically, he looks the same as in recent years, but his level of play is definitely on the decline. And the Lakers, building their hopes and plans around Bryant, repelling in the process some pretty good players who found it hard to work with an egotistical team leader, have not fared well in recent years. Byron Scott, the Lakers' current head coach has said that he would never bench Bryant for poor play. Such a decision, publicly announced, has a negative effect on the team's morale. With Bryant, the Lakers of late were never a cohesive group with team spirit. Perhaps a few years after Bryant's departure, the Lakers will become a team again, rather than a Hollywood-like leading man with a bunch of extras.

(5) The case for banning killer robots: In **this article** (published in *Communications of the ACM*, issue of December 2015), Ronald Arkin argues against fully autonomous weapons that, once activated, would be able to select and engage targets without further human involvement. If you disagree, simply imagine a robotic arms race, whereby each country tries to develop more advanced and deadlier robots. Such an arms race would be extremely troubling, with or without a corresponding nuclear component. It would be interesting to see how the NRA would react to a ban on armed autonomous robots.

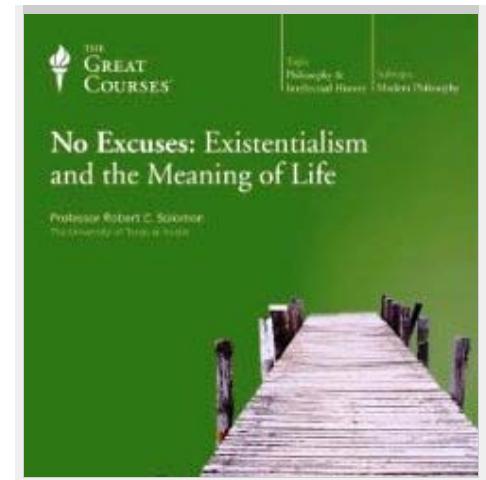
(6) Rabbis welcome refugees: According to **Time magazine on-line**, 1000 American rabbis have signed a letter urging the US Congress to accept Syrian refugees.

(7) A holiday concert: Tonight, I attended Pink Martini's superb and highly enjoyable concert, with lead singer Storm Large, at the Arlington Theater in Santa Barbara (they have a second lead singer, China Forbes, with the two alternating in concerts). Pink Martini specializes in upbeat music, with Latin and other dance rhythms. Tonight's program was very international and included English, Italian, Spanish, Arabic, Armenian, and Turkish songs, most in the trademark dance style of the 12-member band. So, the program did not consist of holiday songs exclusively. The dance version of "**Auld Lang Syne**" was particularly good, as was their Spanish Hanukkah song ("**Ocho Kandelikas**"). Here is a **76-minute concert** by the band that contains many of their standards. The band's performance of "**Brasil**" got the audience engaged in a conga line. Pink Martin's repertoire also includes the Persian song "**Omid-e Zendegani**" (not performed tonight; **tansliterated lyrics**). [Note added on 12/04: Actually, "Ocho Kandelikas" isn't in Spanish but in Ladino, a Sephardic language with roots in Spanish and Hebrew.]

2015/12/02 (Wednesday): Here are four items of potential interest.

(1) Course review: Solomon, Robert C., *No Excuses: Existentialism and the Meaning of Life*, a 24-lecture course, in the "Great Courses" series, on 12 CDs (plus a guidebook), The Teaching Company, 2000.

The main tenets of existentialism (that every one of us is responsible for who we are, what we do, and the way we interact with the world around us) are quite simple and appealing to modern humans, but they also have stern critics. In short, existentialism is the philosophy of no excuses. Ironically, most major figures of existentialism (Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Camus), perhaps with the exception of Sartre, would acknowledge being part of any



movement at all. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche actually rejected all philosophical movements and, as ferocious individualists, considered them signs of herd mentality arising from cowardice and lack of integrity.

I learned a great deal from this course and recommend it highly.

An outline of the course follows.

Lec. 1. What is Existentialism? It urges us to live our lives to the fullest (emphasis on passions, not rationality).

Lec. 2-6. Albert Camus: "The Stranger"; "The Myth of Sisyphus"; "The Plague"; "The Fall" (on social justice).

Lec. 7-9. Soren Kierkegaard: Christianity; subjective truth; existential dialectic (passion = profound insight).

Lec. 10-13. Friedrich Nietzsche: Nihilism; death of God; immorality; freedom, faith, responsibility; Übermensch.

Lec. 14. Grand Inquisitors—Dostoevsky, Kafka, Hesse: "The Brothers Karamazov"; absurdity, guilt, innocence.

Lec. 15-17. Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger: The self, the world (time), truth, and authenticity.

Lec. 18-23. Jean-Paul Sartre: Emotions; responsibility; phenomenology; bad faith; "No Exit"; sex and love.

Lec. 24. From Existentialism to Postmodernism: Existentialism is evolving; Sartre's "the self" has been rejected.

(2) Terrorist attacks come to SoCal: At least three assailants opened fire late this morning at a San Bernardino facility for the developmentally disabled, **killing at least 14** and wounding 17, some critically. This appears to be a case of domestic terrorism. Inaction on the part of our lawmakers to curb gun violence raises the question of whether they are more afraid of NRA than of ISIL.

Note added at 10:45 PM: It now appears that the mass shooting was indeed a case of Islamic extremist terror, but it is not clear whether there is an international connection.

(3) Imprisonment of poets and writers continues in Iran: In this [Facebook post](#), Iranian poetess Hila Sedighi likens these arrests to "spitting upward," a Persian idiom used to describe spiteful acts meant to hurt others, while their results end up splattering on one's own face. If you read the comments, you will note that several people think the poet depicted in the photo (Yaghma Golrouee) deserves his fate, because he had insulted Cyrus the Great in a poem! No one should be imprisoned for an opinion, period! Believing that certain figures are above reproach isn't much different from the mindsets of ISIL and Islamic Republic that believe anyone insulting Prophet Muhammad, any of the imams, Ayatollah Khomeini, or Supreme Leader Khamenei deserves to die.

(4) UCSB exits the NCAA men's soccer tournament: After advancing to the "Sweet-Sixteen," the 15th-seeded UCSB did not reach the "Elite-Eight" group, because of a 2-3 loss against Clemson, the tournament's second seed. The game was tied 1-1 at halftime, with Clemson scoring a disheartening goal in the last minute. Both teams scored around midway through the second half to make the score 2-2. Clemson's winning goal came in the 79th minute. Clemson capitalized on 3 of their 4 good scoring opportunities, whereas UCSB was much less effective in this regard.

2015/12/01 (Tuesday): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Iranian Women Writing Transnationally: This is the title of a [roundtable discussion](#) in Persian, as part of UCLA's Bilingual Lecture Series on Iran, to be held on Sunday, December 6, 2015, in 121 Dodd Hall on the UCLA campus. Dr. Nasrin Rahimieh will moderate the discussion, which includes 8 well-known women authors.

(2) Dancing to Iranian music at an unnamed American university. The song you hear is "Eshgh-e Man Baash" ("Be My Love"), sung by Behnam Safavi, who is unfortunately fighting brain cancer. It was rumored that he is on his deathbed, but this rumor has been debunked. Wishing him full recovery! [[2-minute video](#)]

(3) Jewish Kurds in Iraq: "A ceremony marking the deportation of Jews from Iraq seven decades ago was held for the first time on Monday in the country's autonomous Kurdish region." [[News story](#)]

(4) Serious piano music, but with a humorous twist: One of Victor Borge's trademark musical comedy routines involving two piano players on a single piano.

Note: If you read Persian, you can double your smiles by reading the Persian caption under the video. It says that (the emphases are mine) "Hungarian Rhapsody [No. 2]" is one of the most beautiful and FAMOUS pieces of

music that EVEN Iranians have enjoyed in the past; it has been featured in the "Tom & Jerry" cartoon series.

(5) Facebook CEO and wife announce **arrival of baby**: Mark Zuckerberg and Dr. Priscilla Chan also pledge to give 99% of their Facebook shares to charity over their lifetimes.

(6) The role of symmetry in 3D vision: This was the title of yesterday's very interesting UCSB talk by Professor Zygmunt Pizlo of Purdue University. After obtaining a PhD in electrical engineering, Dr. Pizlo earned a second PhD in psychology, thus becoming eminently qualified to pursue shape perception research in the field of computer vision. He is the lead author of the book *Making a Machine that Sees Like Us*.

Three-dimensional shape perception is difficult because depth information is lost in 2D imaging. Even when binocular vision is used, depth perception is inaccurate, particularly at long distance when the angle between the two viewing axes is fairly small. The speaker's main thesis was that depth reconstruction is unnecessary for seeing in 3D. We humans use a-priori cues to help with 3D perception, with or without binocular vision.

The most important a-priori cues are symmetry, compactness, and gravity. The latter cue arises from our knowledge that in a room, e.g., furniture and people stay on the floor, and this awareness gives us important information about depth. Compactness is the property of an object to have a small volume relative to its surface, that is, a small ratio V^2/S^3 , where V is the volume and S is the surface. Given multiple possible interpretations of a 2D image as a 3D object, our visual system gives strong preference to the most compact option.

The focus of the talk was, of course, on symmetry. Many objects have symmetry around a plane (there are also other kinds of symmetry that were not discussed in this talk). When we see a chair, for example, we mentally construct its mirror image based on symmetry and then use the two images to deduce its 3D shape; the speaker referred to this as the buy-one-get-one-free property. Symmetry provides so much information that it does not matter if parts of the chair are behind other objects or are otherwise invisible.

On this [demo page](#), you can see how the use of symmetry to deduce the 3D shape allows a robot to form a 3D model of a scene from a 2D image.

2015/11/30 (Monday): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) *Time* magazine features ISIS and inventions: The double issue of *Time* magazine, dated November 30 and December 7, 2015, has a cover feature entitled "World War ISIS," which is composed of multiple articles on the ISIS threat and possible countermeasures. A second feature, entitled "25 Best Inventions of 2015" introduces interesting inventions, such as a musical instrument that can be played like several different ones (by tapping, strumming, or banging) and a ball that helps teach kids to code in order to control how and when it lights up.



(2) Quote of the day: "Canada is back." ~ Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, ending his remarks at the Paris Climate Change Summit

(3) Gender gap study: According to the [World Economic Forum](#), Iceland takes the top spot in the world for gender equality. In seventh position, Philippines is the only Asian country making the top ten. Rounding up the top ten are Norway, Finland, Sweden, Ireland, Rwanda, Switzerland, Slovenia, and New Zealand. At the bottom of the 145 economies ranked are Yemen, Pakistan, Syria, Chad, Iran (#141), Jordan, Morocco, Lebanon, Mali, and Egypt. The United States is #28.

(4) The weaker sex? Not in rural Iran! [[Photos](#)]

(5) Evolution of the human face over 6 million years: Fascinating [2-minute time-lapse video](#), conjured up by science, art, and a bit of imagination.

(6) Secret-Santa and mathematics: For the past few years, our family has been doing a secret-Santa drawing about a month before Christmas, so that each person buys a single gift for the person s/he happens to draw. Of course, if a person draws his/her own name, the drawing is repeated. After we did the drawing on Saturday, I noticed that my sons were doing calculations to determine the probability that in the course of an n -person secret-Santa drawing, no one draws his/her own name, so that no repeated drawings occur. The problem proved more difficult than initially anticipated, so a Google search for possible solutions became necessary. It turned out that the kind of drawing in which person k does not draw the number k has a name: a 'derangement,' that is, a permutation in which no object appears in its 'natural' or ordered place. The function giving the number of distinct derangements is written as $!n$, which equals $[n!/e]$, where brackets denote the 'nearest integer' function. As n increases, starting at 2, the probability $!n/n!$ that no one draws her own name in an n -person secret-Santa drawing assumes the values $1/2, 1/3, 3/8, 11/30, 53/144, \dots$, tending for large values of n to $1/e \sim 0.36788$.

2015/11/29 (Sunday): Memorable evening at UCLA, celebrating the

life and work of poet/lyricist **Rahim Moeini Kermanshahi** (RMK): Following is a list of tributes, poetry readings, and music in tonight's program, held at UCLA's Dodd Hall, from 5:30 to 7:30 PM. There was standing-room-only in the auditorium, as evidenced by [this photo](#), taken 10 minutes before the program's start (many more people showed up afterwards). More than 100 attendees stood by the auditorium walls or sat in the aisles.



1. Emcee **Homa Sarshar** started the proceedings and provided an agenda for the 2-hour program.
2. Farhad Moeini Kermanshahi introduced his father and gave an overview of his life and works, including his recollections of how his dad worked meticulously and tirelessly on his book *Shahkar*, a 5000-page history of Iran (in verse, in the style of *Shahnameh*) from the time of Ferdowsi to the present. RMK devoted the last two decades of his life, from age 71 to his death last week at age 93, to this labor of love. The speaker conveyed his father's plea to young artists to respect the arts and artists by not stealing their work and not mutilating or otherwise transforming their creations to the point of making them unrecognizable. He also distributed copies of a sample [page of *Shahkar*](#), handwritten by RMK in pencil.
3. Poet and literary critic Dr. Mandana Zandian read passages from RMK's *Shahkar*.
4. Shahriar Ghanbari, who could not attend in person, spoke to the audience via a video message.
5. Singer Fataneh Eghbali, accompanied by violin and tombak, performed RMK's "[Raftam keh Raftam](#)."
6. Abbas Hojatpanah's short documentary film, based on an interview with RMK in 2005, was screened.
7. Journalist Alireza Meibodi related his views of, and interactions with, RMK.
8. Gordafarid, well known for her recitation of epic Persian poetry, [read from RMK's *Shahkar*](#).
9. Singer Arash Avin, accompanied by violin, performed RMK's "[Sang-e Khara](#)."
10. Nasser Pirasteh, a friend of RMK, spoke about how he met and what he learned from the maestro.
11. Dr. Mandana Zandian took the stage again and recited two of RMK's love poems.
12. Homa Sarshar read messages from noteworthy artists, who sent their respects and condolences.
13. Singer Sousan Yousefi, accompanied by violin and tombak, performed RMK's "[Mi-Gorizam](#)."
14. Singer Dariush Eghbali paid tribute to RMK and [sang one of his songs](#) impromptu, without music.
15. **Noushin Moeini Kermanshahi** closed the ceremonies by speaking briefly about her father and thanking those in attendance.
16. A final musical performance, an encore by Arash Avin, ended the proceedings.

[Note added on 12/04: Here is a [114-minute video](#) of the entire event, courtesy of N. Moeini Kermanshahi.]

[Side note: I was dismayed by the behavior of some attendees, all seemingly modern men and women, who argued about their place in the line formed before auditorium doors opened and about their right to save seats for friends not yet in attendance. Ironically, this behavior occurred at a gathering meant to honor a cultural icon known for his folksy lyrics and lifestyle.]

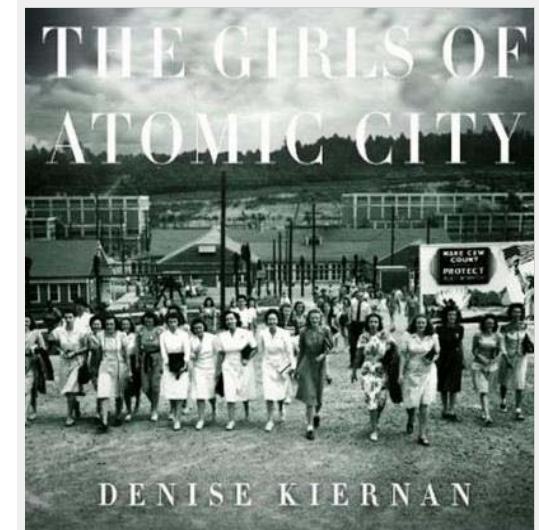
2015/11/27 (Friday): Here are four items of potential interest.

(1) Book review: Kiernan, Denise, *The Girls of Atomic City: The Untold Story of the Women Who Helped Win World War II*, unabridged audiobook on 11 CDs, read by Cassandra Campbell, Brilliance Audio, 2013.

The town of Oak Ridge in Tennessee, created from scratch in 1942 and having 75,000 residents at the height of World War II, was home to secret research and development activities in connection with the Manhattan Project, the US effort to develop the atomic bomb ahead of the Germans.

This book is really just another retelling of the story of how the US beat Germany to the bomb, embellished by the experiences of women who were recruited from small towns for (mostly) clerical and other low-level jobs in the newly built city, complete with a psychiatric ward to treat loneliness and anxiety resulting from the hush-hush environment, where revealing information about one's work was punishable by job loss and eviction, and where workers were recruited to spy on others.

The women, like other workers, didn't find out about the nature of the work at Oak Ridge (uranium enrichment) until the first atomic bomb, code named "Little Boy," was dropped on Hiroshima. Most thought their stay at Oak



Ridge was temporary and that they would be returning home after the war. Many ended up marrying scientists or military men they met there.

A lot of research has gone into writing this book, including interviews with many surviving women, but the end result is not very enlightening or appealing. Not helping with the book's appeal are many instances of poor writing and editing, causing the reader/listener to lose track of ideas and their connections.

Perhaps I would have had a more positive assessment had I pursued the hard-copy book format instead of the audiobook version, but I have heard similar concerns from reviewers of the book. There are better books about the atomic-bomb effort than this one. The misogyny reflected in the women's experiences was widespread in the 1940s and was not confined to those at Oak Ridge.

(2) Monarch butterflies in Goleta: In this [1-minute video](#), taken at the Goleta Butterfly Grove today, you see clusters of Monarch butterflies appearing like leaves on tree branches, as well as an occasional single butterfly fluttering around.

(3) Mouthwatering display of fruits and other edibles: I don't know where [this place](#) is, but would very much like being invited to attend! Even though the Persian description reads "Heads of State Summit Feast," it appears to me more like a trade exhibit, rather than a feast.

(4) Final thought for the day: "I am grateful for what I am and have. My thanksgiving is perpetual." ~ Henry David Thoreau

2015/11/26 (Thursday): Here are four items of potential interest.

(1) Happy Thanksgiving Day: On this day, I am thankful for three healthy, bright children, a loving and supportive family, and many caring friends.

(2) Words of wisdom for the upcoming Black Friday: "If you are not content today, there is nothing you can buy this weekend that would change that." ~ Anonymous

(3) Incompetent Photoshoppers at Iranian state-owned media: Photos of Iranian actresses at a news conference were Photoshopped childishly to hide their exposed strands of hair, presumably to help them and the readers of the newspaper get into heaven! Most Iranian women lead double lives. Actresses, it seems, have triple lives: their private lives, their professional lives visible in the first of these [pair of photos](#), and their on-stage lives in which the hijab requirements are stricter!

(4) Modern Persian music: Violin maestro Bijan Mortazavi performs "Ayriliq" (an Azeri folk song) with a big orchestra. [[7-minute video](#)]



2015/11/25 (Wednesday): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) A beach resort island in the making:

According to the Japanese Coast Guard, a volcanic island that popped up in the middle of the Pacific Ocean 2 years ago has now grown to 12 times its initial size.

(2) Today is international day for the elimination of violence against women: A conservative estimate indicates that one in three women and girls experience violence in their lifetime (up to 70%, according to some sources). This can be eliminated through education and by setting examples for our children and students. Verbal abuse is a form of violence and it often leads to physical violation.



(3) Iranian music icon commemorated: I hope to be able to make it to [this event](#) in honor of Rahim Moeini Kermanshahi, the legendary poet and lyricist who recently passed away in Iran. The event is held on Sunday, November 29, 2015, in Dodd Hall 147 on the UCLA campus, from 5:00 to 7:00 PM. Poetry and music will be included in the tribute program.

(4) Mr. Haloo [pays tribute](#) to a legendary poet/lyricist: Mohammad Reza Ali Payam (aka Mr. Haloo) recites a poem he wrote for Rahim Moeini Kermanshahi. At the end, he recites one of his popular humorous poems.

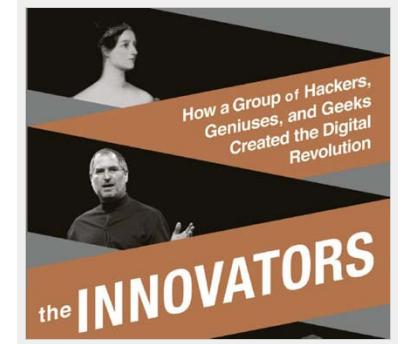
(5) Puzzle: Add any number of mathematical symbols in the equality below to make it hold: $8 \ 8 \ 8 = 6$
[From: *IEEE Potentials* magazine, issue of November-December 2015]

(6) Final thought for the day: "Just because something doesn't do what you planned it to do doesn't mean it's useless." ~ Thomas A. Edison

2015/11/24 (Tuesday): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Book review: Isaacson, Walter, *The Innovators: How a Group of Hackers, Geniuses, and Geeks Created the Digital Revolution*, unabridged audiobook on 15 CDs, read by Dennis Boutsikaris, Simon & Schuster Audio, 2014.

This book, written by Isaacson following the success of his biography of Steve Jobs, is already hailed as the standard history of the digital revolution. Featured in the narrative are pioneers such as Ada Lovelace (also prominently depicted on the cover, along with Steve Jobs), the 1840s pioneer of what we know today as programming, and 20th-century visionaries such as Vannevar Bush, Alan Turing, John von Neumann, J. C. R. Licklider, Doug Engelbart, Robert Noyce, Bill Gates, Steve Wozniak, Steve Jobs, Tim Berners-Lee, and Larry Page.



These people often collaborated in groups and adopted/hijacked ideas from others, so it is difficult to assign credit for a particular innovation or invention. The most important advances resulted from work in "idea factories," such as AT&T's Bell Laboratories. We see bitter rivalries as well of missteps in the stories of these all-too-human pioneers. Some innovators remained humble scientists/engineers, while others developed huge egos, and a few (like William Shockley of the transistor fame, now remembered for his racist theories) overstepped their expertise and made fools of themselves.

This is a great book to peruse for both the general public and tech history buffs, and it can also be viewed as a valuable reference volume, a function that cannot be served by the audiobook.

(2) ISIS has little chance against Western hackers and cybersecurity forces: It will take a while, but crackdowns from administrators of Twitter and other social media sites have already reduced the effectiveness of ISIS recruiting programs. And this is on top of hacker attacks on on-line accounts of ISIS and ISIS sympathizers. Thought you might like a piece of [positive news](#) amid all the doomsday stories.

(3) Hatred is blind: One of the latest **stabbing victims** in Israel is a 70-year-old Palestinian man who was mistaken for a Jew. In a classic case of denial, Palestinian Authority officials claim that Israel plants knives near the bodies of the Palestinians it kills.

(4) Gigantic data (beyond "big data"): We now generate 2.5 quintillion* bytes of data per day, and this is set to explode to 40 yottabytes** per day by 2020. [From: *IEEE Computing Edge*]

*Quintillion = 10^{18} = 1 billion billion (the prefix "exa" is used for 10^{18} , as in "exabytes" = gigagigabytes)

**The prefix "yotta" stands for 10^{24} , that is, one trillion trillion (as in "yottabytes" = teraterabytes)

(5) What we can learn about culture from analyzing millions of books: Here is an informative and entertaining [14-minute TEDx talk](#) about the Google-sponsored ngram project that built an index of all ngrams used in 5 million books and made it available to everyone, with some interesting results.

P.S.: I experimented with [Google ngram viewer](#) by entering triples of words/phrases such as "Iran, Persia, Persian Gulf", "Pahlavi, Khomeini, Khamenei", and "Israel, Palestine, Lebanon". The usage frequencies of various terms over the years tell us so much about cultural and historical trends. Try it out; you'll like it!

2015/11/22 (Sunday): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) College soccer: UCSB (in blue), which had received a first-round bye in the NCAA tournament due to being seeded 15th in a field of 48 teams, played South Carolina (in white; 1-1 winner over Furman on PKs) in the second round tonight.

In theory, this should have been an easy win for UCSB, due to SC being unseeded and UCSB playing at home. So, it came as a surprise to me when the regulation time ended in a scoreless draw, with UCSB unable to finish on many scoring opportunities.



Fortunately, UCSB scored less than 3 minutes into the first of two 10-minute sudden-victory overtime periods to advance to the "Sweet-16" third round.

UCSB will play away from home on 11/29 at the second-seeded Clemson, which had a predictably easy 5-2 victory over Elon. Interestingly, the current NCAA tournament for UCSB is a carbon-copy of the 2011 season, when the Gauchos were also seeded 15th and got to play and lost to the second-seeded Creighton 1-2 in the third round. Hope the similarity ends here!

(2) Ethiopia, Iran, and China are tops in Internet censorship: These three countries censor in every one of the 10 categories considered (criticism of authorities, news/opinion on conflict, accusations of corruption, views from the political opposition, satire/ridicule, blasphemous content, cultural commentary, on-line protests, information about minorities, LGBT issues). [Info from: *Time* magazine, issue of November 23, 2015]

(3) Ad for **RCA-807 vacuum tube** from March 1940: Seventy-five years ago, many ordinary citizens could not afford to buy a new radio receiver, yet RCA was doing brisk business selling its tubes to amateur radio

operators. RCA closed its electron tube operation in 1976, but 807s are still made in Russia and China, to the delight of audio enthusiasts. [Source: *IEEE Spectrum* magazine, issue of November 2015.]

(4) Interesting fact of the day: Six US Secretaries of State have gone on to become Presidents, but none in the past 160 years. And, of course, none of them was a women. [From "Fareed Zakaria GPS," November 22, 2015.]

(5) Breakfast in post-apocalypse America: This is the title of a [Newsweek on-line article](#) about a facility in Colorado that holds a library of plant and animal material we would need to start over, should everything be wiped out due to a natural or man-made disaster; a modern Noah's Ark, if you will.

(6) Professor Fazlollah Reza speaks in Ottawa: He was honored by the Iranian-Canadian community on November 7, 2015, for many services rendered to Iran in his 101 years. Reza is the lone survivor of the first graduating class of Fanni (Engineering) College of University of Tehran. He specializes in electrical and electronics engineering and has made notable contributions to information theory and systems theory (including authoring a highly successful textbook). This [52-minute Persian talk](#) about Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* (*Book of Kings*), however, is non-technical and draws upon the speaker's vast knowledge about Iran's cultural and literary heritage. This video contains Dr. Shervin Erfani's [introductory remarks](#) before Professor Reza's lecture.

2015/11/21 (Saturday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) FAST radio telescope: The 500m-aperture spherical telescope, the world's largest and most sensitive, is nearing completion in southwest China. [From: *IEEE Spectrum*, issue of November 2015.]



(2) Puzzle: Consider the following "equalities":

$55 = 131 \mid 90 = 194 \mid -35 = -31 \mid 10 = 50 \mid -50 = -58$
Extrapolating from the above, what would be an equality with both sides the same? That is, find x such that $x = x$. [From: *IEEE Potentials*, November-December 2015]

(3) American exceptionalism: The US is [26th in the world](#) in infant mortality rate. [Source: *IEEE Spectrum* magazine, issue of November 2015.]

(4) "The Interlace" building: This brilliantly designed [apartment complex](#) in Singapore has more than 1000 units. And here is a more detailed [11-minute unedited video](#).

(5) Vancouver's [twisted tower](#): Most skyscrapers are more bulky at the bottom and are tapered near the top. A planned Vancouver tower, to be completed in 2019 on a narrow triangular lot, is just the opposite.

(6) Republican presidential candidates on tax reform: Six want to reduce the top marginal rate from 39.6% to 35% (Rubio), 28% (Bush, Christie, Kasich), 25% (Trump, Jindal). Four are flat-taxers, proposing a flat rate of 20% (Santorum), 15% (Carson), 14.5% (Paul), 10% (Cruz). [Info from: *Time* magazine, November 23, 2015]

(7) Iranian women's public and private lives: Women are responding to a call to post their photos with and without hijab to the Facebook page "My Stealthy Freedom." [This pair of photos](#) bears the caption "Hoping for a day when we can live our reality."

(8) A hot potato in Iran: In [an article](#), that contains some hype but is at least partially accurate in my judgment, journalist Amir Taheri writes of a serious dilemma faced by Iranian politicians, as the December 15 nuclear-deal deadline for dismantling 10,000 centrifuges and permanently disabling a nuclear reactor approaches. No one seems to want to sign the official order that would allow technicians and other low-level employees to carry out these actions. The politicians seem to remember well the fate of the late Shah's ministers who were executed for treason, because of their involvement in foreign political pacts or trade deals. The Supreme Leader certainly will not sign the order, because he prefers to have all the power, with no accountability. He will take credit for the deal if it succeeds, but wants no part of a failed deal. All others involved apparently fear that the deal will be unsuccessful, thus exposing them to various charges or to house arrest with no charges.

(9) Final thought for the day: "The idea is to die young as late as possible." ~ Ashley Montagu

2015/11/20 (Friday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) Oxford English Dictionary's word of the year is an emoji: The new word is officially called "face with tears of joy." In 2013, the chosen new word was "selfie"; in 2014, it was "vape."



(2) Humor, based on a cartoon by John Atkinson: Updated chess pieces, and how they move. Annoying friend: Always needs help moving. Hashtagger: Doesn't use spaces.

Hummer: Takes up two spaces. Politician: Moves right, then left, then right again.

(3) A friend, author Firoozeh Dumas, decides to go silver and leave Facebook: Maybe her friends' reactions (dozens of comments within a few minutes of her Facebook post) will make her reconsider the second decision.

Good luck to her in either case!

"Dear Facebook friends: When I turned 50 this year, I made a list of ten things I wanted to do. Number One was to ditch the hair dye. This Persian cat is going silver. (Thank goodness for German winters. Hats, hats and more hats.) Number Two was to delete my Facebook account. As much as I enjoy staying connected with friends around the world, I am choosing to go on a different path. The other eight things on my list you will hear about later. (Maybe.) For information on events, and other deep thoughts, please follow me on Twitter at firoozehdumas. Thank you to all of you for being a part of my online community on Facebook. I look forward to actually meeting many of you at my book events in the coming years!"

(4) Famous refugees: Isabel Allende, Frederic Chopin, Albert Einstein, Anne Frank, Sigmund Freud, Victor Hugo, Claude Levi-Strauss, Vladimir Nabokov, and Rudolph Nureyev were all refugees. Steve Jobs' father was a refugee.

(5) Puzzle: A hunter meets two shepherds, one of whom is in possession of 3 loaves of bread and the other one has 5 loaves. They decide to share the 8 loaves equally. When they have eaten, the hunter gives the shepherds 8 coins. How should the two shepherds divide this money to be fair? [From: *IEEE Potentials* magazine, issue of November-December 2015]

(6) Day-long siege in Mali hotel ends with 27 dead: Islamist group al-Mourabitoun claims credit for the incident that ended with a raid to free the hostages. The group briefly pledged its loyalty to ISIS but later rescinded the alliance.

(7) What makes someone a religious extremist? Haroon Ullah, adjunct professor of foreign policy at Georgetown University has a [very clear explanation](#).

(8) Quote of the day: "We have this nontrivial problem of having to get the deniers out of the way. They're trouble." ~ Bill Nye, 'The Science Guy,' in a *Time* magazine interview, issue of November 23, 2015 [The author of *Undeniable*, in support of evolution, Nye has just published a book, *Unstoppable*, about climate change.]

(9) How I spent the early part of last evening: I sat at a local Starbucks, reading the book *Searching for Hassan* (which I will review when finished), listening to a talented street musician, watching the activities at an adjacent small farmers market, and taking in the fresh air on a perfect November day. There are a couple of things that I would change if I could, but life IS beautiful!

2015/11/18 (Wednesday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) Brief book review: Didion, Joan, *Blue Nights*, unabridged audiobook on 4 CDs, read by Kimberly Farr, Books on Tape, 2011.

Joan Didion, widely regarded as America's top essayist, wrote a best-selling book, *The Year of Magical Thinking*, after her husband of 40 years, John Gregory Dunne, died suddenly in 2003 of a heart attack. The death of her adopted daughter Quintana Roo Dunne in 2005, only 20 months after her husband's, is what brought about this touching companion book, in which the author wonders whether she did her motherly duties to nurture, protect, and care for her daughter. In other words, did she love her enough?

Quintana's life story is weaved together with the author's own childhood and with her married life. Death of a loved one is a transformative event, and death of two loved ones in rapid succession is even more so. Didion writes beautifully and honestly about her painful transformation.

There is also the story of Quintana's birth family: one of her two siblings, a sister, tracked her down, using a detective and on-line investigative work, which led to Quintana being connected with her birth family in Dallas and undergoing a difficult period of adjustment.

This isn't an easy book to read, or to hear, but it is certainly worth the effort.

(2) Quote of the day: "I'm not as interested in what you have to tell or sell as I am in how you choose to live and give." ~ Cory Booker

(3) Fact worth remembering: Since 9/11, 750,000 refugees have been resettled in America. Not one has been arrested on domestic terrorism charges. [From *The Economist*]

(4) A Frenchman's powerful message to ISIS: Antoine Leiris lost his wife in the Paris terror attacks but he makes it clear that he or his 17-month-old son won't give the terrorists the satisfaction of hating them.

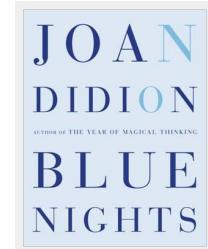
(5) Seals playing 2-on-2 volleyball: Very impressive!

(6) The return of the Arab dictator: This is the title of a [Newsweek on-line article](#) about how current events in the Middle East and North Africa have dashed the hopes of the Arab Spring in Egypt and elsewhere.

(7) While my guitar gently weeps: A wonderful rendition of the [George Harrison song](#) by guitar maestro Carlos Santana, with vocals by India Arie.

(8) Best kebab dishes in Los Angeles: I did a Google search to find places where they serve calf liver kebab and came across [this list](#) of mostly family-run kebab places. Among them is Denj (20002 Ventura Blvd., near Winnetka, Woodland Hills), which I plan to visit soon.

(9) Final thought for the day: "Anxiety is the dizziness of freedom." ~ Soren Kierkegaard



2015/11/17 (Tuesday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Iran and the Paris attacks: While President Rouhani and FM Javid Zarif have condemned the Paris terrorist attacks, Supreme Leader Khamenei has been eerily quiet on the topic. Interestingly, however, the *Kayhan* Daily, overseen by a Khamenei-appointed loyal protege, reveals his viewpoint. *Kayhan* ran the following headline on November 15, 2015: "The Rabid Dog of DAESH Bit the Leg of Its Owners"

(2) Quote of the day: "Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards." ~ Soren Kierkegaard

(3) Three suicide bombers targeted the Paris soccer stadium:

Luckily, none of them got inside. Quick thinking in locking down instead of evacuating the stadium **may have saved hundreds of lives**.



(4) Conspiracy theories, denials, and celebrations: As in the case of many previous terrorist attacks, including those of 9/11, conspiracy theories and denials are beginning to emerge for the Paris massacre. First and foremost, are the theories that it was the work of Mossad/Zionists/Israel/CIA/MI6. The second category begins with "what attacks?" How come no one videotaped an actual explosion or a terrorist as he was shooting a victim? The incident was staged with hired actors and cameramen, as an excuse for killing 8 Muslims and giving Islam a bad name. Then, there is the matter of street celebrations in Gaza. With the first few photos, I thought that someone might have used images from past festive occasions, trying to pass them off as new images connected with the Paris terrorist attacks. Then I saw an image of celebrations, with burning of a French flag featuring prominently, and I knew that some Muslims are actually happy about the deaths.

(5) A revealing reply from an ISIS prisoner about what motivated the young recruits: "[The Americans] took away Saddam, but they also took away our security. I didn't like Saddam, we were starving then, but at least we didn't have war. When you came here, the civil war started." [[Full article](#)]

[Note added on 11/18: Those who instigated the civil war by their intolerant ideologies are ultimately responsible for the casualties. Blaming their woes on foreigners is typical in the Middle East, but this is what they think and what should be corrected via constructive dialog.]

(6) Rahim Moeini Kermanshahi, Iranian poet and lyricist, **passes away**: He began his songwriting career more than six decades ago quite accidentally. He was an employee and then a manager at Radio Iran, when he was asked to write the lyrics for a song by a musician colleague. This **4-hour sound file** contains many of his songs.

(7) Haters and fear-mongers are helping ISIL: This Australian Muslim TV host uses on-line communications and other ISIL documents **to warn us** that haters and fear-mongers are falling into the trap set by ISIL. One of ISIL's goals is to make Muslims feel alienated throughout the world, so that they see ISIL as their savior.

(8) Final thought for the day: "To dare is to lose one's footing momentarily. Not to dare is to lose oneself." ~ Soren Kierkegaard

2015/11/16 (Monday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) An alternative to despair after terror attacks: The world moves in the direction of healing and improvement when all of us do our best in our jobs and other activities. Terrorists take lives and create a shock that slows us momentarily, but they cannot dictate our mood, unless we become paralyzed, as they wish. This **Persian essay** by author Moniro Ravanipour makes these points forcefully and eloquently.

(2) Quote of the day: "Love is all, it gives all, and it takes all." ~ Soren Kierkegaard

(3) Net worths of presidential candidates, **according to Forbes**: At the bottom of the list (#20) is Martin O'Malley, with a net worth of zero (he took on debt to send his kids to college). The rest, in order of increasing net worth are Marco Rubio (\$100K), Bernie Sanders (\$700K), Lindsey Graham (\$1M), Rick Santorum (\$2M), Rand Paul (\$2M), Chris Christie (\$3M), Ted Cruz (\$3.5M), Bobby Jindal (\$5M), Jim Webb (\$6M), Jim Gilmore (\$7M), Mike Huckabee (\$9M), John Kasich (\$10M+), George Pataki (\$13), Jeb Bush (\$22M), Ben Carson (\$26M), Lincoln Chafee (\$32M), Hillary Clinton (\$45M), Carly Fiorina (\$58M), Donald Trump (\$4.5B).

(4) Brief news of the day about the Paris terrorist attacks:

- The hacker group Anonymous declares all-out cyberwar on ISIS
- Official Palestinian Authority newspaper claims that Israel and Mossad carried out the Paris attacks
- Palestinians in Gaza celebrate the Paris attacks and burn the French flag
- Far-right rabbi calls the Paris deaths payback for the Holocaust
- Belgium and Norway have arrested several suspects in connection with the Paris attacks
- Decision to lock down rather than evacuate the Paris soccer stadium may have saved many lives

(5) Drum and piano duel: **Havasi plays** in a symphonic arena show.

(6) College soccer: The UCSB men's soccer team has earned a first-round bye in the 2015 NCAA tournament by

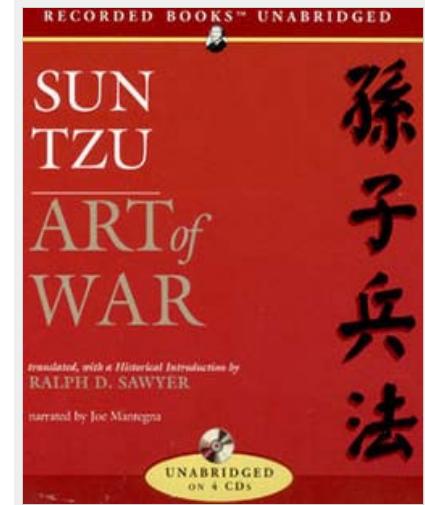
virtue of being seeded among the top 16 teams nationally. There are a total of 48 teams, with 32 of them playing in the first round to get a chance to advance to the second round. UCSB will play at home on Sunday 11/22, 6:00 PM, against the winner of South Carolina vs. Furman.

(7) Final thought for the day: "People demand freedom of speech as a compensation for the freedom of thought which they seldom use." ~ Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard [1813-1855]

2015/11/14 (Saturday): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Brief book review: Sun Tzu, *Art of War*, unabridged audiobook on 4 CDs read by Joe Mantegna, Recorded Books, 2001.

I had heard a lot about this book (written by a Chinese general more than 2500 years ago) and the wise counsel it dispenses, not just in matters of war-making, aka military science, but also in sociology and human relations. In discussing methods of winning, Sun Tzu teaches how to do so without fighting, when possible, or at least with minimal casualties on both sides. The book also enumerates and assesses the importance of leadership qualities. A recurring theme is the importance of knowing yourself and your enemy (or, in the context of business and athletics applications of these ideas, your competition). "So it is said that if you know others and know yourself, you will not be imperiled in a hundred battles; if you do not know others but know yourself, you win one and lose one; if you do not know others and do not know yourself, you will be imperiled in every single battle." Such parallel constructs and the associated repetitive style of writing are very typical of the entire book.



(2) Quote of the day: "Donald Trump has said that if he is elected President, we will all be saying 'Merry Christmas' again. I don't know about that, but we will definitely be saying 'Jesus Christ' a lot." ~ Saturday Night Live, "Weekend Update"

(3) "Imagine": **Pianist's performance** on a Paris street, after the recent terror attacks.

(4) A musical tribute to the City of Light: The **mesmerizing song** "Paris," by Marc Lavoine and Saoud Massi.

(5) Please let me grieve on my own terms: Today, several people posted a text on Facebook that begins: "It is not Paris we should pray for. It is the world." Like many other posts that hijacked the Paris tragedy to advance their xenophobic and hateful agendas, this one too wants to use the incident for political purposes, while deflecting attention from the tragedy itself. [Not all those who reposted may have been politically motivated, though.] Conservatives are using it to diss immigration; Obama-haters are blaming him for the attacks; the far right is demonizing Islam. Yes, all losses are important and, as they say, every life matters. But, how many of the people who cite the latter slogan truly care about lives lost to poverty, hunger, disease, drunken driving, gun accidents, and so on? Each of these death categories, as well as suicide bombings, ethnic cleansing, and political executions is truly important and must be dealt with, the way we deal with various diseases: through research for finding preventive measures and remedies. But today, I would like to focus on Paris. I am more connected, emotionally (my daughter is studying in France), culturally, linguistically, and in many other ways to France than to virtually any other country besides the two where I have resided for half of my life (each). Telling me not to mourn Paris but rather mourn all of the other incidents at the same time is like someone coming to me on the day my father died with the suggestion that I should remember and pay tribute to all fathers, many of whom died on the same day. My answer would have been: Let me grieve the way I like. I will pay tribute to other fathers on some other day.

2015/11/13 (Friday): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) The Paris tragedy: [Many friends are struggling to understand and cope with the senseless **violence in Paris** that took the lives of 150 or so people. Let me share with you a comment I made on a friend's Facebook post about this topic.] It is easy to feel despair in the face of brutal acts against innocent victims. But, if we step back and look at these 100-200 deaths in perspective, they are but a small blip in the history of the human race.

This may sound cold-hearted, but viewing the Paris deaths, or even the 3000 deaths of 9/11, as results of the terrorism disease, will motivate us to redouble our efforts to find countermeasures. Diseases have taken much larger tolls and for each one, rather than throwing in the towel, humans have worked hard to find prevention tools and remedies.

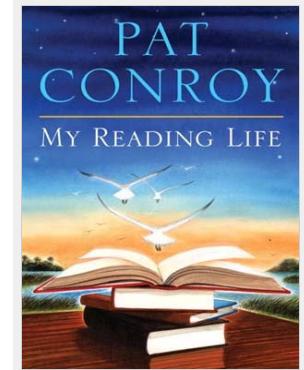


I agree that moderate Muslims should become more vocal in condemning these acts, if not for the sake of humanity and moral imperative, then for protecting their own religion. There is no doubt that these thugs will be

brought down sooner or later; the question is whether they will take Islam down with them. The latter is a real possibility if moderate Muslims fail to speak up.

(2) Brief book review: Conroy, Pat, *My Reading Life*, unabridged audiobook on 7 CDs read by the author, Random House Audio, 2010.

In this book, the author conveys his love of reading, a lifelong passion that probably saved his sanity, if not his life. He writes about people (especially an English teacher) and places (notably the public library) that nurtured his passion for reading. For many years, the author kept notebooks in which he recorded words, expressions, and phrases, creating a treasury of useful ideas and language constructs from which he could draw inspiration in his own writing. I started listening to this audiobook, but was turned off by the style of writing and by the author's reading voice, stopping about one-third of the way through the audiobook. Despite its compelling subject matter, I found the book rather boring; other reviewers, however, have painted a much rosier picture of the book and the author's writing style.



(3) To Live and Dine in L.A.: This is the title of **an exhibition** running until Sunday 11/15 at the Los Angeles Central Library (downtown), featuring old restaurant menus, with lots of food-related lectures and other activities, that will delight "[b]ookworms, foodies, and foodie bookworms."

(4) Persian music: The song "**Beh Man Nakhand**" ("Don't Laugh at Me"), performed by Sattar and Mahasti.

(5) Kurdish construction workers **enjoying themselves** with music and dance.

2015/11/12 (Thursday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Iranian pop diva Googoosh, with and without makeup.



(2) Quote of the day: "Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness." ~ Desmond Tutu

(3) The new Monument Men: A Middle-East parallel has been developing to the WW II group known as Monuments Men (which, by the way, included a few women), who saved a great deal of Europe's most-important artwork from looting and ravages of war. **The new group** extensively documents and photographs historical artifacts, and, when possible, hides them in locations known only to a few, in order to protect them (or at least their likenesses) from extremist Islamic groups and opportunistic looters that operate in the chaos they create.

(4) Santa Barbara area vulnerable to long, widespread power outage in case of disaster: According to a report by our local **ABC TV station**, KEYT, Southern California Edison documents from 2012 reveal major concerns over the reliability of the two power lines coming from Ventura to Santa Barbara, given that both lines go over the same set of towers located in areas eroded by mudslides and fires, potentially leading to weeks-long outages in the event of an earthquake or another natural disaster.

(5) A sampling of higher education news from the past couple of days:

- University of Missouri President and Chancellor resign amid allegations of inaction against racism (*USA Today*)
- University of California System to increase enrollment by 10,000 (*San Jose Mercury News*)
- Dean of Texas Tech College of Business resigns over his role in a grade-changing scandal (*Houston Chronicle*)
- Arizona State University builds \$120M engineering student housing (*Phoenix Business Journal*)
- See also my 11/09 post about a serious case of sexual misconduct at Stanford University's School of Business

(6) UCSB Reads program's 2016 book selection: The book that will provide a common reading experience and discussion opportunities for UCSB students, faculty, staff, and our surrounding community is Bryan Stevenson's *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* (Spiegel & Grau, 2014). A MacArthur Fellow and Executive Director of the Equal Justice Initiative, the author has been described by Nobel Laureate Desmond Tutu as "America's young Nelson Mandela." Stevenson has famously said: "The opposite of poverty isn't wealth ... the opposite of poverty is justice." The highly successful UCSB Reads program is in its 10th anniversary year now.

(7) Final thought for the day: "A person often meets his destiny on the road he took to avoid it." ~ Jean de la Fontaine [Reposted from November 2014]

2015/11/11 (Wednesday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) A nice classification of Indo-European languages:

I had posted a similar tree diagram a long time ago, but this one's more detailed.

(2) Iran's President Rouhani cancels attendance at planned Elysee Palace lunch with

François Hollande, because the French authorities would not agree not to serve wine.

(3) Header ban in youth soccer: New US soccer guidelines **ban heading** the ball for children up to 10, and they also limit heading the ball for those 11-13 years old.

(4) College soccer: Tonight, I attended a Big West Conference semifinals men's soccer match between UCSB and UC Davis. The game was scoreless until about 11 minutes from the end, when UCSB finally broke through after many missed opportunities to score the winning goal. On Saturday 11/14, UCSB will face Cal State Fullerton (3-1 winner of the other semifinals game against Cal Poly) here at UCSB.

(5) Mandatory hijab in Iran: A French reporter asked Iran's President Rouhani whether Iran cannot follow the examples of Tunisia, Morocco, and Turkey in allowing women freedom in their choice of clothing. After repeating regime authorities' talking point that we have more serious problems to deal with, **Rouhani said** that clothing restrictions are the law of the land (for men and women) and laws should be respected. He dodged the question of whether laws can be changed. Rouhani must be reminded of this quote from Louis D. Brandeis: "If we desire respect for the law, we must first make the law respectable."

(6) The dystory of Ahmed's clock: This is the title of [an article](#) by Hal Berghel in the November 2015 issue of *IEEE Computer* magazine. The word "dystory" means a "fabrication purportedly based on real events, but that is actually based on falsehoods, deceptions, misrepresentations, distortions, and misinterpretations to conceal the primary intent to mislead, misdirect, or manipulate an unwary audience." Ahmed's clock became a useful artifact in the service of those who wanted to promote their xenophobic and fear-mongering interests. Thus, the boy's project couldn't be thought of as an attention-getting expression of a teenager with an attitude. Rather, it was made into a hoax- or half-bomb through imagining an intent of use that wasn't there. The author expresses disappointment that computer specialists did not step forward to explain the obvious: that interpreting a digital clock as a potential bomb-making component is an ideological interpretation, not a scientific one.

(7) The following quote is appropriate for today, when we honor soldiers and veterans, who make sacrifices in fighting wars, while generals and politicians are remembered in historical records as heroes. Happy Veterans' Day! [Quote of the day: "In war the heroes always outnumber the soldiers ten to one." ~ H. L. Mencken]

2015/11/10 (Tuesday): Here are nine items of potential interest



(1) Beautiful panoramic evening photo of Tagh-e Bostan, an ancient historical site in Kermanshah, Iran.

(2) Quote of the day: "Their idea of fast food is snail." ~ Bill Maher, on the French, who take their time in almost everything, yet conduct their election campaigns in a matter of weeks (not a couple of years, as in the US)

(3) British family helping refugees arriving on boats to the island of Lesbos in Greece: This **8-minute video** shows the enormous problems they, and a group of other unpaid volunteers, face.

(4) Duet in Persian and Turkish: Sattar and Ersin Faikzadeh sing "Simin Bari."

(5) Stunning UNESCO World Heritage site in China: [Aerial video](#) of Guilin and Yangshuo, set to beautiful music.

(6) Omelet muffins: An excellent **breakfast idea**. I will try it out soon!

(7) Are Palestinian children dispensable? Why are they sent on stabbing missions, instead of their elders or the clerics and other leaders who incite them?

(8) The fourth Republican presidential debate: Mike Huckabee and Chris Christie were not included in tonight's main debate. Here are random soundbites from the 8 candidates in the main debate.

Jeb Bush: Our next commander-in-chief must rebuild the military and restore respect to veterans.

Ben Carson: Regulations are creating an abnormal situation, costing money for individuals.

Ted Cruz: I have an exemption and then, above that, everyone should pay a flat, fair tax of 10%.

Carly Fiorina: Socialism starts when government creates a problem and then steps in to solve it.

John Kasich: On-the-job training for the President of the United States does not work.

Rand Paul: I am the only fiscal conservative on this stage (who'd cut spending across the board).

Marco Rubio: Putin is a gangster who controls a large economy and seeks geo-political power.

Donald Trump: We cannot let Hillary Clinton, the worst Secretary of State in our history, win.

(9) Final thought for the day: "Between what is said and not meant, and what is meant and not said, most of love is lost." ~ Khalil Gibran

2015/11/09 (Monday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) A most unusual sunset. (Sunrise?)

(2) Word puzzle: Complete the following words using these clues, which are given in random order. (a) Equipment with automated parts. (b) Butternut squash alternatives. (c) Kissing. (d) Classic 1974 film noir set in LA. (e) Spine-covered ocean dweller; 2 words. (f) Man with a list played by Liam Neeson.

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(3) "The perfect is the enemy of the good": This famous quote from Voltaire serves as an apt reminder to some Iranian expats who criticize every effort of opposition groups that does not rise to the level of toppling the Islamic regime in Iran. My advice to fellow Iranian-Americans and others living in exile is to praise good deeds, even though they do not rise to the status of perfect in their view. Remember another metaphor: Each small act of protest (like one woman taking her headscarf off in public) is like a straw that may not have much effect in isolation, but it takes us in the direction of the final straw that, in the end, breaks the camel's back.

(4) Large group of **tambour players** perform in Kermanshah, Iran.

(5) Scientology tell-all makes serious accusations: **Leah Remini's book**, *Troublemaker*, is the latest exposé written by a Scientology defector. Among the juicy details in the book are how church officials milk the recruits, who end up paying in excess of \$0.5M over time for books, lectures, courses, and misdeed penalties, regardless of their income, often racking up huge credit-card debts in the process. There are also allegations of misconduct against multiple high-ranking members, including Tom Cruise.

(6) Sexual harassment policy and a love triangle at Stanford's Graduate School of Business: In what reads like a juicy novel, the love triangle involving the dean of business school (a man) and two senior professors, who were getting divorced, is told in this **Vanity Fair article**. The sexual intrigue, though not uninteresting, isn't what made me write about the matter. The story of how the affair went around Stanford's established sexual-harassment policies, isn't my focus either, even though there are several important lessons in it (all UC faculty members are required to complete an on-line sexual harassment training course every couple of years). What caught my eye is the woman's description in court hearings (in connection with her divorce) of how difficult it was for her to get "electronically untangled" from her estranged husband. They had shared passwords and she routinely asked him to help her with computer and cell-phone technical problems, allowing him to discover the affair and, later, to monitor her communications to gain leverage in the divorce case. It is a slippery slope. Couples sharing passwords is clearly good to establish and nurture trust in a relationship. However, as this case reveals, there is potential for trouble if the relationship goes sour.

(7) Final thought for the day: "Because it's 2015." ~ Justin Trudeau, newly elected Canadian PM, when asked why he went with gender balance in his cabinet appointments (15 of 31 cabinet members are women)

2015/11/08 (Sunday): Here are four items of potential interest.

(1) Persian love poem: This playful poem is

attributed to Marjan Alishahi on one Web site and is posted without attribution on many others.

(2) We weren't children, we were lambs: Thus begins a heartfelt **Persian essay** by Azita Khaghani (from Dubai), who writes about her childhood experiences and how they were different from those of today's kids.

(3) Vintage 5-minute historical film: Polish refugees in Iran, at the outset of World War II. According to Wikipedia, Polish refugee camps in Iran were located in the cities of Tehran, Isfahan, Mashhad, and Ahvaz. Most of them arrived by boat across the Caspian Sea, after a train ride to the Soviet Union. Wikipedia also says that due to hostility from the Soviet Union and the approaching German army, Poles did not stay in Iran for long, but says little about their eventual fates. It is safe to say that they gradually moved to other European countries or to America, once conditions improved. If they had met a sadder fate, we would have heard about it for sure.

(4) The Cyrus Cylinder and the Rights Question: This was the title of an informative lecture in Persian by Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi (affiliated with University of Toronto, History and Near & Middle Eastern Civilizations), delivered this afternoon as Part of UCLA's Bilingual Lecture Series on Iran. Belonging to 539-538 BC, discovered in an 1879 excavation in Babylon, and currently held by the British Museum, the Cyrus Cylinder has been the subject of discussions and controversy at various junctures in the history of Iran, including after its rise to prominence in recent years.

According to the speaker, the Cylinder played a major role in discussions of equality, justice, and human rights in the mid-20th-century Iran. In those days, a group of intellectuals were trying to overcome the Muslim clergies' opposition to equal treatment of Iranians from different religions and to give women the same rights as men. In weaving a narrative to justify their proposals, they needed a foundational text to serve as historical basis for diversity and tolerance, which they found in the Cyrus Cylinder. Their task was complicated by the fact that while incorporating the need for equality and human rights, amendments to the Iranian constitution at the time also specified Iran as a Muslim country subject to the rules of Shi'i Islam. This era of pursuing diversity and tolerance was preceded (in the early 20th century) by a historical narrative of Iran based on Aryan identity, a thinly disguised racist ideology.

In the speaker's own words, his talk explored "the interplay between historical memory, social rights and contested conceptions of government and constitutionality in the four decades prior to the 1979 Revolution. Offering a corrective to the ideological and linear revolutionary narratives of Pahlavi Iran, this historical inquiry elucidates how a multi-confessional conception of Iran and its constitutionally sanctioned 'equality rights' of citizens was conceived at 'a moment of danger' during WW II, when Iran was invaded by the Allied forces and Reza Shah Pahlavi (r. 1925-1941) was forced to abdicate."

It is interesting that the aforementioned efforts in the area of human rights have fallen prey to historical forgetfulness; most Iranians consider the discussion of human rights in Iran to have begun with President Carter's administration. Iran was actually quite engaged in the domain of human rights and was an active participant in the United Nations' efforts in this area. In fact, some of the early resolutions of the UN were issued in defense of Iran against the Soviet aggression.

I questioned the speaker about a third narrative, from the late 20th century, that deems Iran's cultural richness and civilization to have begun with the Arab invasion that transformed a formerly uncivilized population; a dangerous view, given that it is promoted by some of those currently in power. The speaker responded that the said narrative was a short-lived one and that, today, most Islamic scholars believe in Cyrus the Great having been acknowledged in the Quran as "Zolgharnein" (the ram with two horns, alluding to the kings of Media and Persia).

On the speaker's **Web site**, you can find information about his background and work and can download his book, *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism and Historiography*.

2015/11/07 (Saturday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) Satellite image of the San Francisco Bay Area: If you live there, try to locate your residence or place of work. Here is a **clickable on-line version** of the image. Clicking on a point leads to zoom-in for greater detail.

(2) Quote of the day: "Get at least eight hours of beauty sleep. Nine if you're ugly." ~ Betty White

شدهام عاشق تو، وای که حالا چه کنم؟ | ماندهام در طلب غرق تمنا، چه کنم؟
گفته بودی که رعایت کنم آن حد و حدود من پذیرفتم و حالا نشد اما، چه کنم؟
تو پر از خاطرهای، داشتن ات حق من است با دل من تو بگو، حق خودم را چه کنم؟
دل من هر نفس و لحظه، فقط با یادت می شود شاعر و دیوانه و شیدا، چه کنم؟
همه را از دل من، عشق تو بیرون کرده ماندهای در دلم اما تک و تنها، چه کنم؟
می سپارم به تو این دغدغه‌ها را، اما تو نیاش، تو بگو، با غم دنیا چه کنم؟
خسته‌ام جز تو نگراز همه چیزو همه کس | تو بگو با دل افسرده لبریز تمنا چه کنم؟



(3) Thirty years of Bernie Sanders speeches. [[9-minute video](#)]

(4) Toronto **bans hookah lounges**: Smoking is dangerous to your health, no matter what form it takes.

(5) Standup **comedy routine** about misheard song lyrics: Very funny!

(6) On fake and ridiculous national days: In a hilarious *Time* magazine column (issue of November 9, 2015), humor columnist Joel Stein lampoons the creation of all sorts of national days. Apparently, there is a private company that helps you create and register such days for a \$1500 fee. Here are some of Stein's funnier proposals: "Truck Driver Day," "National Crazy Cat-Lady Day" (on the day after "National Cat Day"), "National Grandkid Day," and, not surprisingly, "National Magazine Humor Columnist Day."

(7) Chinese and Taiwanese leaders to meet: Reasons for this **first meeting in 66 years** are not quite clear

(8) Emotional manipulation at scale: It is well-known that Facebook filters its users' newsfeeds, because the sheer volume of data makes it impractical to include everything. This might be acceptable if the selection is random or is based on objective criteria, such as the degree of closeness of people or relevance of the posts. In 2014, a report was published on the results of a FB experiment in which unknowing users were subjected to directed filtering, with some receiving more feel-good posts and others getting more negative updates, presumably with a third group used as control, the objective being to show emotional contagion at scale. The study raised two types of objection. One was about the manipulation of our emotional states without our permission; human subjects of psychological studies must always be willing participants, according to prevailing ethical rules for research. The second was the dire possibility that FB and other operators of social networks may use the results of this study by skewing our newsfeeds towards positive emotions, in order to make it more likely for us to stay connected, thus creating more revenue for the operator. Of course, these concerns are on top of an array of feel-good apps that purport to show you who you look like (usually a gorgeous celebrity) or what type of person you are (often kind, generous, intelligent; never returning a negative attribute).

(9) Final thought for the day: "A lie can travel half way around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes." ~ Charles Spurgeon

2015/11/06 (Friday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Iran 2025: This is the title of a *Time* magazine cover feature (issue of November 16, 2015) that has ruffled some feathers, because it imagines an Iran a decade hence, where women are still wearing headscarves. This image, from My Stealthy Freedom FB page, contrasts the magazine's Iran 2025 to Iran 1973, as seen on the cover of now-defunct *Woman of the Day*, published before the Islamic Revolution in Iran.



(2) Eyebrow-raising Ben Carson opinions continue to arrive: This time he claims that the Giza pyramids were constructed not as royal tombs, but for grain storage; never mind expert opinion in this or any other matter!

(3) Engineering freshman stabs 4 at UC Merced: The assailant, who was shot dead before he could stab other victims, apparently had more elaborate plans, as he was carrying a hammer, duct tape, zip-tie handcuffs, two bags of petroleum jelly, and a night-vision scope in a backpack. Fortunately, none of the victims sustained life-threatening injuries.

(4) The "Ali Chap Alley" discovered: I don't know whether this **street sign** is a fabrication, but "taking the Ali Chap Alley" is a Persian idiom that means pretending not to know/notice.

(5) A quick and safe way to **move a parked car**.

(6) On Anonymous' list of KKK members: A list purported to have been published by the group known as Anonymous, but later exposed as fake, made the rounds in cyberspace a few days ago. Some people were quick

in demonizing those on the list and demanding that they resign from their public-service positions immediately. Given the prior record of Anonymous, a legitimate list from that group merits some attention, but even then, it should be viewed as accusations until proven through proper channels. In this case, many did not even wait until the list's attribution was verified.

(7) Bush Sr. biography paints unflattering pictures of Cheney and Rumsfeld: The just-released book, *Destiny and Power: The American Odyssey of George Herbert Walker Bush*, written by journalist John Meacham with unprecedented access to Bush Sr., Barbara Bush, and the couple's notes and diaries, may become the nail in the coffin for Jeb Bush's presidential aspirations, as he is again put in the position of defending his brother's presidency. Bush Sr. maintains that his son was ill-served by 'iron-ass' Cheney and 'arrogant' Rumsfeld, leading to poor decisions by his administration, most notably in invading Iraq. These blame assignments, however, ring hollow, given that Bush Sr. himself kept publicly quiet during the events leading up to the Iraq war, apparently giving no private advice to his son either.

2015/11/05 (Thursday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: This is the presidential debate. If people want facts, they can watch 'Jeopardy'." ~ Andy Borowitz, fictionally quoting the RNC Chair

(2) The new Canadian PM is a self-proclaimed feminist: By choosing **15 women and 16 men**, he has honored his pledge to appoint women to half his cabinet positions. One of his appointees (Minister of Democratic Institutions) is the Afghan-Canadian Maryam Monsef, a 30-year-old woman who arrived in Canada as a refugee.

(3) Egypt **pumps sea water** into illicit Gaza tunnels: Smuggling across the Gaza-Egypt border has come to a virtual halt as a result. Egypt alleges that in addition to common goods smuggled to Gaza via these tunnels, they have been used to ship arms in the other direction to support anti-government rebels in the Sinai peninsula.

(4) Mini-concert at noon: A bluegrass group performed at UCSB's Music Bowl yesterday. Here is a sample song entitled "**Sitting on the Top of the World**" (as usual, I had to leave after 25 minutes to make it to my 12:30 office hour). The four band members played guitar, mandolin, banjo, and bass. And here's **another song**.

(5) Chipotle closes 43 restaurants: The E-coli outbreak traced to the restaurant chain continues to grow.

(6) Saying no to mandatory hijab: Sadaf Taherian, the Iranian actress who posted a number of hijabless photos on-line, was attacked furiously by the Islamic Republic government officials and their state-run media empire, branding her as immoral and loose. Now, ironically, the actress is being attacked by two unlikely sources. First, some Iran-based actresses have condemned her actions publicly (in my opinion, because their own livelihoods were threatened by the Islamic regime, which controls not just radio and TV broadcasts but also the country's film/entertainment industry). Second, some Iranian expats residing in the West have belittled her as a second- or third-rate actress whose actions merit no attention. This assessment is in conflict with the Iranian government's take, because they have seen fit to spend millions on smearing her in order to stop other women who might decide to do similarly. Each of these individual acts is a straw that has little effect by itself. One of these days, however, the final straw will force the Islamic regime to retract its backward and bigoted laws against women.

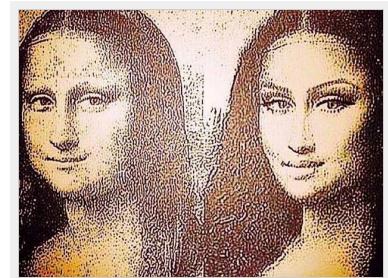
(7) UC Regents discuss **rising anti-Semitism**: Increased anti-Semitic activities and initiatives on University of California campuses, and the threat they pose to campus denizens and the ability of UC to recruit top students, prompted the UC Regents to discuss the problem in their October meeting at UCLA. Among the proposals heard was one to broaden the definition of anti-Semitism to that used by the US State Department, which includes demonizing, delegitimizing, or applying a double-standard to the state of Israel.

(8) VW cheating scheme involves other car brands: Some Audi and Porsche models also used the circumvention code, and investigators are still looking to uncover other instances of fraud in emissions control. Given that an estimated 60 early deaths have been attributed to VW's criminal behavior, I hope that the company does not get away with financial penalties only.

2015/11/03 (Tuesday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Humorous image of the day: Mona Lisa, before and after spending a week in Tehran, the world's capital for cosmetic surgery.

(2) Quote of the day: "Every major technological change in recent years traces most of its funding back to the state." ~ Mariana Mazzucato, University of Sussex economist and author of *The Entrepreneurial State: Debunking Public vs. Private Sector Myths* (She cites the smartphone, often claimed as a product of private-sector innovation and venture capital support, whereas all key components of a modern cell phone, including GPS, Internet access, and touchscreen, were advanced by the Defense Department)



(3) Yemen's neglected disaster: This is the title of a *Time* magazine illustrated article (November 9, 2015, issue) on the toll war has taken on the Yemeni people.

(4) Maccabee-era fortress unearthed in Jerusalem: The 2000-year-old structure, found after a century-long search, is believed to have been **built by Antiochus**, known in the Jewish tradition as the villain of the Hanukkah holiday's story.

(5) Animated vintage-book cover graphics. [[5-minute video](#)]

(6) The e-mail-killing app: A fast-growing start-up has taken the elite corporate world by a storm via its Slack application. A most annoying feature of our daily work and personal lives is the dreaded e-mail in-box. No matter how diligent we are in taking items out, the in-box seems to quickly fill up to an anxiety-causing level. On the personal side, Facebook and messaging apps have eased up the burden a bit, but work-related e-mails remain a big problem. A US office worker sends/receives an average of 122 messages per day from company e-mail accounts; that's one e-mail every 4 minutes in an 8-hour workday. Enter Slack, which replaces the standard e-mail communication system with threads (think projects, discussions, meetings). There is a pre-set list of participants for each thread, and others can be tagged, much as in Facebook, to receive specific communications. You can follow conversations in real-time, or you can go back to one and review it in detail. Threads are stored permanently and are fully searchable, so temp workers and new employees can be brought up to speed quickly.

(7) Final thought for the day: "The problem isn't that Bernie Sanders is a crazy-pants cuckoo bird. It's that we've all become so accustomed to stage-managed, focus-group-driven candidates that his authenticity comes across as lunacy." ~ Comedian Jon Stewart

2015/11/02 (Monday): Here are reports on three talks I attended today at UCSB.

(1) Barna Saha (Assistant Professor at U Mass Amherst) delivered a talk this afternoon at 3:30, with the title "Randomization in Data and Design."

Big-data is a fashionable buzzword these days. Saha began with what she called the five "V"s (or challenges) of big-data, namely, Volume (lots of data), Velocity (rapid change), Variety (many types), Veracity (accuracy and completeness), and Value (much junk mixed with high-value data). The talk's focus was on veracity. In Saha's words, "Before big-data, we need clean-data."

Saha then talked about her research in ensuring/verifying data quality via randomization methods. The use of randomization for making difficult computational problems tractable has a long history in computer science. So, it is not surprising that randomization also finds applications in big-data, where the five "V"s make the timely processing of data quite challenging.

(2) The second talk by Southern California Edison President (Dr. Pedro J. Pizzaro; BS Harvard, PhD Caltech, both in chemistry), had the title "California's Low Carbon Future: Energy Efficiency and Distributed Energy Resources." The introduction of the speaker was accompanied by the comment that California's per-capita energy use has been pretty much flat over the last four decades, a remarkable success story that has cemented California's leadership the energy conservation.

SCE has been evaluating its role in the face of changes both in energy production/consumption patterns and advances in technology. A key aspect of these changes is a shift from a centralized, one-way utility (owning much its production and distribution infrastructure) to a two-way energy integrator and arbiter. Much of today's electric distribution network, optimized for one-way energy distribution, must be modified to make it more efficient on the energy reception side.

SCE is working on a number of pilot DoE-supported projects, including those in Orange County and Irvine, to test the various energy integration and storage strategies that will form the future of the electric energy market. In parallel with these large-scale pilot projects, SCE has streamlined the process of evaluating and approving small-scale residential solar installations, which now takes on the order of 5 days in most cases.

(3) Hector Tobar, who worked for *Los Angeles Times* for two decades and won a Pulitzer Prize as part of the team that covered the 1992 LA Riots, gave a UCSB Campbell Hall talk entitled "Deep Down Dark: The Untold Stories of 33 Men Buried in a Chilean Mine, and the Miracle that Set Them Free." This was an engaging talk, based on Tobar's book by the same title, which has been made into a movie, starring Antonio Banderas, Lou Diamond Phillips, and Juliette Binoche, to be released later this month. Actually, given that the book was released in 2014, Tobar and the film's scriptwriters worked in parallel, exchanging ideas along the way. The miners went from virtually the worst, dirtiest, and most dangerous jobs possible in Chile to national sensations, who were offered free vacations, large sums of money for interviews, and product endorsement deals. They even watched themselves on TV, while still trapped in the mine, on the Chilean equivalent of "The Today Show." Their 17-day starvation period before they were discovered and 69-day total entrapment took a heavy toll on the miners' physical and psychological well-being, which the author tried to capture in his well-received book. Apparently, the movie is quite faithful to the story and its various colorful characters.

As soon as they were rescued, the miners were taken to a high-powered Chilean law firm, which had been

handling the negotiations on their behalf, and put their "Juan Hancocks" on various deal documents. There were interesting family dynamics, which included discord when the families discovered, part-way through the ordeal, that they were going to get rich. A particularly memorable event in the 2010 mine-collapse incident was two women fighting above-ground over one of the trapped miners.

2015/11/01 (Sunday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Where US presidential candidates stand on climate change:

An interesting visual representation from *Newsweek* on-line.

(2) Quote of the day: "I think we'll use Larry at our next rally.

He does better than I do." ~ Bernie Sanders, on Larry David's impersonation of him on "Saturday Night Live:

(3) Men behaving badly: **Brief video clips**, good for a chuckle this November Sunday.

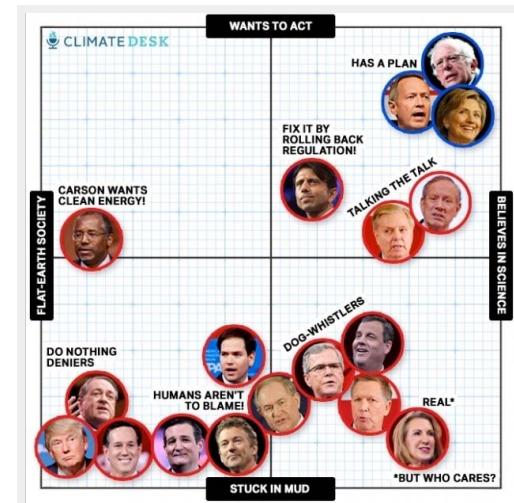
(4) Canadian politics: Justin Trudeau's win was primarily about internal Canadian politics, but he will have positive international effects as well, including on troubled relations with the US.

(5) Bangladesh struggles with Islamic terrorism: Bangladesh is a poor country, with more than its share of calamities, including natural disasters. Now, with the murder of a secular blogger by Islamists, and other acts of terror and intimidation, the country enters a new chapter in its difficult history. [Info from: *Time* magazine, issue of November 2, 2015.]

(6) The latest *Time* magazine cover: In a slow news week in US presidential politics, *Time* opts for bacon strips **on the cover** of its November 9, 2015 issue. The cover feature article is entitled "The War on Delicious."

(7) The world's quietest place: A specially designed anechoic chamber in a Microsoft Redmond audio lab has set a Guinness World Record as the world's quietest place, registering a noise level of -20 decibels, just shy of the lowest possible noise level of -23. By comparison, calm breathing corresponds to +10 db, rustling leaves +20 db, refrigerator hum +40 db, and normal conversation +60 db. [Info from: *Time* magazine, November 9, 2015]

(8) Final thought for the day: "Let's not forget that he's actually a misogynist." ~ Daniel Craig, James Bond portrayer in the last four movies of the franchise, on the title character being a poor role model for men



2015/10/31 (Saturday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) All set up and ready for the little trick-or-treaters tonight. Happy Halloween!

(2) Quote of the day: "Sandra Bullock and her A-list sisters are hunting down Hollywood's best new roles—the ones written for men." ~ Eliana Dockterman, writing in *Time* magazine, issue of November 2, 2015

(3) Fusion energy may actually work this time: Researchers following this holy grail of clean energy have cried wolf too many times, so it is understandable if you shrug your shoulders this time around as well. But *Time* magazine (issue of November 2, 2015) reports that several start-up companies are rebooting the quest and have already broken one of fusion energy's great barriers, that is, holding the plasma soup that spawns the fusing of atoms stable.

(4) Carly Fiorina's convenient untruths: She has been spreading lies at an alarming rate and seems to be unfazed by fact-checkers who point out her misrepresentations. When she is not stretching the truth, she changes the subject. For example, when asked about climate change, she pointed to Islamic State militants as greater threats. About gay rights, she has said that while at HP, she provided the same benefits to gay couples, adding that the government should step in to protect businesses that want to discriminate based on their faith. [Adapted from *Time* magazine, issue of November 2, 2015.]

(5) Conan O'Brien goes to Armenia: He takes his Armenian assistant to serve as his guide and shoots a show there, to be aired on Tuesday, November 17, 2015. [[3-minute preview](#)]

(6) Adopting visualization ideas from metro maps: Metro maps are epitomes of efficiency in conveying information. They abstract away irrelevant details, presenting only the essentials about lines, stops, intersections (for transfers), and rough geographical relationships. They favor legibility and topological validity over proper scaling of distances. The same style can be applied to representing many other relationships. The example in [this diagram](#) pertains to the relationships between rock bands in terms of how each style of rock music influenced other styles and musicians. [Adapted from an article in *Communications of the ACM*, issue of



November 2015.]

(7) College soccer: After winning their next-to-last regular season game 2-1 against Sacramento state on Wednesday and their final game 1-0 on the road against UC Davis tonight, the UCSB Gauchos have amassed an impressive record of 12-5-2 (7-2-1 in Conference play) and are headed to the Big West Conference playoffs.

2015/10/30 (Friday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Joys of the Persian language: This post, for my Persian-speaking readers, contains some observations about how prefixes and suffixes allow us to construct a virtually unlimited collection of compound Persian words which are compact, expressive, and beautiful. I hope Persian language experts forgive any shortcomings in my statements.

(2) Kinesin protein (aka the motor protein) walking on microtubule. [[GIF image](#)]

(3) Brain-controlled wheelchairs to take a leap forward: Biomedical engineer Jordan Nguyen was inspired by a neck injury that paralyzed him to develop the technology for a **wheelchair controlled by brainwaves**. Instead of dropping out of school, Nguyen stuck with his studies and developed prototypes for his machine in 2008. He now hopes to design an even smarter wheelchair and is working with the Cerebral Palsy Alliance on a project to assist in diagnosis of cerebral palsy and autism in babies.

(4) UC San Diego to pursue the "**See-Think-Do" technology**: UCSD is building a robotics institute to develop machines that can interpret everything, from subtle facial expressions to walking to sizing up what people are up to. If I were UCSD, however, I would call the technology "See-Think-Act"; the acronym is much better!

(5) Daylight saving time will end early Sunday: Here is [the trailer](#) for this very confusing movie.

(6) Fail at scale: In computer systems, as in other engineering endeavors, the conventional wisdom is to frown upon failures that lead to service disruptions and/or loss of data. Companies that run large data centers with tens of thousands of servers and an even larger number of disk drives have come to realize that such wishful thinking is counterproductive. Instead they embrace failures as inevitable and educational. They prepare for such events through practice and develop a culture of thoroughly reviewing incidents with the aim of pinpointing the problem (human error, workload anomalies, disk crash, hacking, and so on) and making improvements.

[Adapted from an article by Ben Maurer, *Communications of the ACM*, November 2015, pp. 44-49.]

(7) Ending today's entries with five of the day's news headlines: Tens of US Special-Ops forces to head to Syria

US releases last UK detainee from Guantanamo | Budget deal passed by US Congress, sent to Obama
Rafsanjani admits to A-bomb program in the 1980s | High-ranking Jeb Bush campaign official departs

2015/10/29 (Thursday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Goleta's development continues at an alarming rate: Other than UCSB student and staff housing units, some completed and others still under construction, there are many residential projects in progress, the largest of which is this vast complex across from the Camino Real Marketplace (the one with Costco) on Hollister Avenue.

(2) Quote of the day: "Before you marry a person you should first make them use a computer with slow Internet to see who they really are." ~ Comedian Will Farrell

(3) Muharram mourning, part 2: You may have seen my post of a video clip that showed a boy dancing to the beat of mourning music. [This photo](#), that shows young children kissing, was also taken at a mourning venue.

(4) Enjoy your little ones, before you know it they'll be 16: Sixteen years compressed in this [5-minute video](#).

(5) Artistic creation: It's always interesting for me to see [artists at work](#). I never forget my surprise when I found out that painters do not paint tree leaves one at a time, but rather use special strokes with an appropriately loaded brush to create the various colors, texture, and shading, all at once.

(6) John H. Holland (1929-2015): The interdisciplinary researcher was known for contributions to adaptive behavior in natural and artificial systems, including advances in genetic algorithms. The Holland Machine, a digital computer built of cell-like building blocks that collectively stored a program, one instruction per cell, was

زیبایی‌های زبان پارسی: چند پیش به ساختارهای زبان پارسی، و به ویژه به پیشوندهای و پسوندهایی که با آنها می‌توان واژه‌های نو ساخت، می‌اندیشیدم.
پارهای از پیشوندهای پر کاربرد را در زیر بر می‌شمارم:
با - بی - نا (یاسواد - بیگناه - تابینا)
پر - کم - چند (پررو - کمنگ - چند برگی)
خوش - نیک - بد (خوشبخت - نیکنام - بد خدم)
درون - برون - فرا (درون کاوی - برون شهری - فرا مزی)
هم - خود (همپایه - خودرو)
بلند - دراز - کوتاه / کوتاه (بلند پایه - دراز دست - کوتاه فکر)
و این هم چند نمونه از پسوندهای پر کاربرد:
اور - گز - چی (آن آور - سازشگر - آیا رارچی)
پرور - آفین - پرداز (دام پرور - شورآفرین - کار پرداز)
انگیز - ساز - پر (شور انگیز - خانه ساز - رنجبر)
دار - وار - ور (تمادر - دیوانه وار - پیشه ور)
این پیشوندهای و پسوندهای از تو ان با واژه‌های عربی و غربی
هم به کار نمی‌برد. در پسیلاری از چنین ساختارهای کمی جستجو
به یافته و آنده ای پر این پارسی می‌انجامد. برای نمونه، به جای
"بی حوصله" می‌توان نوشت "بی تاب" و به جای
"طرف انگیز"، "سرور انگیز".



instrumental in my attraction to the field of parallel processing. His 1959 paper, "A Universal Computer Capable of Executing an Arbitrary Number of Subprograms Simultaneously," was one of my references during PhD research in the early 1970s. May he rest in peace!

(7) Algorithmic authors: Consider this fragment of an April 2015 sports story on Sonoma Little League's Web site for Team #13, The Falcons.

"Anthony T got it done on the bump on the way to a win. He allowed two runs over 2 1/3 innings. He struck out four, walked two and surrendered no hits. Anders Mathison ended up on the wrong side of the pitching decision, charged with the loss. He lasted just two innings, walked two, struck out one, and allowed four runs. The game's last lead went to Sonoma LL Falcons thanks to a first inning rally that saw one run cross the plate on a sacrifice fly by Brett Armitage."

The story isn't the work of a human reporter but of Quill, a software package developed by the Chicago-based Narrative Science. Can the days of Harry-Potter-like successful novels by software authors be far off?

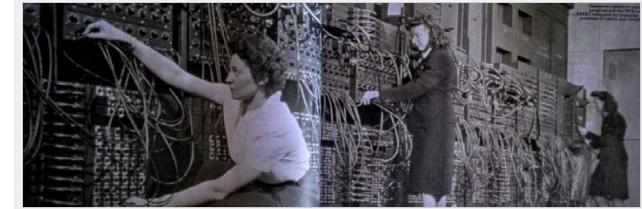
[Adapted from: *Communications of the ACM*, issue of November 2015]

(8) Ending today's entries with five of the day's news headlines: Paul Ryan becomes Speaker of the US House European Parliament resolves to protect Edward Snowden | China abandons its one-child policy; allows two Third GOP debate uneventful, except for ire at CNBC | VW emissions cheating has caused ~60 early deaths

2015/10/28 (Wednesday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Where did computing go wrong? An industry that saw women drive some of its earliest developments is now heavily male-dominated.

A key reason, according to an article in *E&T* magazine (issue of November 2015) is greater affluence in Western societies, with its associated greater disdain for science and engineering among students.



UCSD's Professor Maria Charles explains that in such societies, "the economic costs of forgoing lucrative STEM careers are more easily borne."

(2) Quote of the day: "Okay, which one of these dresses says, 'I'm terribly sorry your heartless autocrat husband is finally dead'?" ~ Tea Leoni's character in "Madam Secretary," trying to find the appropriate attire for the funeral of the Russian President

(3) A humiliated woman tells her story: She and her boyfriend were flogged for holding hands in public. They are now married and lead a happy life outside Iran.

(4) Surrounded by blood and violence, little boy enjoys dancing to the beat of Muharram mourning music.

(5) The blimp that got away: A helium-filled US military surveillance blimp was blown away from its mooring in Maryland, **ending up in Pennsylvania** and knocking down some power lines in its path. Two fighter jets accompanied the blimp and tracked its movements.

(6) Actress discusses challenges facing women in Iranian cinema: Sadaf Taherian, who recently published hijab-less photos on social media, talks about the reasons for her decision, that has led to attacks from Iranian authorities and her inability to continue working in the country. She also talks about some unwelcome advances from male directors and producers.

(7) The creation of 3D sidewalk paintings: This **4-minute video** contains a time-lapse depiction of the process of creating a 3D painting, followed by numerous examples of such paintings.

(8) Noon mini-concert at UCSB's Music Bowl: A subset of a much larger UCSB Middle East Ensemble performed on campus today, playing music from Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, and other Arab countries. The program also contained 3 dances, such as this **basket dance** from southern Egypt. And here is a **Lebanese/Syrian dance** that shares some features with Kurdish dances. The last dance was this **cabaret-style solo** performance. According to the Ensemble's Director, solo dancers are powerful women in the Arab world. Their photos are on billboards everywhere and people know them by name, endlessly arguing about which one is the best. Famous dancers often hire their own musicians and even composers, so that they get the music to match their tastes and styles.

2015/10/27 (Tuesday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Cartoon of the day: In honor of the new James Bond film.

(2) Neft Daslari: Featured in *E&T* magazine's November 2015 James Bond tribute, entitled "007 Special: 7 Stunts, 7 Evil Plans, 7 Lairs, 7 Gadgets," **this villainous HQ** is an actual floating industrial city in the middle of the Caspian Sea, off the coast of Azerbaijan. Built in 1949 to extract top-quality black oil and housing 2000 drilling platforms in its heyday, the megapolis rests on 7 sunken ships that form its foundation. The Azerbaijani government is seeking an investor to avoid



having to demolish its former empire.

(3) The next James (Jayme?) Bond: The James Bond fever is back with the release of another film in the series. Daniel Craig's reluctance to play in more James Bond films has led to speculations by *Entertainment Weekly* (issue of October 30, 2015), which picks five men (Idris Elba, Tom Hardy, Damian Lewis, Tom Hiddleston, Henry Cavill) and one woman (Emily Blunt, who recently shined in "Sicario") for the role.

(4) Don Henley became a musician because he couldn't play football: His football coach was arrogant and physically abusive and his fellow players teased him and tried to get him in trouble. So, he quit football and went for music instead. He is thankful for having that awful football coach! [Adapted from: *AARP Magazine*, issue of October/November 2015]

(5) Malibu residents to pay **\$31M for sand** over 10 years: The SoCal community will have truckloads of sand brought to Broad Beach to replenish the sand that is continually washed away by storms.

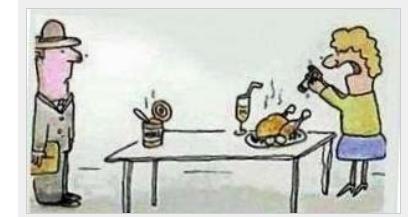
(6) Soccer **goals scored by goalkeepers**: Usually during the last seconds of the game, when the keeper has vacated his goal and plays in a forward position to try to get an equalizer, but also several where the keeper scores from his own end, aided by strong winds and high bounces off the artificial turf.

(7) A day in the life of the American caregiver: This is the title of a feature in *AARP Magazine*, issue of October/November 2015, which reminds us of the 1-in-6 Americans (16.6%) who render unpaid assistance to an adult. This care, if provided by paid workers, would cost \$450B annually. Whereas parenting effort is universally admired and acknowledged, those caring for adults are often engaged in a thankless job. We can all help make the work of these kind souls easier by doing small things for them. Examples include shoveling snow, going grocery shopping from their lists, doing a load of laundry, watering their flowers, driving their kids to various events, baking them cookies, and arranging for a short get-away.

2015/10/26 (Monday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Cartoon of the day: "Your food is over there; this is for Facebook!"

(2) Quote of the day: "This type of under-the-chin beard has come from Europe and belongs to Italian homosexuals." ~ Alireza Alipour, a cleric overseeing morals in Iran's professional soccer league, affronting a former Esteghlal soccer player (he also **joined Mashhad's Friday Prayers Imam** in condemning the naming of two of Mashhad's soccer teams after "a sworn enemy of Imam Reza")



(3) Magnitude-7.5 quake hits Afghanistan, near the Pakistani border: The death toll of more than 300 is expected to rise, as **search and rescue continues** and remote regions are accessed.

(4) Comedian Jimmy Kimmel weighs in on the **vaccination debate**: He invites a number of medical doctors to impress this point upon people who believe a forwarded e-mail more than the opinion of someone who studied the human body and diseases for 8 years.

(5) Contradictions in Iran: Modern women, with headscarves that they are obviously wearing reluctantly, at a Muharram mourning venue. [[Photo](#)]

(6) Amazing virtual reality demo. [[9-second video](#)]

(7) Baby reacts to mom singing a sad song. [[2-minute video](#)]

(8) WHO report indicates that processed red meats cause cancer: Some Facebook posts indicate that such meats are as bad as cigarettes and asbestos, but on a segment of the **PBS NewsHour** tonight, an expert indicated that some of the claims being circulated, though based on real science, are misleading. What puts processed meats in the same class as cigarettes and asbestos is the level of certainty of the research results, not the level of risk. You have to eat bacon, hot dogs, and other listed meats every day for decades for your risk of cancer to increase by a minute amount over the base case of not eating processed meats at all. So, there is little harm in indulging your appetite, if done in moderation.

2015/10/24 (Saturday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Oh, the joys of technology!

(2) Quote of the day: "The past always looks better than it was. It's only pleasant because it isn't here." ~ Finley Peter Dunne

(3) Electric vehicles deemed essential to the **survival of auto companies**:

"The future of cars is battery electric vehicles," writes energy expert Mike Barnard. "That's just a reality," he adds. The recent VW revelations provide some evidence that perhaps we cannot make ordinary combustion and diesel engines cleaner and more efficient. Meanwhile, the electrical grid continues to move toward a smaller carbon footprint. Fuel cells and other alternative energy sources simply can't compete. A corollary is that car manufacturers have no choice but to sacrifice profits from their existing lines to invest in developing electric cars from scratch, in order to remain competitive.



(4) Are all successful pop songs based on just 4 chords? Well, this **hilarious demo** by the comedy rock band Axis of Awesome is pretty convincing that they do!

(5) A rare treat for your Saturday: In what appears to be a Chinese talent competition, young girl on the violin and young boy on the piano offer a **12-minute virtuoso performance** of classical music that is beyond praise.

(6) Openly selling theses and dissertations in Iran: I have been receiving spam e-mails from Iranian companies that openly advertise the availability of theses, dissertations, and research papers for purchase. The latest of these is from tezpdf.com that advertises availability of a wide variety of research reports (purportedly for studying, rather than direct use for earning degrees or publishing plagiarized research papers), many with Persian translations. When multimillion dollar embezzlements go unpunished in the country, there is little hope that academic dishonesty will lead to any judicial action, especially since some former and current high-level Iranian officials have been guilty of such plagiarism.

(7) College soccer: A rowdy, cheering student crowd (biggest of the season) was on hand as UCSB (ranked 21st nationally) and archrival Cal Poly (ranked 20th) began their battle for the top spot in the Big West Conference. In an electrifying first half, UCSB's relentless attack yielded two beautiful goals from left and right services, and the Gauchos led the Mustangs 2-0 at halftime. The second half was all Cal Poly's, which played a solid possession game and tied the score 2-2 only 2 seconds to the end of the game, on an awful UCSB defensive error. After two 10-minute overtime periods, the game ended 2-2; a fair score, given UCSB's dominance in the first half and Cal Poly's in the second half, with overtime periods played evenly.

2015/10/23 (Friday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Help, my parents are Millennials: This is the title of a cover feature in *Time* magazine, issue of October 26, 2015, that explores how Millennial parents are different from earlier generations. From raising vegan children to using cloth diapers, they provide their kids with a childhood unlike their own.

(2) Potentially catastrophic **Hurricane Patricia** threatens Mexico: With 200 MPH winds, this is the strongest tropical cyclone ever recorded on Earth.

(3) Bus-truck collision near Bordeaux leaves 43 dead: This is reportedly the **worst traffic accident** in France since 1982.

(4) Hillary Clinton emerges unscathed from day-long grilling: The marathon 11-hour session fails to reveal any serious misconduct, leaving conservatives angry at the US Senate's Benghazi committee. Lecture-like questions, childish props, and fits of anger (including dissing other Republican-led committees that probed the same incidents) made the Republicans look bad. Clinton's presidential campaign, meanwhile, is likely to be strengthened.

(5) Giant machine that **helps build elevated rail**: This is how China has built 10,000 miles of high-speed rail in just a few years.

(6) The weakening of Saudi Arabia: Many forces are at work to fundamentally weaken the arrogant Saudis. Iran's predicted increase in oil exports after economic sanctions have been lifted can only lead to further reductions in oil prices, which will hit the Kingdom in its coffers. With 80% of its budget and 90% of its exports coming from oil, reducing production to force the price up won't be an option. Meanwhile, Saudi support for extremist sects of Islam, now under attack from many countries (including Russia), has marred its international image and drained its financial resources. Even the US shows signs of impatience with the Saudis. Finally, when the recently installed King Salman (already 79 and reportedly ill for years) passes away, his designated



replacement, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, may lack widespread support, raising the potential of his authority being challenged by other princes. [Adapted from a *Time* magazine piece, issue of October 26, 2015.]

(7) Emotion sensing in cyberspace: This morning, I attended a Computer Science Distinguished Lecture, entitled "Transforming Digital Experiences with Emotion Sensing and Analytics," at UCSB. By and large, distinguished lectures are delivered by graying men, so it came as a surprise for me to see a young, attractive woman at the podium; a practical demonstration of what these days is called "the new face of science/engineering." The speaker, Rana el Kalioub (PhD), a founder and Chief Strategy and Science Officer of the start-up company Affectiva, is a pioneer in the area of facial expression recognition, which finds applications in robotics, education, treatment of autism, advertising, and many other exciting areas still being uncovered. Her company has developed a large database of facial expressions, about 10% of which has been labeled (they use labelers in Egypt for economic reasons and require a 3-out-of-5 agreement among labelers to accept a label for a facial expression). Parts of Affectiva's database of facial expressions are available on-line for free to other researchers. There are already apps in the Apple Store that allow ordinary people to also experiment with these notions. For example, the Chubble app captures emotions directly from your front-camera, as you engage with friends. This [11-minute TED talk](#) from May 2015 conveys the main points of this very interesting 1-hour talk.

2015/10/22 (Thursday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

- (1)** Here, have some hearty soup! The free food, known as "nazri" and cooked in huge pots, is provided to Muslim mourners during the month of Muharram.
- (2)** Islamic mourning rituals for Muharram, held in Los Angeles, complete with [chain-beating](#) (zanjir-zani).
- (3)** Impressive [art demo](#), from southern India.
- (4)** Quote of the day: "We won't seek revenge. Violence will breed more violence." ~ Kurdish leader Selahattin Demirtas, on the recent terror attack in Turkey during a peaceful gathering of Kurds, showing once more that the Kurds are the adults in a region plagued by child-like behavior of hurting/killing anyone who disagrees with you



- (5)** Shocking fact of the day: Of the 188 countries in the entire world, only three have no paid family leave: Papua New Guinea, Oman, and the US. The other 185 have laws authorizing mothers, and in 78 cases even fathers, to take time off and still receive paychecks while caring for newborns or other relatives.
- (6)** Hollywood's gender gap, in [two charts](#). [From: *Time* magazine, issue of October 26, 2015.]
- (7)** The Known Universe: Developed by the American Museum of Natural History based on the Digital Universe 3D Atlas, this [7-minute video](#) begins on Earth, zooms out to get a glimpse of the entire universe as we know it today, and returns to Earth, putting us in awe and impressing upon us how small our entire habitat is compared with the grandeur of the universe.
- (8)** Guess what's coming trick-or-treating this Halloween: [An asteroid](#) the size of a skyscraper (~500 meters wide) that is predicted to miss the Earth by about 300,000 miles (a tad more than the distance to the moon). Compare this Empire-State-Building-size asteroid with the 20-meter asteroid that exploded over Russia in 2013 to realize how lucky we are that it will miss us.
- (9)** Final thought for the day (on being attacked by mad dogs): I have no sympathy for Jeb Bush and other "mainstream" Republicans being attacked by the fringe members of their own party. They bred and nurtured these mad dogs and fully enjoyed their musings for a while, when they were directed at the Democrats. Now they cry wolf, when they are targets themselves.

2015/10/21 (Wednesday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

- (1)** Plight of refugees, as depicted by Syrian artist Nizar Ali Badr.
- (2)** The beautiful NYC: [Aerial photo](#) showing the west edge of Central Park with fall foliage.
- (3)** Vice-President Joe Biden will not run for US presidency: He saved himself major embarrassment, IMHO. He should have done this much earlier. He also provided some words of wisdom that are rarely uttered these days. He said that Democrats should view the Republicans not as enemies but as opposition.
- (4)** Beautiful [Persian anthem](#) in praise of freedom: Music, arrangement, and conduction by Mehrdad Baran, lyrics by Saeed Soltanpour, Paris-based Bahar Choir performing.
- (5)** Quote of the day: "The good life is one inspired by love and guided by knowledge." ~ Bertrand Russell



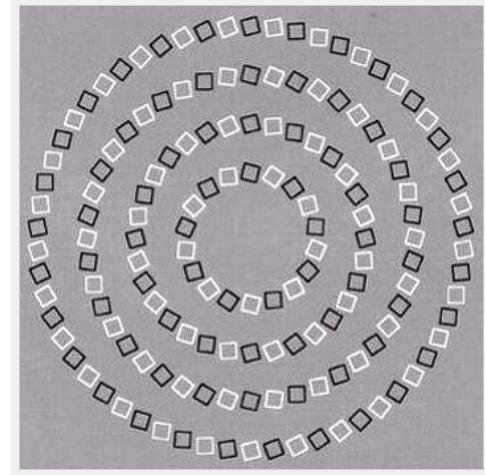
(6) Telegram has been **blocked in Iran**: Pavel Durov, developer of the secure messaging app, has indicated that the blockage resulted from his company's refusal to accept Iran's demands to help them spy on their citizens. One after one, the campaign promises of President Rouhani begin to ring hollow. It was also in the news today that some two dozen Iranian singers have been banned from all artistic activities. It seems that the symbolic key Rouhani used during his campaign to indicate his intention and ability to open doors is being used to double-lock them.

(7) Noon mini-concert at UCSB's Music Bowl today: The Masanga Marimba group played lively music from around the world, including this **wedding tune** from Zimbabwe. Unfortunately, I could stay for only 20 minutes, given my office hour at 12:30.

(8) College soccer: After lackluster performances at Sacramento State (losing 2-5) and Cal Poly (losing 2-3), the UCSB Gauchos returned home to defeat UC Davis 2-1 tonight. Both UCSB goals came on penalty kicks (one deserved, one iffy), and Davis had more scoring opportunities. So, despite the win, UCSB's offensive and defensive woes continued tonight. UCSB will try to improve on its 10-5-1 overall record (5-2 in the Big West Conference) on Saturday, 10/24, when Cal Poly will come to Santa Barbara for a return match. The two teams have a longstanding rivalry in soccer, so some 12,000 spectators are expected at Harder Stadium, including a sizable group of fans for the visiting team, which is based only a 1.5-hour drive away from Santa Barbara.

2015/10/20 (Tuesday): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Optical illusion: Believe it or not, there are four perfectly round circles in this image. If you have a hard time seeing the circles, squint your eyes and move away from the image.



(2) The Martian: As the new Ridley Scott film starring Matt Damon is being released, *IEEE Spectrum* magazine (October 2015) contains **an interview** with the author of the best-selling sci-fi novel on which the film is based. Software-engineer-turned-author Andy Weir always had a passion for space technology, so when he retired after 25 years, he pursued his twin interests of writing and space, leading to *The Martian*. His software writing skills came in handy, because he constructed simulation programs to determine the detailed path of the spacecraft to Mars and to estimate the trip's duration. He took pains to ensure that all problems and their solutions are plausible. Weir says he wrote the story for science geeks and was very surprised when it attracted general interest.

(3) Donald Trump breaks a longstanding taboo: He blames George W. Bush for the 9/11 attacks happening under his watch. The conventional wisdom so far has been that no one could have stopped those attacks, but Trump is challenging this assumption, in part to respond to Jeb Bush's rhetoric that his brother kept America safe.

(4) Subtle forms of misogyny, racism, and other prejudices: This morning, I encountered three different repostings of this Kevin Hart joke: "The Kardashians turned Scott into an alcoholic, Lamar into a crackhead, and Bruce into a woman. I can't wait to see what they do to Kanye ..." The stab at the ridiculous cult of the Kardashians is funny on first take. Upon reflection, however, one sees the parallel construct that considers womanhood just as bad as alcoholism and crack addiction, and it ceases to be funny. Another post of this morning was about **the four agreements**, the first of which, "Be impeccable with words," is particularly relevant here. We should examine our words carefully to eliminate unintended insults.

(5) Sharing with you my comment on a "**My Stealthy Freedom**" Facebook page post that urges women to defy Iranian government's ban on public handshaking or kissing between men and women: These silly rules all result from viewing women as property; hence, the attitude that no one should enjoy the friendship or company of our property without our permission. An independent, self-assured, thinking woman who chooses whom to welcome with a hug, a kiss, or a handshake is very threatening to those who consider their women (wives, mothers, daughters) as property. Taboo-breaking is a good thing, but I am getting tired of tackling individual symptoms of the problem: allowing women to sing, allowing them to watch volleyball, allowing them to watch basketball, . . . , allowing them to choose whether they want the hijab, allowing them to travel abroad, and so on. All of these problems will go away with one small statement added to Iran's constitution, i.e., "woman = man." This will get rid of all discriminatory practices in one step and will give women the same rights as men. Of course the bigger problem after this step is to give men and women their human rights.

2015/10/19 (Monday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) Young Iranian actresses gather to honor Jaleh Olov (holding her own portrait) from an earlier generation of

Iranian cinema. From left to right, Katayoun Riahi, Jaleh Olov, Mitra Hajjar, Mahtab Keramati, Leila Hatami.

(2) A blind, autistic piano maestro: Japanese young man Noboyuki Tsujii performs Liszt's "[La Campanella](#)".

(3) A female version of James Brown: Karise Eden performs "[It's a Man's World](#)" on The Voice Australia.

(4) Magnificent whales, captured by a drone, in Dana Point, California. [[6-minute video](#)]

(5) Canadian boy and girl from Hong Kong perform an awesome version of "[You Raise Me Up](#)" in what appears to be a Chinese talent show.

(6) US drone owners **must register** with the Department of Transportation: We are so lucky that drones were not mentioned in any of the amendments to the US Constitution, or else regulating them to avoid accidents would be out of the question!

(7) The gun lobby wants loaded guns at our children's schools but those who run **this gun show** don't allow loaded guns or ammunition!

(8) Quote of the day: "I don't hate my attacker, I pity him." ~ Marike Veldman, a Dutch national who opened a foster home for Arab children in East Jerusalem 32 years ago and **was recently stabbed** in a terror attack

(9) On stabbings in Jerusalem and other Israeli locales: Many people, including some friends, have been posting videos on Facebook purporting to show the arrest, restraining, or even shooting of Palestinians on Israeli streets. Nearly all of these videos conveniently edit out the events immediately preceding those shown, that is, stabbings or other acts of aggression. Perhaps some of the acts against Palestinian attackers are over-reactions and some are misguided, but the right to self-defense is universally acknowledged in nearly all cultures. When those on stabbing missions are children, fingers should be pointed at their parents or other adult religious/political leaders who direct or encourage them to commit these acts.



2015/10/18 (Sunday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) How different nationalities tackle problems:

Here's my proposed entry for Iran: Problem ---
- What problem? ---> Will be solved, God willing!

(2) Confirmation of Ebola being a sexually transmitted disease: [A new study](#), published in *New England J. Medicine*, confirms what was suspected earlier this year, when the Ebola virus was found in the semen of a man who had no symptoms of the disease himself.

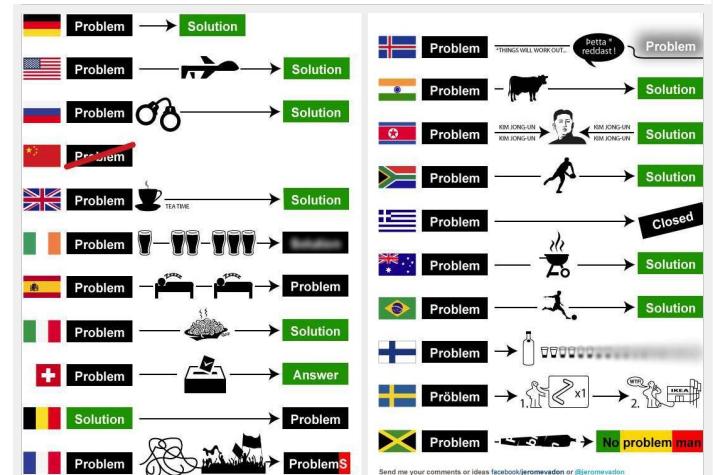
(3) Iranian **folk music** from Khorasani Kurds: The region in northern Khorasan is sometimes referred to as Eastern Kurdistan. I also heard another song from the same group, performed with a choir, a few days ago. I copied the link, but it seems to be broken (will try find it again).

(4) Speculations about a **possible mega-structure** in space: NASA's Kepler telescope has spotted something huge, decidedly different from a planet, which moves around a nearby star outside our Milky Way Galaxy. It may be a giant clump of space dust, an asteroid belt, or, titillatingly, an alien-built structure, perhaps having to do with harnessing energy from the star. Scientists are planning to take a closer look as early as next January.

(5) Volkswagen to recall 8.5 million autos in Europe: The carmaker tried hard to make the repairs voluntary, as opposed to mandatory, but the German government threw out VW's proposal. This is as it should be, given that excessive emissions from the company's diesel engines actually hurt people, while also generating undue profits for the carmaker, which sold a lot of cars over its competitors because of false claims of combining performance with environmental stewardship.

(6) Bratz dolls reimagined: Wendy Tsao gives them "make-unders" and new clothes [to honor iconic women](#) such as Malala Yousafzai and Jane Goodall.

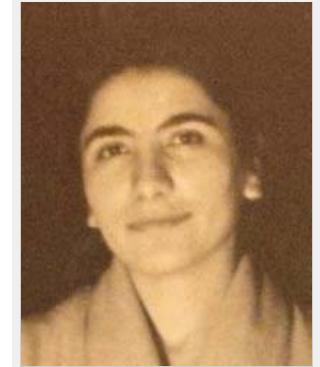
(7) Final thought for the day: Today, I saw several Facebook posts about how sickening it is to have almost hourly updates on Lamar Odom's recovery from drug-induced coma at a brothel, while there is no such coverage for a multitude of soldiers recovering from their injuries on the battlefield.



Send me your comments or ideas facebook/jeromevadon or @jeromevadon

2015/10/15 (Thursday): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) In memory of my aunt Tal'at (may her soul rest in peace): Time marches on and generations turn over. I wasn't very close to aunt Tal'at, in large part because of the family's forced immigration from Iran. Ours was a story common to many displaced families. She went to France and from there (after many years that saw her two sons get married and have children) to Israel, and I came to the US via Canada. Our paths somehow did not cross during the past four decades. But I have fond memories of her from my childhood and youth in Iran. This cropped photo is from that time period. She was an educated, kind, and selfless person who lived a difficult life in diaspora. Of the 9 male and 3 female children of my paternal grandfather, only the three youngest uncles are still with us; something my cousins and I should reflect upon (I hope for many years), before we take over as the oldest living generation of the Parhami family.



(2) Meet the face behind Siri's voice: I just came across this 2-year-old [video clip](#) of an interview with Susan Bennett, the woman also known as Siri.

(3) Iranian Revolutionary Guards unveil a "missiles city," located **500 m under the ground**.

(4) A small sample of Iran's **Islamic justice**: Prison sentence of 12.75 years for drawing cartoons of Iranian politicians, vs. 5.25 years for corruption and embezzling more than \$300M from public funds.

(5) Three Iranian **opposition artists sentenced** to a total of 26.5 years in prison and 421 lashes.

(6) Final thought for the day: "You cannot shake hands with a clenched fist." ~ Indira Gandhi

2015/10/14 (Wednesday): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Aftermath of thunderstorm in our area: I took this photo of a thunderstorm, as seen from my study window, shortly before 6:00 this evening. Apparently, just as I was taking the photo, **lightning hit the transformer** atop an electrical pole in Isla Vista, causing it to explode. In Goleta, a palm tree caught fire from lightning strike.



(2) The Great California Shakeout: This year's annual event for preparing citizens to protect themselves during earthquakes will take place tomorrow (Thursday, 10/15) at 10:15 AM. Participation from 5M Californians is expected.

(3) Word puzzle: The letters in the word "FIENDISHNESS" can be rearranged to make two words of 4 and 8 letters that are synonyms, each of them both a verb and a plural noun. What are they?

(4) The world's **largest single structure** opens in China: It is a ~2M-square-meter shopping mall, three times the size of the Pentagon, or, if you prefer, the size of 329 football fields.

(5) Experiencing the plight of refugees first-hand: Members of the German Parliament got into an **overcrowded raft** in order to get a glimpse of what desperate refugees feel. This is a positive step, even though the politicians were never in danger of drowning and had no trouble being allowed back on land.

(6) Final thought for the day: "Avoid popularity; it has many snares and no real benefit." ~ William Penn

2015/10/13 (Tuesday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "The American people are sick and tired of hearing about your damned e-mails." ~ Bernie Sanders defending Hilary Clinton during today's Democratic debate, because the e-mails issue is a distraction from engaging in a discussion of important problems of interest to the public

(2) I don't know if this will help or hurt Hillary Clinton: Nancy Reagan **has endorsed her candidacy**.

(3) Lively **Kurdish music** makes everyone dance in a Dusseldorf shopping mall.

(4) Iranian documentary **film-maker sentenced** to a 6-year jail term and 223 lashes: The film that got the Kurdish artist Keyvan Karimi, a native of Baneh and winner of multiple international film awards, in trouble is a documentary about sociopolitical graffiti, "Neveshtan bar Shahr" ("Writing on the City"). Yes, FM Javad Zarif: You are right; there are absolutely no political prisoners in Iran!

(5) A trip back to the Tehran of yore: This **8-minute video** shows a museum and festival that recreate how people looked and what they did in Iran's capital city many years ago.

(6) A dozen brief announcements from actual church bulletins:

- Scouts are saving aluminum cans, bottles and other items to be recycled. Proceeds are used to cripple children.

- Ladies, don't forget the rummage sale ... [of items] not worth keeping around the house. Bring your husbands.
 - For those of you who have children and don't know it, we have a nursery downstairs.
 - [X and Y] were married on October 24 in the church. So ends a friendship that began in their school days.
 - A bean supper will be held on Tuesday evening in the church hall. Music will follow.
 - At the evening service tonight, the topic will be 'What Is Hell?' Come early and listen to our choir practice.
 - Please place your donation in the envelope along with the deceased person you want remembered.
 - Potluck supper Sunday at 5:00 PM — prayer and meditation to follow.
 - The ladies of the Church have cast off clothing of every kind. They may be seen in the basement on Friday.
 - Low Self Esteem Support Group will meet Thursday at 7 PM. Please use the back door.
 - The 8th-graders will be presenting Shakespeare's Hamlet ... The congregation is invited to attend this tragedy.
- Weight Watchers will meet at the First Presbyterian Church. Please use large double door at the side entrance.

(7) California opts for [automatic voter registration](#) upon obtaining/renewing driver's licenses or state ID cards: This idea is great! Why wasn't it implemented earlier? Once your identity has been verified, requiring extra work for voter registration does not make sense.

(8) Every story has two sides: There have been numerous social-media posts condemning the Israelis for killing Arabs on their streets, but very little mention of the multiple victims of stabbings and shootings that have occurred there, or of sermons [like this one](#) urging Palestinians to form stabbing squads.

2015/10/12 (Monday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) The great migration: The October 19, 2015, issue of *Time* magazine contains a 56-page feature on the current flood of refugees and migrants, second only in severity to what happened during World War II. The report identifies countries of origin (the top 5 are Syria, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Albania, Iraq), migration paths, smugglers who benefit from the misery, the importance of mobile phones in the refugees' lives, how this wave may affect Europe's economy, the plight of teenage migrants, and many other aspects of the problem.



(2) Nobel Prize in Economics: The [2015 Prize](#) went to Angus Deaton (Princeton) "for his analysis of consumption, poverty, and welfare."

(3) Poking fun at Iran's judiciary: Particularly, the way it shares info with the public using initials rather than full names of well-connected defendants (e.g., B. Z. instead of Babak Zanjani) accused of embezzling billions of dollars. [[FB post](#) in Persian]

(4) The "Ice in Paradise" skating rink in Goleta (adjacent to Girsh Park) is finally open, in time for residents to enjoy cool activities in the current scorching weather.

(5) A nice [Persian poem](#), bearing a political statement, by Ali Asghar Vaghedi.

(6) Modern Persian music: The song is "[Ey Iran-e Man](#)" ("Oh My Iran"), with music and lyrics by Nader Mohansi and vocals by Saeed Asadi. Other credits are at the beginning of the video.

(7) UCSB professor [cancels speech](#) at Brigham Young to protest lack of religious freedom for its students.

(8) Ben Carson's [most provocative lines](#): Why is this bumbling man still polling in the double-digits?

(9) Send silence packing: On the way home from my office this afternoon, I stopped by a display of 1100 backpacks on a campus lawn. The backpacks, many of which bore photos and personal stories, represent the 1100 annual suicides by college students. Ninety percent of those who die by suicide struggled with a treatable mental health disorder at the time of their death. Two-thirds of college students tell a friend that they are suicidal before they tell anyone else. So, whether we are friends, teachers, or family members, we can help prevent suicides, the second leading cause of death among college students, by listening and looking for the signs. Help is available on all college campuses and through the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 1-800-273-TALK (8255). You can also get info [on the Web](#) or [on Facebook](#).

2015/10/10 (Saturday): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Today is World Day Against the Death Penalty: Amnesty International has issued [a statement](#) for the occasion, which, while condemning capital punishment, highlights the progress made in recent years. "Thankfully the death penalty is in decline in the United States and around the world. Last year, executions in the United States were at a 20-year low, and death sentences were at their lowest level since 1976. What's more, nineteen states plus the District of Columbia have banned capital punishment, and seven other states have not carried out an execution in 10 years."

(2) Free cloud storage options: This [Newsweek article](#) introduces you to Google Photos (I have already downloaded the app on my mobile phone and PC, and it works great), Google Play Music, and Microsoft One Drive (I will try it out soon, given that it includes free basic Office applications).

(3) Twin explosions in Turkey kill 90 and injure twice as many: **The blasts** occurred near Ankara's main train station, while Kurds were protesting with banners, raising the possibility that it was sponsored by the government or the work of rival Kurdish factions.

(4) Confederation Cup soccer: After being tied 1-1 at halftime and at the end of 90 minutes at Pasadena's Rose Bowl, Mexico beat USA 3-2 in overtime on a beautiful one-touch volley goal to claim the Cup championship.

(5) Current state of neuroscience: A **10-minute tutorial**.

(6) On college faculty hanging on, now that the mandatory retirement age has been lifted: This **NPR story** resonated with me. I would have been forced to retire in less than 2 years, had the age limit of 70 not been lifted several years ago. I have a lot of energy left in me, still enjoy teaching, and believe that I am contributing (pulling my weight, so to speak). But I do see the other side of the argument that students relate better to younger teachers and that recent graduates should be given their turn at teaching jobs.

2015/10/09 (Friday): Year of Light Symposium: To honor UNESCO's designation of 2015 as the Year of Light and Light-Based Technologies, UCSB held a one-day symposium at Corwin Pavilion yesterday. With a Nobel Laureate specifically honored for his contributions to efficient lighting technologies (Shuji Nakamura) and two other Nobel Laureates who have contributed scientific results that facilitate solar energy harvesting (Alan Heeger) and optical communication (Herbert Kroemer), UCSB Engineering is in a great position to showcase its prowess in these areas. A fourth Nobel Laureate, Steven Chu, was the Symposium's Keynote Speaker.



The Symposium, which had three main corporate sponsors (Corning, HP, Intel) along with 8 supporting sponsors, included an eclectic mix of theoretical, practical, and administrative ideas that were quite interesting and informative to me.

After introductory remarks by UCSB Chancellor Henry Yang, Engineering Dean Rod Alferness, and President-Elect of the Optical Society of America Alan Willner, the technical talks of the Symposium began, which were organized in four 3-talk sessions.

The first speaker was Herbert Kroemer, ECE Professor at UCSB and a 2000 Nobel Laureate in Physics, whose talk, "The Double-Heterostructure Concept: How It Got Started," covered his work on compound semiconductors that enabled high-power lasers, without which optical-fiber communication would have been impossible.

The second speaker, John Bowers, ECE Professor at UCSB and Director of its Institute for Energy Efficiency, talked about "Silicon Photonic Integrated Circuits," covering strategies for facilitating and expanding the design and mass production of light-based technologies in the US.

The third speaker, Amnon Yariv (Caltech) was introduced as the person who literally and figuratively wrote "the book" on optoelectronics. His talk, entitled "Light, Noise, and Darkness," strangely began with how light is described in the Bible but then became technical as it moved to the roles of various scientific geniuses who produced our current understanding of light.

The fourth speaker was Alan Heeger, Physics & Materials Professor at UCSB and a 2000 Nobel Laureate in Chemistry, whose talk, "'Plastic' Solar Cells," covered how semiconducting polymers allow the construction of flexible, lightweight, and low-cost solar cells, that can perhaps be synthesized via 3D printing and used in a wide array of environments.

The fifth speaker, Eva Silverstein, Physics Professor at Stanford, spoke about "First Light: The Cosmic Microwave Background and Early Universe Physics." CMB radiation was discovered only 50 years ago, so we are still trying to understand and model it.

The sixth speaker was Bill Parish, Founder and CTO of Seek Thermal, whose talk titled "Energy Awareness: Seeing Energy to Save Energy" made the important point that visualizing our energy use would help us save energy. If we are not aware of it, we don't think about the waste. Most energy, when dissipated, produces heat, so thermal imaging with the help of MEMS structures will allow us to see, while looking around a room, for example, where energy waste is the greatest.

The seventh speaker was Shuji Nakamura, Professor of Materials and Co-Director of the Solid-State Lighting & Energy Center at UCSB and a 2014 Nobel Laureate in Physics, whose talk was entitled "Blue LED and Prospects for the Lighting Industry." He spoke passionately about the energy savings implications of LED lighting, presenting the estimates that complete conversion to LED lighting would eliminate the need for 7 nuclear power plants in Japan and about 20 in the US.

The eighth speaker was Steve DenBaars, Professor of Materials and ECE and Co-Director of the Solid-State Lighting & Energy Center at UCSB (also, a successful entrepreneur), whose talk was entitled "Energy Savings and Future Directions in Solid-State Lighting." He predicted that laser-based lighting has the potential of being an order of magnitude more efficient than LEDs and has potential applications in car headlights and giant 100" TVs that would sell for under \$1000.

The ninth speaker was Larry Coldren, ECE and Materials Professor at UCSB, whose talk, entitled "Semiconductor Lasers: Vertical, Tunable, Enabling Photonic ICs," was about making optical communication more efficient, including between components on the same chip.

The tenth speaker was Waguih Ishak, a division VP at Corning, whose talk was entitled "Lightwave Technologies are Key to: Good Health, Good Communications & Good Entertainment." He observed that the dawn of low-loss fiber communication has been responsible for our connected world, as we experience it today. In future, super-thin and extra light sheets of glass will make huge, ubiquitous displays possible.

The eleventh speaker was Ania Jayich, Physics Associate Professor at UCSB, whose talk was entitled "Quantum Sensing and Imaging with Photoluminescent Single Spins." She indicated that varieties of diamond get their distinctive colors from defects or impurities, which are undesirable for diamonds as gems but that produce electrical and optical properties that may be beneficial.

The twelfth and final regular speaker was Dan Morse, Molecular Genetics & Biochemistry Emeritus Professor at UCSB, whose talk, entitled "Tunable Biophotonics," began with the observation that life forms have interacted with light for millions of years, thus developing sophisticated systems for processing and emitting/reflecting light. The ability to glow and change color for camouflaging are examples of such systems.

Following a reception that took place in parallel with a poster session, the keynote speaker Dr. Steven Chu, Physics and Molecular & Cellular Physiology Professor at Stanford, former US Secretary of Energy, and a 1997 Nobel Laureate in Physics, spoke "In Celebration of Light." He observed that light is essential for the production of oxygen, food, and energy, that is, the basic human needs. After making the point that fossil fuels can be viewed as buried sunlight, he went on to outline how light will continue to expand our scientific horizons and redefine our daily lives, from the measurement of time, to biology, medicine, and combating climate change.

2015/10/08 (Thursday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) Doctors increasingly recommend less aggressive treatments for breast cancer:

Time magazine's cover feature for its October 12, 2015, issue is on how more women (and their doctors) are deciding to do less or even nothing in treating breast cancer.

(2) Malala Yousafzai's life story is a **just-released movie** titled "He Named Me Malala" ("He" being her father). I reviewed Malala's memoir, *I Am Malala*, on July 1, 2015.

(3) The woman who lost her eyesight but not her hope: She was blinded from acid sprayed on her face by her father-in-law, after she divorced her husband. When her story spread, **bank accounts were set up** for donations to help with the cost of medical procedures to recover at least part of her eyesight.

(4) Beautiful mosaics made completely by hand. [[5-minute video](#)]

(5) Nobel Prizes in Literature and Peace: The **2015 Literature Prize** went to Belarusian Svetlana Alexiovich "for her polyphonic writings, a monument to suffering and courage in our time." The honoree has written extensively about the horrors of war and other man-made disasters. As for the Peace Prize, there was a great deal of speculation about the recipient(s), as everyone feels entitled to speculate on this Prize. The **2015 Peace Prize** was awarded to National Dialogue Quartet "for its decisive contribution to the building of a pluralistic democracy in Tunisia in the wake of the Jasmine Revolution of 2011."

(6) Oldest fetus ever found: Within **48-million-year-old fossil** of a horse-like creature in Germany.

(7) This woman is the president of the women's hairstylists union in Iran. [[Image](#)]

(8) College soccer: Tonight, the UCSB Gauchos defeated UC Riverside 2-0 in a men's soccer home game at Harder Stadium. With earlier road wins against UC Irvine on October 1 (3-1) and Cal State Northridge on October 3 (2-1), UCSB is off to a great 3-0-0 start in Big West Conference play and improves its overall record to 8-3-1. On Saturday 10/10, UCSB will play Cal State Fullerton at home, a game that I will unfortunately miss.

(9) Playful optical illusions: Works by designers at Flying Mouse 365, a start-up company, aimed at making people smile. [[Pictorial](#)]



2015/10/07 (Wednesday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "[God will flood all 50 states if] the gays keep getting married." ~ Pat Robertson, in the wake of severe flooding in South Carolina caused by torrential downpours of biblical proportions (1000-year rains, according to the state's Republican Governor)

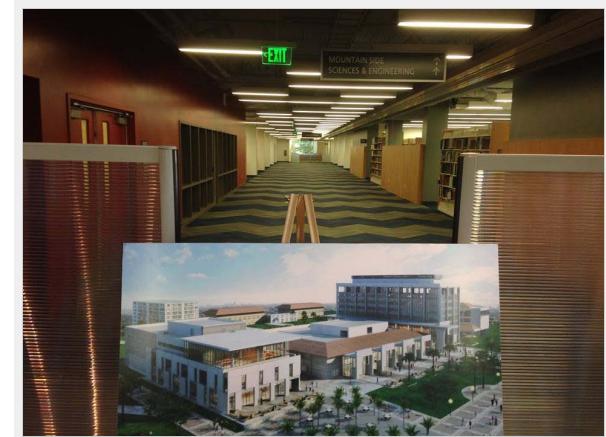
(2) Nobel Prize in Chemistry: The **2015 Prize** went to three scientists for showing how cells repair damaged DNA, potentially leading to new cancer treatments. Swedish scientist Tomas Lindahl, American Paul Mordrich, and Turkish-American Aziz Sancar share the honor along with the ~\$1M prize in equal shares.

(3) Russia bombs **targets in Syria**: Cruise missiles aimed at targets in Syria were fired from warships in the Caspian Sea and flew over northern provinces in Iran and Iraq, along several trajectories. International sources are skeptical that the missiles hit ISIS sites only, claiming that moderate forces opposing Assad were also hit.

- (4) Talking with Stephen Colbert, the Explainer-in-Chief (former President Bill Clinton) **pinpoints the reasons** for the rise of Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump.
- (5) LinkedIn to pay **\$13M in settlement** for excessive spamming: When a member used its "Add Connections" feature, the person on the other side received an e-mail and multiple reminders if s/he did not reply.
- (6) A brand new **Josh Groban concert**, filmed in August and based on his 2015 album "Stages," will be coming to PBS in December.
- (7) Ravel's "Bolero" played by four musicians **on one cello**: Truly fantastic!
- (8) October is National Cybersecurity Awareness Month: Recent high-profile cybersecurity incidents such as breaches at the US Office of Personnel Management, Sony Entertainment, and UCLA Health remind us of the ever-present security risks. This month is a great time to review your current practices and implement simple steps to reduce your personal exposure and that of the University. [Adapted from a UCSB announcement]
- (9) Final thought for the day: I think that because of the current US presidential campaign, people will stop citing brain surgeons as epitomes of intelligence, leaving rocket scientists with no competition.

2015/10/06 (Tuesday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Faculty reception to introduce the nearly completed UCSB Library extension: The opening of the new additions has been pushed back to January 2016, but the reception attended by the Chancellor and scores of faculty members was held as planned, with parts of the new structures taped off due to ongoing construction activities. The photo depicts the main hallway connecting the original parts of the UCSB Library to the new structures, along with artist's rendition of the completed project from above. An excellent feature of the new structure is an east-west indoor walkway that connects the two sides of the campus (arts/humanities and science/engineering), inviting campus denizen to enter the library and serving as its main hub.



(2) Michelle Obama's sound advice to girls: "There is no boy that is cute enough or interesting enough to stop you from getting your education."

(3) New STEM internships in California: UC Santa Barbara and the US Navy are working together to start a new program, called PIPELINES, next summer to expose veterans and underrepresented community college students to civilian STEM careers in the Navy. During this paid internship program, a Ventura County navy base will host 10 community college and five UCSB undergraduate students for an 8-week immersion into real-world engineering design problems.

(4) On-line universities for refugees: Kiron University, based in Berlin, is working with 20 universities around the world to launch an online university to offer 3-year internationally accredited college degrees to refugees. After a year of general-education classes and a second year of electives in 5 concentration areas, students will be able to transfer to one of the partner universities for the final year. Students will not be required to submit official documents until the third year, giving them time to obtain the documents they need that are often lost when refugees have to flee their countries of origin.

(5) California continues to lead the way in environmental stewardship: The *New York Times* reports that California is on the path to meeting its renewable-energy benchmarks. Contracts already in place virtually guarantee meeting the goal of 33% of electricity coming from renewables by 2020. State officials are confident that operational reliability will not be an issue up to the 33% level; there are some challenges to be worked out for the subsequent 40% and 50% goals.

(6) Supermarket changes on California's South Coast: Santa Barbara locals may be happy to hear that the ill-advised foray of Haggen into our area is coming to an end and that Smart & Final will be taking over two of the locations on State Street and Linden Avenue. Gelson's Markets is reportedly interested in other Haggen stores.

(7) Final thought for the day: "We've got BOOKS banned in this country to 'keep our kids safe' but we won't ban assault weapons to keep them safe. Lord, have mercy. And please let us not use tired arguments like 'Bad guys will get guns anyway.' Yes, bad guys will also run red lights. We still have traffic laws. Bad guys will still rape. We still have laws against rape. Let us not be ridiculous while our babies are dying." ~ From a **Facebook post**

2015/10/05 (Monday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Cartoon of the day: Conservatives on climate change.

(2) Nobel Prize in medicine: Three medical researchers have

been honored with the **2015 Nobel Prize** in physiology/medicine. Irish-born William C. Campbell and Japanese Satoshi Omura, who won half of the Prize, were cited for their joint work on a drug that is highly effective against a number of parasitic diseases. The Chinese scientist Youyou Tu was awarded the other half of the Prize for discovering a drug that significantly reduces mortality rates from malaria.



(3) South Carolina devastated by unprecedented floods: The floods have submerged homes, washed away cars, and destroyed roads, bridges, and other infrastructure.

(4) IBM announces breakthrough with carbon-nanotube transistors: Through a paper just published in the journal *Science*, IBM claims a factor of 7 speed-up in computation, or about the same factor in power savings, if carbon-nanotube transistors were to replace silicon transistors in a simulated IBM processor.

(5) Some mesmerizing mathematical GIFs.

(6) Chinese firm uses 3D printing for construction: Additive manufacturing using 3D printers is increasingly going beyond small widgets and into large-scale projects, as seen in the construction of entire houses in China. Shanghai WinSun Decoration Design Engineering firm recently mass-produced 10 houses in less than 24 hours with its own massive 3D printer, which makes 657-square-foot house for under \$5,000 using recycled materials. American 3D-printing firms have not attempted such large projects, but Stratasys is currently collaborating with MIT on a "4D printing project" researching self-assembly technologies for large-scale structures.

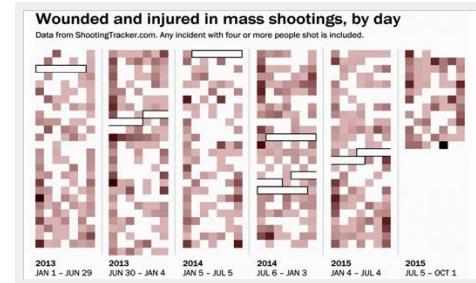
(7) Remembering faces: Today, I discovered that I may have prosopagnosia, or face blindness, at least in a partial or mild form. The abilities to remember faces and to recognize them are preprogrammed in the human brain and most of us perform these functions without any conscious thought. The 7 signs of prosopagnosia are:

- a. Failing to recognize someone close to you, especially if you were not expecting to see him/her.
- b. Trying to remember hairstyle or a distinctive feature, rather than the face, when meeting someone new.
- c. Trouble following films or TV shows that have more than a few distinctive characters.
- d. Failing to recognize yourself in the mirror and/or in photographs.
- e. Not knowing who a person is when s/he casually waves or says hello in the street.
- f. Failing to recognize a person after s/he gets a haircut.
- g. Difficulty in recognizing neighbors, friends, coworkers, clients, or schoolmates out of context.

I seem to have signs b, e, and g from the list above. Sign e may not be unusual for a teacher, who encounters many students over a lifetime, whereas each student encounters a much smaller number of teachers. Thus the asymmetry in recognition ability may be quite natural. I have observed sign b when I try to remember my students' names; this is much easier for me when a student is the only female or the only Asian, say, in class or has a distinctive body shape or posture. When there are multiple students with similar features, I have a hard time learning their names. As for sign g, I have been in numerous situations when I failed to recognize an acquaintance upon encountering him/her out of the normal context of our relationship.

2015/10/04 (Sunday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) Every week during the past 2.5+ years, there has been a mass shooting: If you define a mass shooting as 4 or more people being shot, there has not been a single week since President Obama's second term began when we have not had a mass shooting incident (sometimes several in one day). Each of these tinted squares represents multiple people killed or wounded through gun violence. And here is [a more detailed view](#) in tabular form.



(2) Twenty profound shower thoughts: At least half of them are laugh-out-loud funny. My favorites are #s 5, 7, 11, 12, 19, 20.

(3) Math puzzle: You are offered 12 chances to throw a single die. You can win \$20 if the throws show all the possible outcomes 1 through 6 at least once. If some of the 6 numbers do not show, you lose \$20. Would you accept the challenge? [From: *E&T* magazine, issue of October 2015.]

(4) Hillary Clinton plays a bartender and pokes fun at herself on this "Hillaryous" SNL skit.

(5) An enchanting performance of "Hotel California" by Cubanos Acapella, complete with amazing electric-guitar improvisations. And here is a wonderful acapella performance of **"Every Breath You Take"** in concert.

(6) Iranian folk music: A nice performance of **"Shiraz-e Man"** ("My Shiraz").

(7) Persian music: Performance of **"Morgh-e Sahar"** ("Dawn Bird") in Paris, with big orchestra and choir. The **Bahar Choir** strives to propagate Iranian and Silk Road musical traditions.

(8) Saudi prince charged with sexual assault may have fled the US: Majed Abdulaziz al-Saud, 29, has not

been seen since posting a \$300K bail. Saudi Arabia has no extradition treaty with the US.

(9) Citizen science gets a boost: White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) has released a memorandum and toolkit for government agencies to encourage "citizen science," crowdsourced scientific observation. WH-OSTP director, Dr. John Holdren, directed government agencies to designate a citizen science coordinator and to catalog citizen science activities that are open to public participation.

2015/10/03 (Saturday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) Cartoon of the day: A judiciary official in Iran has accused Foreign Minister Javad Zarif of being "a spy." By the way, several instances of courteous handshaking that do not meet with the approval of some hardliners in the Islamic government are referred to as "Handshakegate" in Iran.

[From *NYT*: "Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Ejei, implied that Zarif had engaged in treason. 'There is another method of spying that we must be watchful of—an individual who does not appear to be paid by the enemy and does not give classified information, but who has set the scene for the entrance of the enemy,' Ejei, a former prosecutor-general, said."]

(2) Anniversary of my arrival in Santa Barbara: I arrived in California on October 2, 1988, to begin working at UCSB, making yesterday the anniversary of my move from the harsh climate of Ottawa to the perpetual spring of the region between California's South and Central Coasts. Despite personal ups and downs, it has been a pleasant 27 years overall!



(3) Quote of the day: "If you have the power to turn another planet into Earth, then you have the power to turn Earth back into Earth." ~ Physicist Neil de Grasse Tyson, dismissing on "Real Time with Bill Maher" the need to escape our deteriorating planet (The 13-minute discussion in [this video clip](#) is quite interesting.)

(4) Talk about good luck! [\[19-second video\]](#)

(5) A scary tourist attraction in China: The 600-foot-high **glass-bottom suspension bridge** isn't for those who fear heights.

(6) Shimon Peres meets **Iranian peace activist** Maryam Faghih-Imani: The daughter of a prominent ayatollah, she apparently does not intend to return to Iran, where visiting Israel is punishable by death.

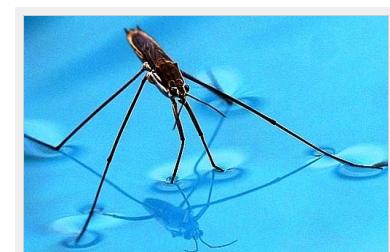
(7) California Avocado Festival: Today, I attended the annual food/carfts/music festival in Carpinteria (a town located midway between Santa Barbara and Ventura) with a few members of my family and a family friend. We sampled the obligatory guacamole and bought an avocado-almond cake. Our group enjoyed the outdoors, walking, and watching the bustling crowd, most of whom were waiting in food lines!

(8) Azeri music: A band performs "**Bakh Bakh**" ("Look, Look").

(9) Final thought for the day: "Math: The only place where people buy 60 watermelons and one wonders why." ~ Anonymous

2015/10/01 (Thursday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Mimicking nature: Water striders are insects that can land on water, stay for an extended time period, and take off from there with little effort. Researchers from Seoul National University and Harvard have been studying the insect as a model for lightweight robots. Using what they learned from the insect's body shape and maneuvers, the team built a robotic strider that can exert 16 times its body weight on the surface, without breaking through.



(2) Fun fact of the day: AT&T's phone records database is thought to be the world's largest, at 312 terabytes; enough to fill some half a million CD-ROMs.

(3) Yet another **campus mass shooting**: The deranged gunman and 10 innocent victims died and 7 were injured in an Oregon community college today. It is sickening that such mass shootings have become so routine that we don't even lift a finger to change the situation, after sympathizing with the victims and their families and paying lip service to the need for more stringent gun safety laws. Four Americans died in Benghazi and a years-long investigation was launched. Yet, scores are killed every few months due to lax gun laws and nothing happens in the US Congress. Enough is enough!

(4) Crack the following code by filling in the blank at the end of the last row: [From: *E&T magazine*, Oct. 2015]
dog dog, beetle beetle dog
human dog, spider

beetle beetle, spider dog spider human spider dog _____

(5) Julie Andrews turns 80: The **seven most magical moments** of this famous, yet mysterious, star.

(6) Iranian women mean business: Despite all the restrictions and social pressures, Iranian women are making **unprecedented gains** in career accomplishments and social status.

(7) A mountain of table salt: **Monte Kali** in the small town of Heringer in eastern Hesse, Germany, is one of the dumps associated with potash mining that contains nearly pure (up to 96%) sodium chloride.

(8) Final thought for the day: "To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you." ~ Lewis B. Smedes

2015/09/29 (Tuesday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Tech businesses that began in garages: Hewlett-Packard and Apple Computer are well-known examples of successful businesses that began in garages by a couple of individuals. The September 2015 issue of *The Institute*, an IEEE newsletter, features another example. Earl Bakken started the successful company Medtronic, now a leading developer of pacemakers, catheters, and other medical equipment in his Minneapolis garage as an outgrowth of his repair work for the hospital where his wife happened to work.



(2) How the Arab Muslims defeated the Sassanid Empire: [An interview](#) (in Persian) with Touraj Daryaee (UC Irvine) and Hossein Kamali (Barnard College, Columbia Univ.) about the root causes and consequences of the Sassanid Empire's collapse when attacked by the newly minted Muslim Arabs.

(3) Computing with noanmagnets: The September 2015 issue of *IEEE Spectrum* magazine contains an interesting article, by Wolfgang Porod and Michael Niemier, on how nano-dimensioned magnets can be used for highly efficient computing, though not quite as fast as the typical electronic-circuit implementation. Tiny rectangular cells are more easily magnetized along their lengths than across their widths, leading to stable states for storage. Adjacent magnets influence each other, leading to change of magnetization direction and, thus, computing, via an organized sequence of changes.

(4) Great white shark [sighted at Goleta Beach](#), on California's Central Coast.

(5) Largest ever gas field discovered in the Mediterranean: Discovery of the Zohr field off the coast of Egypt will help meet Egypt's gas needs for decades and seriously threatens Israel's fledgling gas export business. [Info from: *E&T* magazine, issue of October 2015.]

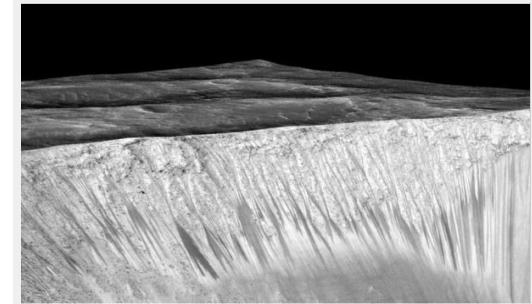
(6) Facility to test the safety of driverless cars: Mcity, designed by the University of Michigan within its North Campus Research Complex, is a [realistic little town](#) with street crossings, traffic lights, "pedestrianized" areas, railroad crossings, building facades, and even benches. [Info from: *E&T* magazine, issue of October 2015.]

(7) A math puzzle: Using any or all of the basic arithmetic operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division, can you reach 24 while employing all of the 4 numbers 3, 8, 3, 8? Note that $3 \times 8 = 24$ is unacceptable, because it does not include all four numbers given. [From: *E&T* magazine, issue of October 2015.]

(8) Final thought for the day: "Our ultimate goal is to make as many people as sad as possible when we die." ~ Anonymous

2015/09/28 (Monday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Liquid water on Mars: From external evidence, it has been known for some time that Mars contains liquid water below its surface. Now, for the first time, scientists have discovered liquid water on the surface.



This image shows a salt covered cliff with dark streaks that come and go over time, suggesting that water occasionally flows over it. It is believed that the water is extremely salty, which explains why it remains in liquid form, despite the very cold temperatures. Experts are debating whether this level of salt in the water is consistent with supporting some life forms. Even if the answer is no, the water sources below the surface (that perhaps percolate to the top of the cliff) may not be as salty, hence such a conclusion won't rule out the presence of life below the Martian surface.

(2) Quote of the day: "The attack on education isn't on training our youth for whatever careers they choose; it's on teaching them to think logically in order to form opinions based on facts rather than on familial and social influences." ~ Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, writing in *Time* magazine, issue of October 5, 2015

(3) Explaining words/phrases through rearrangement of letters: I had seen some, but not all, of these before.
PRESBYTERIAN: BEST IN PRAYER | ASTRONOMER: MOON STARER | DESPERATION: A ROPE ENDS IT | THE EYES: THEY SEE | GEORGE BUSH: HE BUGS GORE | THE MORSE CODE: HERE COME DOTS | DORMITORY: DIRTY ROOM | SLOT MACHINES: CASH LOST IN ME | ANIMOSITY: IS NO AMITY | ELECTION RESULTS: LIES -

LET'S RECOUNT | SNOOZE ALARMS: ALAS! NO MORE Z'S | A DECIMAL POINT: I'M A DOT IN PLACE | THE EARTHQUAKES: THAT QUEER SHAKE | ELEVEN PLUS TWO: TWELVE PLUS ONE | MOTHER-IN-LAW: WOMAN HITLER

(4) Modern Persian music: Shahrzad Sepanlou has posted [this song](#), with a special dedication to Niloufar Ardalan, captain of Iran's women's futsal team who could not accompany the team to Asian Cup games because her husband refused to grant her permission to obtain a passport. The song is entitled "Equal Gods."

(5) A so-called "moderate" politician's views from 31 years ago: Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, former Iranian president now masquerading as a moderate Islamist, speaks about women's underwear and how the West uses women and women's clothing to infiltrate Islamic countries. It appears that women's looks and clothing are permanent preoccupations of these guys. Funny and sad at the same time! [[12-minute audio file](#)]

(6) An emotional and politically charged Persian poem: Bidad recites his Persian poem at a poetry-reading session in Tehran. [[14-minute video](#)]

(7) Shakira at the UN General Assembly: She sang John Lennon's "[Imagine](#)" in honor of Aylan and Galip Kurdi and all the other children displaced by the Syrian conflict. Iran's delegation reportedly left the Assembly hall while Shakira performed.

(8) Final thought for the day: "If NASA can find water on Mars, maybe one day they'll find it in California." ~ Stephen Colbert, during tonight's "The Late Show"

2015/09/27 (Sunday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) California Lemon Festival: The annual event, with food and activities for people of all ages, was held yesterday and today at Goleta's Girsh Park. I attended yesterday and also paid a visit to a classic car show held in the same park. Drinking a large cup of lemonade was, of course, a requirement, especially in view of the temperature being in the nineties. I also watched a stage show by Sean Wiggins and Lone Goat, a local band that did a good job performing Meghan Trainor's "[All About That Bass](#)" and Prince's "[Kiss](#)" (the band's [Web site](#)).



(2) Modern Persian music: Saba Morteza-Nejad, a very talented 11-year-old girl, sings "[Mi-Gozaram Tanhaa'](#) ("I Journey Alone"), made famous by Marzieh.

(3) Foreign-film entries for the 2016 Academy Awards: As Iran works to sift through a collection of 10 films to pick its Academy Award submission, word comes that "[Baba Joon](#)," a Persian-language film about conflict inside an Iranian Jewish family, already winner of the top award in Israel's version of the Oscars, will be Israel's entry.

(4) Women on ambition (according to *Time* magazine, issue of September 28, 2015):

Do you consider yourself very or extremely ambitious? Yes, 38% (for men, 51%)

Do you have regrets about not having been more ambitious? Yes, 59%

Being publicly recognized as ambitious is: Empowering, 35%; Embarrassing, 16%

(5) Malala Yousafzai [spoke to a cheering crowd](#) at the Global Citizen fundraising concert last night.

(6) Colorful hills: Located about 25 km northeast of Tabriz in Iran, these magical hills are no more than 100 m high, but they create an [unforgettable vista](#).

(7) Iran wins Asian Cup in women's futsal: Here are [Iran's tournament highlights](#), including the single goal that won the final match against Japan. Recall that Iran's team was missing its captain and best goal scorer, who could not travel because her husband did not give her permission. Other team members clearly made up for her absence. Let's see if Iranian authorities dare to celebrate this victory!

(8) Iranian-American Bita Daryabari [gives \\$1.5M to UC Davis](#) for expanding its Persian studies program.

(9) College soccer: After beating arch-rival UCLA Bruins 4-2 on Monday 9/21, the UCSB men's soccer team returned home to play matches against Akron on Friday 9/25 (lost 0-2) and San Diego tonight (won 4-0). As of tonight, UCSB's record stands at 5-3-1, which is excellent, given the strong opponents they have faced. The pre-season is now over and the Gauchos will begin conference play on the road against UC Irvine (Thursday, 10/01) and Cal State Northridge (Saturday, 10/03), before returning home to face UC Riverside (Thursday, 10/08) and Cal State Fullerton (Saturday, 10/10).

2015/09/25 (Friday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) The girl who launched a company from her dorm room:

Limor Fried, founder of Adafruit Industries, a do-it-yourself electronics company for hobbyists, used to post DIY projects on her Web site as a way of killing time until she found a "real" job. She is now using her successful business as a way of making electronics "just as enjoyable for kids as watching their favorite movies." To this end, Adafruit produces the YouTube series "Circuit Playground," with each



episode covering an electrical engineering concept. [Image: Cover of *The Institute*, an IEEE newsletter, September 2015.]

(2) Quote of the day: "True love is like ghosts, which everyone talks about and few have seen." ~ Francois de La Rochefoucauld

(3) A sickening way to marry a woman: In Ethiopia, one accepted method for marrying a girl, often underage, is to abduct her, rape her, and then negotiate with her family from a position of power to ask for her hand in marriage. This, according to Aberash Bekele, in an interview with *Time* magazine (issue of September 28, 2015), is what happened to her and what will be the subject of the upcoming Angelina Jolie film "Difret."

(4) Mr. Haloo's video clip #167: This humorous Persian poem, recited by Mohammad Reza Ali-Payam (aka Haloo) at a poetry-reading session in Tehran, pokes fun at Sa'adi's poem that proclaims God opens another door with kindness, whenever he wisely closes a door. [[6-minute video](#)]

(5) Asian Cup women futsal: After a 1-0 victory over Thailand in the semifinals, Iran is headed to Saturday's final match against Japan, a team that earlier beat China and Malaysia with impressive 7-1 and 8-1 scores.

(6) This is Lebanon: Someone please send [this musical video](#) to Iran's Supreme Leader before his next speech on Lebanon!

(7) Innumeracy in the US news media: The amount of harmful emissions by Volkswagen's illegal and immoral software hack to deactivate emission control devices once mandated tests have been passed are variously described in the news media as leading to 40% more or 40 times as much harmful emissions as mandated by law. Get your acts together, newspeople! Not that the former would be acceptable, but still there is a big difference between 40% more (1.4 times as much) and 40 times as much. The first is just run-of-the-mill cheating; the second borders on the criminal.

(8) Robots might go to college: According to a *Washington Post* report, the Allen Institute for Artificial Intelligence and the University of Washington have designed an AI system that can earn an average score of 500 out of 800 on the SAT, close to the human average score of 513.

2015/09/24 (Thursday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "We're somehow imagining that our problems can be solved by eating this or doing that ... It's a big cultural picture that is causing us to be unhappy and struggle with food." ~ Chef Alice Waters

(2) Beautiful Persian poetry: An intoxicating love poem, by classical Persian poetess Tahereh Ghoratolein (Tahirih Qurratu l-Ayn, per Wikipedia), is recited in this [11-minute video](#), with tar music by Farhang Sharif.

ای به سر زلفل تو سودای من | وز غم هجران تو غوغای من | عشق تو بگرفته سرای ای من شده تو، آمده بر جای من
گرچه بسی رنج غم پرده ام | جام بیایی ز بلا خوددام | سوخته جاتم اگر افسرده ام | زندگان گز غم مرده ام چون لب تو هست مسیحای من
گنج منم، باتی مخزن تویی | سیم منم، حاجب معدن تویی | دانه منم صاحب خرم تویی | هیکل من چیست اگر من تویی؟ | گز تو منی، چیست هیولای من؟
من شدم از مهر تو چون زده پست | وز قبح باده عشق توست | تابه سر زلفل تو داده است | تاتو منی، من شده اخضای من
دل اگر از توست، چرا خون کنی؟ | ورز تو نیو زد چه مجنون کنی؟ | دم به دم این سوز دل افزوون کنی | تاخویمه راهمه بیرون کنی | جای کنی در دل شیدای من
آتش عشقت چو برا فروخت دود | سوخت مرایه ای هر هست و بود | کفر و مسلمانیم از دل زدود | تابه خم ابرویت آنم سجود | فرق یه از کعبه کلیساي من
کلک از ل تا به ورق زد رقم | گشت هم آغوش چولوح و قلم | نامده خلقی به وجود از عدم | بر تن ادم چو دمیند دم | مهر تو بده در دل شیدای من
دست قضا چون گل ادم سرشت | مهر تو در مزرعه هی سینه گشت | عشق تو گردید مراسنوت | فارغم اکتون ز جحیم و بهشت | نیست به غیر از تو تمنای من
پایی ام از یاد خود و فانی ام | جر عاهکش باده ای ربانی ام | سالک صحرای پریشانی ام | تا چه رسد بر دل رسوسای من
بر در دل تا آری گوشدم | جلوه کنان بر سر آن کو شدم | هر طرفی گرم هیاوه شدم | او همگی من شد و من او شدم | من دل و او گشت دلای من
کعبه ای من خاک سر کوی تو | مشعله افزوژ جهان روی تو | سلسه ای جان خم گیسوی تو | زلفل تو در ذی، چلیباي من
شیفتنه ای ضرست اعلی ستم | عاشق دیدار دل آرامست | رهرو وادی سوداست | از همه بگذشته تو را خواستم | پرسد شده از عشق تو اعضای من
تاکی و کی پندنیوشی کنم؟ | چند نهان بیانه پوشی کنم؟ | چند ز هجر تو خوشی کنم | پیش کسان زهد فروشی کنم | تا که شور راغب کلای من
خرقه و سجاده به دور افکنم | باده یه مینای پلور افکنم | شعشهه در وادی طور افکنم | بام و در از عشق به شور افکنم | بر در میخانه بود جای من
عشق، علم کوفت به ویرانه ام | باده حق ریخت به پیمانه ام | از خود و عالم همه بیگانه ام | حق طلب همت والای من
ساقی میخانه ای بزم است | ریخت به هر جام چو صهیاز دست | ذره صفت شد همه ذرات پست | باده ز ما میست شد و گشت هست | از اثر نشنه ای صهیای من
عشق به هر لحظه تدا می کند | بر همه موجود صدا می کند | هر که هوا ره ما می کند | اگر حذر از موج بلا می کند | پا نتهد بر لب دریای من
هندوی نوبت زن یام توانم | طایر سرگشته به دام توانم | مرغ شبایزی به شام توانم | محوز خود، زنده به تام توانم | گشته ز من درد من و مای من

(3) Some enchanting [Bach music](#) by the Russian pianist Grigory Sokolov.

(4) The ultimate air purifier: The [tower-like device](#), to be installed in Beijing, Los Angeles, and Mexico City neighborhoods, creates a fresh-air bubble around it by extracting pollutant particles from the air and storing

them in its core for later removal during maintenance.

(5) The 700+ pilgrims killed in the Mecca stampede included 130 Iranians: Supreme Leader Khamenei has declared a 3-day period of national mourning. No signs yet from the Saudis or other Muslim countries about revising the pilgrimage process, which, in its current form, would be disallowed by fire marshalls and other safety officials in any advanced country.

(6) The centennial of Einstein's theory of relativity: The September 2015 issue of *Scientific American* is devoted to Einstein in honor of the 100th anniversary of his most famous contribution to science. Other than an editorial to open the issue, there are articles with the titles: Why He Matters (One mind's effect on civilization) | How Einstein Reinvented Reality | Did Einstein Really Invent $E = mC^2$? (Short answer: No) | Head Trip (Einstein's thought experiments) | What Einstein Got Wrong | Relativity's Reach | Cleaning Up After Einstein | A Brief History of Time Travel | The Black Hole Test (Toward an actual test of Einstein's theory) | Who Was Einstein, Really? | Genius in a Jar (On the origins of genius) | Is the Cosmos Random?

(7) A statistical challenge: Today, I wished happy birthday to 3 different Facebook friends for the first time ever. With 222 friends, I should make an average of 0.6 birthday posts per day (the average is actually less, because not everyone lists his/her birthday). So, is it weird that there were 3 today? Not necessarily. The birthday paradox tells us that with 23 randomly distributed birthdays, it is more likely than not to have 2 on the same day. With 75 birthdays, the odds of having 2 on the same day becomes 99.9%; that is, almost certain. These results are counter-intuitive, hence the designation "paradox." I've been thinking since this morning about a corresponding result for having 3 birthdays on the same day. In other words, what is the smallest number of randomly distributed birthdays that would make it more likely than not to have 3 birthdays on the same day? This appears to be a much harder problem than the original birthday paradox, which can be solved with moderate effort.

(8) Final thought for the day: Brushing your teeth is the only time you clean your skeleton.

2015/09/23 (Wednesday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Cartoon of the day: The Pope visits America.

(2) A new academic year begins: The fall quarter officially started on Sunday at many UC campuses and classes will begin on Thursday 9/24. Today, our campus was abuzz with new undergraduate and graduate students trying to find their way to various offices and pre-instructional activities, and returning students resuming their academic plans a year closer to their goal. My own class (a graduate course on fault-tolerant computing), which kicks off my 43rd year of teaching, begins on Monday 9/28. Welcome to the academic year 2015-2016!

(3) Saudi Arabia to head **human rights panel**: And not long ago, Iran sat on a women's rights body. Next will be Russia's turn with gay rights!



(4) Quote of the day: "One of the long-standing problems with the American political system was the lack of shopping ... But democracy has finally matured enough that presidential candidates have added a Shop tab to the top of their websites, right next to Bio, Volunteer and Donate, and nowhere near the nonexistent Positions on Issues." ~ Humorist Joel Stein, writing in *Time* magazine, issue of September 28, 2015

(5) Yogi Berra dead at 90 (yesterday): Berra was an all-time greatest baseball player, coach, and manager. Not being a baseball fan, I knew him mainly for his Yogi-isms, a wide collection of memorable quotes, some consisting of slips of tongue, others, while lighthearted, interpreted as deep statements about life and the human nature (whether or not Berra intended those meanings). Here are some of the better-known examples: "It ain't over till it's over." | "Nobody goes there anymore. it's too crowded." | "When you come to a fork in the road, take it." | "You can observe a lot by just watching." | "Baseball is 90% mental; the other half is physical."

(6) A new school year begins in Iran: On the first day of school, **this boy's mother and uncle** are still in prison for their participation as teachers in the Baha'i University.

(7) A very prestigious faculty hire at UCSB: World-famous mathematician Yitang Zhang, best known for the establishment in 2013 of the first finite bound on the gap between twin primes, has joined UCSB's Department of Mathematics. Twin primes differ by 2 (e.g., 5 and 7; 11 and 13; 41 and 43). The frequency of occurrence of such pairs appears to diminish as we move toward larger numbers. The derived finite bound on the gap between twin primes means that there are ample such pairs throughout the natural number line.

(8) A timeless statement that is so relevant in today's America: "There are people in every time and every land who want to stop history in its track. They fear the future, mistrust the present, and invoke the security of a comfortable past, which in fact, never existed." ~ Robert F. Kennedy

2015/09/22 (Tuesday): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) What Bernie Sanders wants: Short list, according

to *Time* magazine, issue of September 28, 2015.

Big money out of politics;
Universal health care;
Free public universities;
Expanded social security;
Jobs programs.

(2) Ben Carson's days as a US presidential candidate are numbered: You just can't mock evolution and other broadly supported scientific theories and expect to become president in an advanced industrial country (he is even lagging the Vatican on these issues). Mark my word!

(3) This is a fun election US cycle for the Democrats: The Republican presidential candidates are self-destructing one by one and Republicans in the US Congress are ducking the issues, lest they be seen as defending ridiculous positions by their mainstream and fringe candidates alike. Even John Boehner is running scared, because, for all his grandstanding and inflexibility, he is seen by his flock as having failed to stand up to President Obama. Meanwhile the movement *Newsweek* magazine calls "B-B-B-Bernie and the Jets" not only has not fostered any hope for the Republicans that they can beat a leftist candidate, should he prevail over Hillary Clinton, but is directly challenging many of their talking points about taxes being too high and the poor and the elderly (rather than the military-industrial complex and big pharma) bankrupting the US.

(4) A violin duo raised on hip-hop and classical music creates wonders. [[3-minute video](#)] [[NPR story](#)]

(5) Examples that prove businesses need regulations and oversight emerge daily: The latest two incidents are Volkswagen turning on smog-reduction devices only during mandated testing (then turning them off to get better mileage) and the price of Daraprim, a 60-year-old drug, going from \$13.50 to \$750 per tablet (a 56-fold, or 5500% increase) overnight.

(6) Final thought for the day: "There is only one religion—love. There is only one race—the human race. There is only one language—kindness." ~ Anonymous



2015/09/21 (Monday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) The art of light: The October 2015 issue of *Westways* features the streetlights of Los Angeles, including some ornate historical ones on Wilshire Blvd. (between Figueroa and Rampart Blvd.), Olympic Blvd. (between Figueroa and Hoover St.), and Broadway (between Olympic Blvd. and Beverly Blvd.). As for collections or assemblies of streetlights, other than the well-known one at the entrance to Los Angeles County Museum of Art, there is one at the intersection of Vermont Ave. and Santa Monica Blvd., featuring 25 varieties installed by Sheila Klein and titled "Vermonica."



(2) Creativity with cell phones and tablets: A [2.5-minute cartoon](#) that runs in real time on multiple moving screens.

(3) World car-free day: Tomorrow, Tuesday, September 22, 2015, has been designated as a day when we should try to avoid using our cars. Organized events are held in some cities and countries.

(4) A word challenge: What word when used as a noun denotes someone who is highly respected, yet when used as a verb describes a dishonorable action?

(5) Iranian folk music: Minoo Javan sings "**Khoroos Khaan**" ("Rooster Call"). And here are her renditions of "**Hey Yar, Hey Yar**" and "**Pacheh Leyli**".

(6) Taxpayer-subsidized sports stadiums: Cash-rich professional sports leagues, billionaire team owners, and millionaire players are beneficiaries of generous subsidies for building ever-larger and more luxurious sports stadiums. President Obama's [2016 budget proposal](#) called for a ban on using tax-exempt municipal bonds to fund stadiums, but the Congress seems unwilling to act.

(7) Photographer stumbles upon a partially-completed replica of the Space Shuttle in a deserted Soviet-era warehouse. [[A fascinating pictorial](#)]

(8) Obama is the worst Muslim ever: He is pro choice, pro gay rights, pro women's rights, eats bacon, and drinks beer. [Adapted from various Internet sources.]

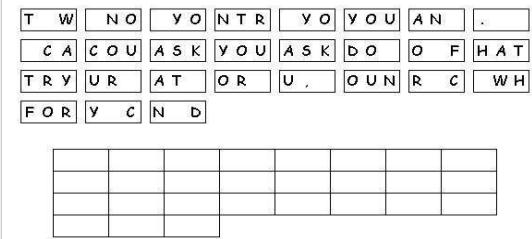
(9) Ahmed has a clock: [One-minute video](#) mocking the recent arrest of a 14-year-old boy for making a clock as his science project.

2015/09/20 (Sunday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) A word puzzle: Decode this famous quote by putting

the given blocks in the proper order.

(2) Golf, without the clubs: Footgolf is a new hybrid sport that is played like golf but which uses soccer balls that must be put into 21-inch-wide holes with as few kicks as possible. It has all the benefits of golf (activity, socializing) and none of the frustrations, and it can be enjoyed by entire families, adults and kids together. There are already more than 400 courses in the US offering footgolf. [4-minute video]



(3) Your heart may be older than you are: According to *Time* magazine, issue of September 21, 2015, the age indicated by your birth certificate may not match that of your most vital organ. Some 69% of Americans have hearts that are older than their biological age (an average of 8 years older for men, 5 for women). An increase in heart age clearly leads to higher risk of heart attacks and strokes.

(4) Commercial for a new shampoo: **Feminism**

(5) Lady Gaga's song and video "**Till It Happens to You**" is about preventing sexual assaults.

(6) Fun science experiments: Observe a number of neat and unexpected results using experiments with everyday items. [6.5-minute video]

(7) Rice by Mama: This is the name of a relatively new family-run restaurant in Ventura, which is featured in the October 2015 issue of *Westways*. It boasts top-notch Thai food, with reasonable prices and generous portions.

(8) The future of monogamy: *Time* magazine, issue of September 21, 2015, contains a feature on monogamy, including why it is unnatural and why it is nonetheless useful; a sign that we humans can accept biparenting, a beneficial social norm that goes against our biology. Nevertheless, monogamy is expected to become less common over time.

(9) Toe-Tac-Tic: This inverse game of Tic-Tac-Toe has been proposed by Marilyn vos Savant. The rules are like Tic-Tac-Toe, but the player who gets three tokens in a row loses. It appears that the first player is at a disadvantage, because s/he will place 5 tokens on the board to the second player's 4. What are the chances of the first player losing if s/he makes the best possible move at each turn?

2015/09/19 (Saturday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) Bernie Sanders is the subject of a cover feature in *Time* magazine's September 28, 2015, issue.



(2) Reducing clutter and helping with a good cause: I have started going through boxes of clothing and other items that are stored in my garage. I had been waiting for an available block of time to sort through these and let others make use of whatever I no longer need. The perfect opportunity is now at hand: helping Syrian refugees. If anyone else also has items suitable for this purpose (baby/child/adult clothing, socks and shoes, personal hygiene items, toys), and can get them to the Los Angeles area no later than September 25, 2015, please let me know and I will put you in touch with a cousin of mine who is working with other volunteers to fill a container of goods to be shipped there.

(3) Carpool karaoke in Los Angeles: Stevie Wonder has **tons of fun** with James Corden, as they sing some of his most famous songs inside a car and contemplate forming a new group, "The Wonder Cats."

(4) The shady family behind America's Iran lobby: While the National Iranian American Council (NIAC) has been doing the heavy-lifting to sell the US public and lawmakers on the Iran nuclear deal, one very well-connected but low-profile family, **the Namazis**, will reap the benefits of economic normalization that may follow from its generous support of NIAC.

(5) Local TV news personality **arrested for DUI**: Paula Lopez Ochoa, former long-time news anchor for KEYT Channel 3 of Santa Barbara and now with KCOY Channel 12, was arrested last week for the second time in two years on charges of driving under the influence and resisting arrest. She was traveling southbound in the northbound lanes of Highway 101 at night, about 10 miles northwest of Goleta. Will she get off easy once again because she is married to a retired Santa Barbara County Superior Court judge? Next time I drive to the SF Bay Area, I should be careful when passing the El Capitan State Beach, where this incident occurred!

(6) The Kamkars Ensemble performs at a Nobel Prize ceremony. [6-minute video]

(7) Modern Persian music: Shadi Amini performs "28," a wistful **song about Tehran**.

(8) College soccer: After winning their season-opener at home 1-0 against the highly ranked Stanford, the

UCSB Gauchos went on the road to play 4 games (2-2 v. Denver; 1-2 v. New Mexico; 2-0 v. Yale; 1-2 v. Connecticut), accumulating a not-so-impressive 2-2-1 record. Last night, they returned home, where they prevailed over the College of Charleston 3-1 to improve their record to 3-2-1. Between this game and next weekend's home games against Akron and San Diego, the Gauchos will travel to UCLA for a game on Monday 9/21.

(9) Final thought for the day: "Of all bodily functions that could be contagious, thank god it's the yawn." ~ Anonymous

2015/09/18 (Friday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) A word puzzle: This matrix, when filled properly, holds a 10-letter word in each of its 10 rows. In each row, five 2-letter blocks are to be placed from the list on the right. For example, the last row must begin with the 2-letter block UN or US (the only ones in the list that begin with U). Similarly, at the end of the first row, the only options are CE, ME, NE, PE, or TE. Good luck! [Credit: Marilyn vos Savant]

(2) Another word puzzle: What do members of each of the following triples have in common?

(Ball, Fish, Cold) (Ball, Salad, Coin) (Cork, Question,

Balloon) (Bottle, Baseball player, Mushroom) (Bell, Mouth, Shoe) (Tug of war, TV news, Boat) (Seventeen, Time, People) (Basketball court, Highway, Bowling alley) (Fog, Jack, Body builder) (Hockey game, Restaurant, Bank)

(3) Quote of the day: "America does not have a shred of humanity." ~ Iran's Supreme Leader Khamenei, vowing to block any attempt by the US to influence Iran in social and economic domains [[This video](#) is just a quick reminder of how the streets of Tehran were filled with humanity in 2009.]

(4) Fine example of Finglish: This [3-minute video](#) has been around for a while, but I still find it funny.

(5) Hillary Clinton is interviewed by Jimmy Fallon impersonating Donald Trump: Quite funny! [[5-minute video](#)]

Hillary Clinton to Jimmy Fallon (impersonating Donald Trump): "What IS your stance on women's issues?"
JF/DT: "Look, I know a lot of women, and they all have issues!"

(6) Persian music, featuring a large ensemble of daf players. [[5-minute video](#)]

(7) Muslim teen arrested when his home-made clock is mistaken for a bomb: Ahmed Mohamed's science project, consisting of a circuit board and a display, raised alarms at a Texas high school, leading to his being handcuffed by the police and a 3-day suspension from school. Following widespread outrage on social media, President Obama has invited the teen to the White House for encouragement and apologies.

(8) CNN [asks Iranians](#) about the US Republican presidential candidates, with some interesting results.

(9) Final thought for the day: "I've heard some college campuses where they don't want to have a guest speaker who is too conservative or they don't want to read a book if it has language that is offensive to African-Americans or somehow sends a demeaning signal towards women. I gotta tell you I don't agree with that either. I don't agree that you, when you become students at colleges, have to be coddled and protected from different points of view." ~ President Barack Obama, speaking during his appearance at North High School in Des Moines, Iowa, on September 14, 2015

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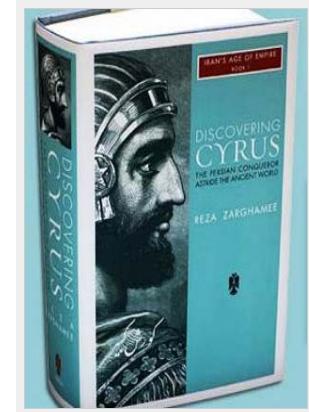
2015/09/17 (Thursday): Book review: Zarghami, Reza, *Discovering Cyrus: The Persian Conqueror Astride the Ancient World*, Mage Publishers, 2013.

[Note added on 9/19: This review has been featured on [Iranian.com](#).]

This is a monumental contribution to the ancient history of Iran, covering Cyrus II (the Great), founder of the Achaemenid Empire. I heard the author speak in August 2014 at a professional gathering in Milan, Italy, and saw firsthand his passion for the material in this book and the care with which he approaches the subject matter. One can say that the book is the result of a lifelong passion of its relatively young author.

Reza Zarghami was born in 1978 to Iranian parents in London and grew up in Boston. He is a Harvard Law School graduate and has pursued ancient Iranian History both formally (double-majoring in history and biology and tutelage with renowned scholars) and as a consuming side interest. He is at work on a second book on Iran's Age of Empire, covering the life of Darius.

In elaborating on his sources (pp. xxvii-xxxiv), the author begins by conceding that "The ancient Persians did not preserve the history of the Achaemenid in a reliable, narrative form." Part of the problem is that written records were kept mostly on parchment, leather, and other perishable material. The Greeks, on the other hand, were masters of historic record-keeping and much of what we know about ancient Persia has been transmitted



to us through the lens of the Greek cultural bias and their protracted competition with the Persians. The Hebrew Bible's account of Cyrus and his reign isn't detailed and is also marred by myths and exaggerations. Later orientalists' accounts were even more distorted by their own forms of cultural bias and by a desire to shock and awe their readers with exoticism and hyperbole.

At 735 pages (not counting the 48 pages of front matter), the book contains a lot of material and leaves no stone unturned, so to speak. This is definitely not a book one reads sequentially, from cover to cover. The best approach, the one I have used, is to take in the general drift of the book and its overarching structure and then go back and read various chapters at a more leisurely pace. This review encompasses my attempt at absorbing the book and contains little in way of actual historical details.

The author, like many others writing about ancient Persian kings, focuses on the grandeur of Cyrus's court and the vast and diverse territory of the empire. The following map shows the Persian Empire at its peak, after Cyrus's kingdom had been augmented by adding parts of Egypt and other lands on the fringe of the map. It is indeed impressive that such a vast area was ruled effectively without the modern-day coordination and communication technologies. A feature that allowed for ruling of diverse, geographically distributed populations over extended time periods was a kind of distributed governance to which Cyrus's personality as a combination statesman/soldier was particularly suited.



Let me insert a side note here. Ever since I studied history in high school, I have been curious as to how some kings and leaders get the designation "the Great" ("Kabir" in some texts, or "Bozorg,: to avoid using Arabic terms). In other words, who makes the judgment? Looking at a list of Persian kings, there is little argument among Iranians that Cyrus was indeed great. Then there is Reza Shah at the most recent end of history, who received the title while his son ruled the country, making the honor a bit fishy. In fact, while there is strong support for calling the founder of the Pahlavi dynasty "Reza Shah the Great," much less complimentary adjectives are used by a sizable group of Iranians.

Color plates on pp. 417-434 include a 19th-Century engraving of Cyrus's portrait based on a bas-relief at Pasargadae, an image of Cyrus's tomb as it looks today, images from Persepolis, Pasargadae, Bisutun, and other historical sites (including some reconstructed views), and an image of the Cyrus Cylinder. The book also includes 20 appendices (pp. 435-557), endnotes on the main parts and the appendices (pp. 559-676), and bibliography (pp. 677-711).

In writing this tome, Zarghamee was faced with the unenviable task of sifting through volumes of material, the diversity of which made conflicting accounts inevitable. He resolved the conflicts, and filled the gaps, using the available evidence as well as his personal judgment. This kind of extrapolation and gap-filling is understandable in writing about an age that was sparsely documented and lost much documents and artifacts to wars and other upheavels.

So, while this book does offer a sweeping narrative that is well-researched and referenced, it cannot be considered a definitive historical account of Cyrus the Great's life and reign. Zarghamee weaves Cyrus's story with that of Zoroastrianism. In fact, one might rightly say that the latter is an equal focus of the book.

Zarghamee sort of implies that Cyrus was "Great" because of his Zoroastrian faith. This is where his claims are controversial. Other accounts of the Achaemenid Empire do not give as much weight to the role of Zoroastrianism in the governing philosophy of Cyrus and his successors or in the societal fabric of that age. The foregoing caveat notwithstanding, I recommend this book to all those who are interested in the ancient history of Iran and its surrounding regions. Perhaps someday the author or another history buff will add multimedia content to this work in the form of color-coded maps, cartograms, dynamic charts, and other visualization tools to make the historical variations and trends more readily understandable. For now, we have to do with a standard printed book, whose visual material limited to photographs, drawings, and maps.

2015/09/16 (Wednesday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) Happy Stepfamily Day to all those who have found love and support with stepparents or stepchildren: As it has been said often, family isn't just, or even mostly, about blood; it's about love and a sense of belonging.

(2) A word puzzle: Place the given letters below in empty slots to form five words that are synonyms. [Credit: Marilyn vos Savant]

Letters to be used: A C C C E E G H I O O P R R R R T U U

Words: T _ _ E | R _ _ _ T | P _ _ _ R | C _ _ _ _ T | A _ _ _ _ E

(3) A puzzle for bird brains: The first four words below follow a rule. The last four don't. What is the rule? [Credit: Marilyn vos Savant] parrot, pigeon, robin, sparrow | cardinal, oriole, thrush, wren

(4) On wearing body-cams: After the discussion of cops wearing body-cams came up, I divulged to some friends that I am uncomfortable with forcing cops to wear body-cams when the same is not required of other professions. How would surgeons feel, for example, if we forced them to wear body cams? Wouldn't such cameras provide better evidence of malpractice and force surgeons to be more careful about their work? What about dentists, taxi drivers, firefighters, or soldiers? Wouldn't teachers and coaches wearing body-cams reduce or eliminate instances of physical and sexual abuse? In its issue of September 21, 2015, *Time* magazine takes up this debate, with psychiatrist Elias Aboujaoude arguing in favor of everyone wearing body cams and privacy expert Jennifer Goldbeck enumerating the dangers of such a dystopian measure.

(5) An honest statement or retraction under pressure? Niloufar Ardalan, whose husband denied her permission for a passport to accompany the Iranian national team on its international trip, **has attacked foreign media** and anti-revolutionary elements for taking advantage of her ordeal, a private family matter, to shame and weaken Iran's Islamic regime. She had earlier criticized the laws that prevented her from accompanying the team as its captain and a most-valued player. Either way, it's a shame: her being forced to make a statement against her belief or her accepting the grim fate as a Muslim woman under a repressive regime.

(6) Magnitude-8.3 quake in Chile rocks Santiago: Video of a supermarket embedded in **this news story** shows relatively minor damage compared with the results of much weaker quakes here in the US; apparently, Chile is well-prepared for earthquakes. Tsunami alerts have been issued in Hawaii and New Zealand.

(7) Donald Trump's worst nightmare realized: An immigrant with limited English skills (Arnold Schwarzenegger) will take over his job as the host of "Celebrity Apprentice," when the program resumes in 2016.

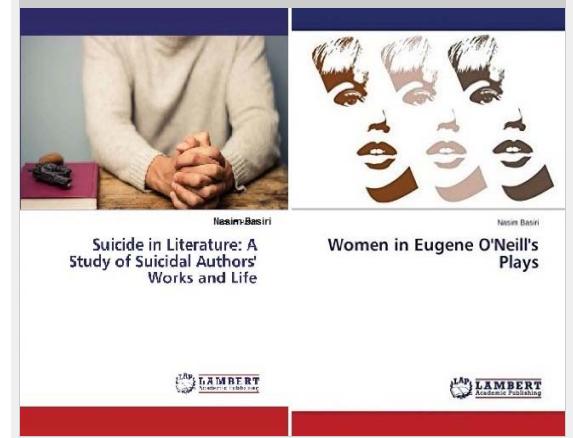
(8) Turning an enemy into an ally: Fiercely defending Hillary Clinton from inside her campaign, David Brock was once a conservative and part of the purported "vast right-wing conspiracy" to destroy the Clintons. Brock now believes that the perceived culture of weakness and nonresponse among the Democrats has improved, which justifies his efforts to fight conservatives and their causes. [From *Time* magazine, issue of September 21, 2015.]

(9) Final thought for the day: "Ability is what you're capable of doing. Motivation determines what you do. Attitude determines how well you do it." ~ Lou Holtz

2015/09/15 (Tuesday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Brief book review and introduction: I would like to bring to your attention a couple of English-language books by Nasim Basiri. Both books are available from Amazon.com. The first book is *Suicide in Literature: A Study of Suicidal Authors' Works and Life* (Lambert, 2015, 116 pp.). This is certainly a fascinating area of study, but given that the subject matter is outside my areas of expertise, I browsed most of the book's sections, without going very deep. I read Sylvia Plath's *Ariel* many years ago (after I learned that her husband's philandering was a main cause of her suicide) and was struck by its very dark tone. It is probably





true that suicidal people (authors or others) have a grim view of the world, an affliction that prevents them from normal interactions and associations.

The dark view in such authors' poetry and prose intrigues many and resonates with others, thus helping them achieve literary success. I am personally appalled by such darkness, find the effort needed to decipher the references exhausting, and get bored quickly, perhaps missing the deeper meaning buried in the work. Other than Plath, American poet Anne Sexton, well-known for her highly personal, confessional writings, receives a chapter-length treatment in this book. Sexton, known, among other things, for quotes such as "The joy that isn't shared dies young" and "Live or die, but don't poison everything," seems to be even more of an enigma in her life and work than Plath.

The second book, *Women in Eugene O'Neill's Plays* (Lambert, 2015, 68 pp.), which I have not read yet, examines O'Neill's plays from a feminist and social perspective and explores the impact of his negative experiences with women (his mother, prostitutes, and wives) on the recurring female character types in his work.

(2) California burns: This year's fires are among the **most destructive ever**.

(3) Pope Francis lauds President Obama's foreign policy achievement: The Vatican **has endorsed** the nuclear accord with Iran and considers it to be a step towards a world free of nuclear weapons.

(4) Deadly **love triangle** in a Mississippi college: Instructor kills girlfriend and a male colleague, before shooting himself when surrounded by the police.

(5) Facebook dislike button on its way: After years of calls by users and resistance by Facebook (reportedly for fear of sponsored posts of products and services being disliked), Zuckerberg finally caves in to the demand.

There is an inherent ambiguity in liking FB posts, which may in fact get worse with the new dislike button. The problem currently is that we don't know whether one likes the post (the fact that the poster cared to share it) or the content referenced. If I post something about a mass shooter and write a narrative for it, someone may like my narrative (or just the fact that I shared the info) but dislike the incident itself.

(6) Word puzzle: In the following famous sentence, arranged in 5 rows of 7 letters each (spaces removed), three consecutive letters have been removed in four spots. Can you decode the sentence? [Credit: Marilyn vos Savant]

T H E R _ _ _ | I N S P _ _ _ | S T A Y S M _ | _ _ L Y I N T | H E P L _ _ _

(7) Final thought for the day: "We are made wise not by the recollection of our past, but by the responsibility for our future." ~ George Bernard Shaw

2015/09/14 (Monday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Today's tour of a new UCSB student housing complex: The Sierra Madre Villages, nearly completed for occupancy this coming weekend, are composed of 2- and 3-bedroom fully furnished apartments, with 2 beds per bedroom. They will rent for about \$650 per student, including all utilities and high-speed Internet access. On-site facilities include laundry rooms, lounges, large meeting rooms, exercise room, recreation room, convenience store, and office. Each unit has two spacious bathrooms, plenty of storage space (including drawers under the beds), and a fully equipped kitchen with granite countertops and stainless-steel appliances. The designers have aimed for gold standard in sustainability and eco-friendliness.



(2) Miley Cyrus does a decent job of covering Paul Simon's "**50 Ways to Leave Your Lover**"; and no, crushing him with a wrecking ball isn't one of the ways!

(3) Baby pays close attention to dad's philosophical musings. [[1-minute video](#)]

(4) Nightmare-scenario [fires in California](#): One woman dead, several firefighters injured, hundreds of homes burned, and tens of thousands evacuated are the tolls so far of what has been described as the most destructive wildfire this year. The Valley Fire started on Saturday and spread quickly through small communities in north Napa Valley, growing more intense and very difficult to fight due to triple-digit temperatures and super-dry vegetation. The Butte Fire near Sacramento is smaller, but equally intense. Hope friends in those regions are safe!

(5) Plains All American Pipeline kept shoddy records: The Texas-based company responsible for the May 2015 oil spill in central California has been [found guilty](#) of poor record-keeping on safety procedures and training and has been ordered to fix probable safety violations.

(6) [A difference of opinions.] Croatia's Parliament leader: My country's name is derived from the name of Cyrus, the Persian King. Iran's Parliament leader: Iranians were illiterate, uncultured savages before Islam.

(7) Head transplant being considered: An Italian-Chinese team will perform a controversial [head transplant](#) operation in 2017. The procedure should really be called a body transplant, as the head is where a person's mind resides. So, it's not the body that is getting a new head, but the head that's getting a new body. The recipient has already been selected. He is a Russian who suffers from a disease which gradually wastes away his muscles. Following the body attachment with glue and stitches, the recipient of the body will be put into a month-long coma and injected with anti-rejection drugs.

2015/09/13 (Sunday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Happy New Year to all those who observe the Jewish Rosh Hashana, beginning tonight!



(2) President Rouhani's [Rosh Hashana tweet](#) generates surprise and varied responses.

(3) Happy Grandparents' Day! Grandparents are recognized on Fathers' or Mothers' Day, but today is an additional day to pay homage to their special role in the lives of the generations beyond their kids.

(4) You can't make this stuff up: Saudi Arabia will help with the refugee crisis in Europe by offering to [build 200 mosques](#) for them in Germany. Now, I hope, the critics of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other oil-rich Arab countries would stop their criticisms!

(5) Gender discrimination shows its ugly head again: Iranian soccer player Niloufar Ardalan has been eliminated from the national team's roster, because her husband would not give permission for her to obtain a passport to leave the country. Husband's (or a male relative's) permission is required for travel according to Islamic law.

(6) The official winner of the "Not My Job" contest. [[Image](#)]

(7) Iranian dance music: I don't know the source of this cheerful [musical video clip](#) (perhaps from a movie or a TV show), but am sharing it to spread the cheers.

(8) Super Mario Brothers' 30th anniversary: The pixelated brothers came to the screen in 1985 and have evolved ever since. Here is their illustrated, [interactive history](#) by Nintendo.

[Make sure to click on the various panels to see a sample of the game introduced in that year.]

2015/09/12 (Saturday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Cartoon of the day.



(2) Britain's Bernie Sanders: [Jeremy Corbyn](#) is Labor's next leader and may end up being Britain's next Prime Minister. He too beat a woman to the post.

(3) A young Iranian man with an unusual voice: His feminine voice could cause him problems in a rigid, intolerant society, but he turned it into an asset by training to do voice-overs and taking on film-dubbing roles, working behind the scenes, until now. [[Interview in Persian](#)]

(4) A math puzzle: Show that the player who goes first has a winning strategy in the following game. Two players take turns placing quarters on a perfectly round table. The coins cannot overlap and each must sit flat on the table's surface. The first person who can't put a coin down loses. [Source: *IEEE Potentials* magazine, issue of September-October 2015]

(5) Lake over the ocean: [This lake](#) in Faroe Islands sits precariously over the North Atlantic Ocean, seemingly ready to collapse into it at any time.

(6) A beautiful old song: James Taylor and Art Garfunkel sing "[Crying in the Rain](#)" in New York, with WTC's twin towers in the background.

(7) Violinist David Garrett plays Bach. [[4-minute video](#)]

(8) Mother and young daughter play Bach's [concerto for two violins](#): Very inspiring!

2015/09/11 (Friday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) Let us remember: The day when nearly 3000 innocent people died, hundreds of emergency response personnel either perished or were harmed for life, countless families grieved the loss of their loved ones, and the seeds of chaos in the Middle East via childish overreaction were sown.

(2) Prescription-strength nature: [A new drug](#) for irritable, tired, and stressed-out people.

(3) US job openings at record high: According to the Associated Press, US job openings rose 8% to 5.75 million, the most since record-keeping began in 2000. Several factors have contributed to caution and a resulting overall hiring slump, however. These factors include China's economy, stock market volatility, and rising concerns about global growth.

(4) A musical tribute to Michael Jackson: MJ's "Don't Stop" is played over dance scenes from many famous movies in this [3-minute video](#). See how many of the films you can identify.

(5) Kelly Carlin, daughter of comedian George Carlin, writes about her dad: The brilliant comedian was adored by his fans, but he had issues at home he would rather not reveal (or let others in the family discuss). Kelly, holder of a master's degree in psychology, [has written a book](#) that shows the human side of her father as much as his successful career in comedy, gaining a therapeutic self-understanding in the process.

(6) The Woz [gives thumbs-up](#) to the new Steve Jobs movie: Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak (known as the Woz) is fully satisfied with how director Danny Boyle and scriptwriter Aaron Sorkin made the film "Steve Jobs," which is already generating awards buzz ahead of its official release in October. Michael Fassbender doesn't much look like Jobs, but he has apparently provided an accurate and deep portrayal of the the tech whiz. Kate Winslet is also commended for her portrayal of Apple marketing chief Joanna Hoffman. Wozniak was involved as a consultant on the film, so his endorsement may be tainted by self-interest.

(7) UCSB's [Sierra Madre apartments](#) ready for fall 2015 move-in: The 3-story new buildings, with fully furnished 2- and 3-bedroom units accommodating a total of 515 students, use the best in green technologies (aiming for LEED Gold rating), including recycled materials for furnishings and flooring and all-LED lighting. I will be taking advantage of a pre-move-in faculty/staff tour of the brand new facilities at 555 Storke Road on Monday, September 14, 2015, 1:30-3:00 PM.

(8) Moonalice: Last week's *Santa Barbara Independent* had an article that covered the band Moonalice. Here is their rendition of "[A Whiter Shade of Pale](#)." This fantastic-sounding roots-rock band of seasoned musicians has a lot of free music on YouTube. The band boasts a collection of original posters, created by professional artists for every one of their appearances. Here is a [7-minute video](#) about the poster collection.

(9) 3D drawing of a snake: I have posted examples of 3D drawings before, but [this one](#) is quite impressive.

2015/09/09 (Wednesday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

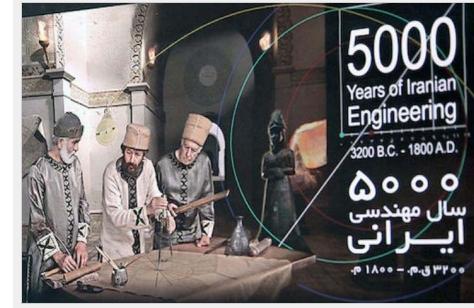
(1) 5000 Years of Iranian Engineering. [[3-minute English teaser](#) of a forthcoming hour-long film] [[Persian version](#) of the teaser]

(2) A word puzzle: Change one letter in each of the following words to find six other words with a common theme: FIG, HIND, MAIL, MUST, SLOW, SMUG. [Source: *IEEE Potentials* magazine, issue of September-October 2015]

(3) A math puzzle: We have four circles on a plane such that each circle is tangent to the other three. If three of the radii are 3, 4, and 5, what's the largest possible radius of the fourth circle? [Source: *IEEE Potentials* magazine, issue of September-October 2015]

(4) Legal issues with wearable technology: This is the title of an article in *IEEE Computer* magazine's September 2015 issue, pp. 10-12, which brings to forth a number of issues already under discussion with other forms of information technology but that will assume greater importance, given large volumes of data collected by wearables. Much of this data is highly personal, so one may legitimately worry about whether any of it can be harvested by app and device providers. Complicated privacy policies and user agreements, which almost no one reads, put us at risk of being victims of data theft/abuse.

(5) A racial-identity scandal in the world of poetry: Michael Derrick Hudson, a white guy from Fort Wayne, Indiana, couldn't get his poetry published, so he became Yi-Fen Chou. Suddenly, his work began being noticed and one of his poems was chosen for inclusion in the 2015 edition of *Best American Poetry*. If you are intrigued by the summary above, you'll find [this article](#) quite interesting. Of course, gender and race have always been important factors in literary success: just ask any of the women who chose to publish under male names (e.g., Isak Dinesen) or hid their gender under initials (J. K. Rowling). Even though using a pen name isn't that unusual



in the literary world, this case has touched a lot of raw nerves on all sides of the issue.

(6) Today's humor: Supermarket checkout clerk to customer: No, I'm not joking. I am a Catholic. I can't sell you these condoms, so please try Register 8. Oh, and she is Muslim, so take your ham to Register 9.

(7) Iranian cuisine: A tour of bakeries and restaurants of Kermanshah. [[6-minute video](#)]

(8) UCSB earns its highest *US News & World Report* ranking ever: UC Santa Barbara has been ranked for 2016 as the 8th public university in the US, a rise of 2 spots. In the overall ranking, that includes both private and public universities, UCSB advanced 3 spots to #37. Among University of California campuses, only Berkeley and UCLA are ranked higher.

2015/09/08 (Tuesday): Here are four items of potential interest.

(1) This is my unmade bed 30 minutes after I woke up this morning: Here is the story. It turns out that our children who don't make their beds, or do so very reluctantly, aren't slobs or lazy; they just are more informed about the health risks of a neatly made bed. After I read this [on-line story](#), I began wondering whether I could go with its advice that not making your bed helps eradicate dust mites that thrive in poorly ventilated and damp environments. I could stand it only for the 30 minutes it took me to shave, shower, and dress, even though I would not be seeing the unmade bed for the rest of the day. And here's the [other side of the story](#), that is, why you should always make your bed. It's funny how you can build an argument for every possible conclusion!



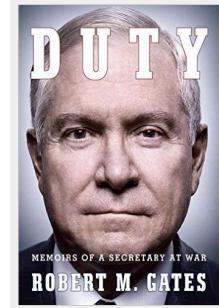
(2) A math puzzle: How many numbers between 0 and 1000 contain at least one 6? How about between 0 and 10,000,000? [Source: *IEEE Potentials* magazine, issue of September-October 2015]

(3) Friendly international men's soccer doubleheader: This afternoon, Brazil demolished a clueless USA team 4-1, with ESPN carrying the match live. This was the final tune-up for the US team, before it meets Mexico on October 10 in a Confederation Cup playoff match. The US has now defeated Brazil only once in 18 face-offs. In the second friendly match, Mexico played the world's top-ranked team, Argentina, to a surprise 2-2 tie. Mexico had what appeared to be a comfortable 2-0 lead until the final minutes of the match, but then Messi went into action and scored 2 beautiful goals. Argentina dominated the match, but Mexico looked sharp in counter-attacks and used its few opportunities quite well.

These results are bad news for the US team in its October 10 face-off against Mexico at Pasadena's Rose Bowl.

(4) Audiobook review: Gates, Robert M., *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, unabridged audio production on 20 CDs, read by George Newbern, Random House Audio, 2014.

This is the ultimate insider's account of how the US military operates and how it fits within the governmental structure. Gates was called upon by President Obama in 2008 to stay on, after two years of service under President George W. Bush, to oversee the winding down of Iraq and Afghanistan wars. He stepped down in 2011 and was replaced by Leon Panetta. Gates wrote his first memoir, an insider's account of the Cold War, in 1997. In this second memoir, very few people emerge unscathed, indicating he has decided to forego any possibility of returning to public service and to aim instead for presenting a comprehensive and honest account of the dysfunction in Washington.



He describes Rahm Emanuel as "a whirling dervish with attention-deficit disorder" and Vladimir Putin as "a stone-cold killer." Similarly unflattering descriptions are offered for many others, including top US military brass. Even the likable Joe Biden does not escape barbs for his being "wrong on nearly every major foreign policy and national security issue over the past four decades." Juicy revelations include Vice President Dick Cheney's desire to bomb both Syria and Iran before leaving office.

Gates pretty much avoids discussing his predecessor Donald Rumsfeld, and lets him off the hook with only brief asides. Even though Gates treats President Obama with more respect, he calls the Obama administration's Afghan War policy a "train wreck" and characterizes the President as deliberative and civil, but a bit detached. Part of the acrimony of this memoir may stem from the fact that Gates feels uneasy, even angry, about his own role in sending American troops to the Middle East, where many were killed and maimed. All political memoirs are self-serving to some extent. However, this volume comes across as more sincere than most. I recommend it highly to those with the patience to finish reading 650 pages or listening to 20 audio CDs.

2015/09/07 (Monday): Here are six items of potential interest on this Labor Day holiday.

(1) Happy Labor Day to my US-based friends: "My grandfather once told me that there were two kinds of people: those who do the work and those who take the credit. He told me to try to be in the first group; there was much less competition." ~ Indira Gandhi



(2) The power of one: "Just one step. Just one mile. Just one dollar. Just one kiss. Just one person. When we look at life through the lens of 'one,' everything becomes that much more attainable." ~ Mick Ebeling

(3) Why the Islamic regime of Iran is doomed: The Iranian people's future is at the mercy of shameless crooks, who swindle billions of dollars at a time, and these **child-like officials** who can't control their tempers at meetings. I don't think there is any other country in the world in which a larger number of former officials (including elected ones) are in prison or severely censured.

(4) Does Europe really welcome refugees? In the span of a few months, Europeans seem to have gone from xenophobes to trying to outdo each other in welcoming Arab refugees. What is going on? Yes, there are thousands with open arms on the streets, seaports, and train stations, but how representative are these cheering and gift-bearing crowds of the rest of the Europeans who stay home? Right now, the number of refugees arriving in Europe is dwarfed by the number in countries around Syria (notably, Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey). Will this welcoming trend continue once European countries face the practical problems of housing and supporting the newcomers, whose numbers are bound to grow, given the open-arms policy?

(5) Just for laughs: If our favorite cartoon characters aged like us humans, many of them would be in assisted-living homes or dead by now. [[10 images](#)]

(6) Final thought for the day: "As far as the laws of mathematics refer to reality, they are not certain; as far as they are certain, they do not refer to reality." ~ Albert Einstein

2015/09/06 (Sunday): Here are three items of potential interest.

(1) Today's visit to the Magic Castle: Established by and for magicians, the converted Hollywood mansion is a club with an adjacent hotel, managed by the Academy of Magical Arts. You have to be a member or have a guest card from a member to visit. I visited with a group of mostly seniors from two condo complexes in Santa Barbara (Encina Royale and San Vicente), each group occupying half of the seats on a large Santa Barbara Airbus coach. The package deal included a yummy champagne brunch and a "Palace of Mystery" magic show, in which a young couple performed glitzy David-Copperfield-style acts.



I also managed to watch two other first-come-first-served shows, an intimate "Close-Up Gallery" show, where a 16-year-old trainee did amazing acts of mind-reading, and a "Parlor of Prestidigitation" show, where magic acts were combined with comedy, using children among the audience as assistants. In the mind-reading show, I was asked to take a large playing card and sit on it while the act was performed, leading to revelation of the card's identity. There were some comedic elements, like when the magician got the card back from me and feigned disgust in handling it. Photography was disallowed inside the Castle, hence the above view of the castle from outside. [See The Magic Castle's [Facebook page](#) for info and more photos.]

While waiting to enter one of the smaller shows, a 17-year-old Japanese boy, who spoke no English and thus used a translator from among his visiting party, entertained us with some interesting card tricks. For him, visiting the Magic Castle was a dream come true, although his act was later frowned upon by the Castle's management.

[Note added on 9/07: I forgot to mention that from the entry lobby, where a bar is located, you enter the rest of the mansion via a door, disguised as a bookcase, that opens by touching a specific area of the wall.]

(2) Jackie Mason's "A Night at the Opera": The Jewish comedian, who is an equal-opportunity offender, treats a UK audience to his trademark stand-up style, poking fun at Jews, gentiles, and others. [[95-minute video](#)]

(3) Stephen Colbert hits the late-night network TV scene with an eclectic **array of guests** during his first week. [Image credit: *Entertainment Weekly*, issue of September 11, 2015.]

2015/09/04 (Friday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Cartoon of the day: On the current refugee crisis.

(2) Quote of the day: "Two groups of people threaten the fabric of our society and its future:

snobs who think they know it all and clueless people who are proud of being ignorant." ~ I wrote this one myself, because I couldn't find anything noteworthy from Buddha, Gandhi, Einstein, or Cyrus the Great today [Adapted from Internet sources]

(3) Sharing these colorful [images of autumn](#), as we enter the last weeks of summer 2015.

(4) President Obama's [5-minute video report](#) from his trip to Alaska.

(5) Debunking the myth that Bernie Sanders is a socialist: Using Cold-War-era fears that still afflict the US population, campaign strategists in both parties are trying to brand Bernie Sanders a "socialist," which is a dirty word in today's political scene. [This article](#) explains why Sanders isn't a radical or a socialist.



(6) Observations by a brave cleric: In this [audio file](#) (in Persian), an Iranian cleric says that a sudden increase in social pressures, including heightened enforcement of restrictions on women's clothing, singing, and mixed-gender events, is a sign that officials are trying to cover up behind-the-scenes theft and corruption.

(7) Celebrity lookalike scams: Over the past few weeks, I have observed with amusement the results of a Facebook app that purportedly matches one's profile picture with those of celebrities and suggests a match (it even provides a percentage or degree of match, like 84%, as if using a scientific process). The results I have seen from Facebook posts by friends and friends of friends all led to a small number of gorgeous celebs, notably Marilyn Monroe, Angelina Jolie, and Jennifer Aniston. Some take the results seriously, but most take them with a grain of salt and joke about them. Like me, the latter group is apparently suspicious of the total absence of matches to celebs like Roseanne Barr, Lady Gaga, and Rosie O'Donnell.

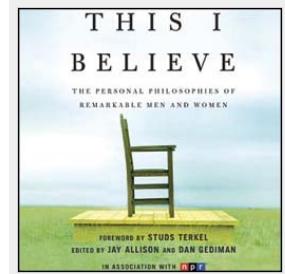
(8) Iran, science, and collaboration: This is the title of a [one-page editorial](#) by Mohammad Farhadi, Iran's Minister of Science, Research, and Technology, in the journal *Science* (September 4, 2015). The editorial contains some valid points and several exaggerations about the current status of science in Iran. He concludes by extending an invitation to scientists around the world to initiate collaborative programs with Iranian scientists. The journal issue also contains feature articles about science in Iran under economic sanctions, building a world-class astronomical observatory, reviving the nearly-dry Lake Urmia, and crises of fragile ecosystems.

2015/09/03 (Thursday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Brief audiobook re-review: Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman (eds.), *This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women*, unabridged audio production on 5 CDs, with the contributors reading their essays, Audio Renaissance (in association with NPR), 2006.

I have just listened to this audiobook for a second time, finishing it during my trip from Santa Barbara to the SF Bay Area. I reviewed it previously in October 2011. So, here, I only cite a [Web site](#) where you can listen to many of the essays in this remarkable series and quote a passage from songwriter Oscar Hammerstein's essay, which particularly resonates with me:

"I have an unusual statement to make. I am a man who believes he is happy. What makes it unusual is that a man who is happy seldom tells anyone. The unhappy man is more communicative. He is eager to recite what is wrong with the world, and he seems to have a talent for gathering a large audience. It is a modern tragedy that despair has so many spokesmen, and hope so few. [From all that is wrong with our world and all my disappointments,] could I not build up a strong case to prove why I'm not happy at all? I could, but it would be a false picture, as false as if I were to describe a tree only as it looks in winter."



(2) People of Iceland show [resolve and heart](#) in dealing with the worldwide refugee crisis.

(3) Last week, Colin Powell and his wife Alma celebrated their 50th [wedding anniversary](#).

(4) A wonderful guitar player: Sometimes you find the most talented musicians [playing on the streets](#).

(5) Apple is expected to announce [new iPad versions](#) next week: Both the 12" iPad, a stylus-based "pro" model that has been in the works for several years, and a thinner iPad Mini are thought to be ready for unveiling.

(6) President Obama comments on HONY post from Iran: On a "Humans of New York" photo post depicting a father and son from Tabriz, Iran, [President Obama wrote](#) that he found the story of the son's generosity inspirational and expressed hope that the young man never loses his desire to help others.

(7) Final thought for the day: "He was a dreamer, a thinker, a speculative philosopher ... or, as his wife would have it, an idiot." ~ Douglas Adams

2015/08/31 (Monday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) A planned sky pool: How would you like to swim in a glass pool 10 storeys above the ground in London?



(2) Phonetically defined: From a cartoon in the "Wrong Hands" series, by John Atkinson.

Army = Possessing many upper appendages

Bunny = An abundance of baked rolls

Hammock = To ridicule a pork product

Jargon = Pertaining to a lost container

Protractor = In favor of farm machinery

Pylon = A pastry-filled lawn

(3) YouTube's rising status among kids: According to a 2014 survey, 66% of kids visit YouTube daily, including 72% of 6-to-8-year-olds. [Info from: *Time* magazine, double issue of September 7-14, 2015.]

(4) Stephen Colbert will begin hosting CBS's "Late Show" on Tuesday, September 8, 2015, but the identity of his first celebrity guest(s) remains a mystery.

(5) Special Olympian John Franklin Stephens **responds** to Ann Coulter's use of "retard" (aka the R-word) to describe President Obama.

(6) "The Mom Song": Every advice given and threat made by a parent, rolled into a **3-minute song**.

(7) "Things Not to Say to Your Wife": Great advice, in the form of a humorous **2-minute song**, from someone who apparently speaks from experience.

[Also check out Tim Hawkins' **parenting songs** and **inappropriate wedding songs** on YouTube.]

(8) Final thought for the day: "If you want to make peace with your enemy, you have to work with your enemy. Then he becomes your partner." ~ Nelson Mandela

2015/09/30 (Sunday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) A history of America's gun culture in 13 covers: I have taken images of 13 *Newsweek* magazine covers from **this article** and assembled them into a collage that ends with the question "What's next?" This series of cover images also provides food for thought about how magazine cover design styles have changed over the years.



(2) Twitter is abuzz with **fake religious quotes** from Trump. Here's one of my favorites: "And Moses went to Pharaoh and said to him, 'Let my people go!' and Pharaoh did because Moses knew how to negotiate." And one more, for your enjoyment: "Great flood, total disaster. Totally mismanaged by Noah, not a smart guy, total loser, couldn't even save the dinosaurs."

(3) The PhD movie 2: I didn't know about such a movie, so, of course, the sequel was a definite surprise. Here, I'm sharing **the trailer** with current and former graduate students among my friends and other readers.

(4) Memories from decades ago: Yesterday, I was reminded by a Facebook post of a small amusement park on Pahlavi Avenue, just to the north of Takht-e Jamshid Street (these are old street names that have since changed). I think it was located at the site where the Radio City Cinema was built. It was called "Boat Club," or however this was pronounced in Persian. I vaguely remember having fun in that park with rides and arcade-style games, although I don't recall anything about the layout or the actual rides/attractions. I performed online searches to see if there are any photos or other info about the park, but found nothing. In case you are wondering what amusement parks look like in Today's Tehran, here is a **pictorial**.

(5) A Republican nightmare scenario, 2016-2032: I am not saying the following will happen, but it is within the realm of possibility. First, Hillary Clinton is elected in 2016 and re-elected in 2020. Meanwhile, Michelle Obama runs for and wins a Senate seat. Then, after a black president and a female president, America elects a black female president. The only thing that can make this nightmare worse is if a Latino president is elected in 2032!

(6) Oliver Sacks dead at 82: This **New York Times article** about the extraordinary medical doctor and science writer, with keen power of observation, devotion to detail, deep reservoir of sympathy, and an intuitive

understanding of the mysteries of the human brain, pays tribute to him as a polymath and an ardent humanist. **(7) Letter to US Congress:** I was one of the 72 signatories of a letter that urges the United States Congress to support the nuclear deal with Iran, and the unanimously-passed UN Security Council Resolution 2231, as an effective path to meeting security challenges in the Middle East, energizing the struggle for democracy in Iran, and initiating a dialogue on human rights abuses (particularly those of women and religious/ethnic minorities). The [7-page letter](#) has 1.5 pages of English text, 3.5 pages of names/affiliations, and 2 pages of Persian text. [Note added on 8/31: [BBC Persian story](#) about this letter and other related messages to the US Congress.]

2015/08/29 (Saturday): Here are brief reviews of three audiobooks (memoirs by funny actors) that kept me company during long car rides over the past few months.

(1) Lynch, Jane, *Happy Accidents: A Memoir*, unabridged audiobook on 6 CDs read by the author, Hyperion Audio, 2011.

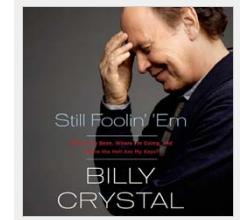
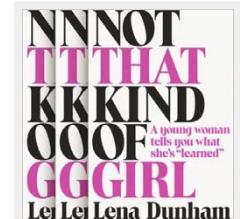
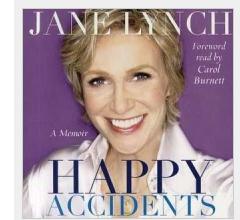
I like Jane Lynch, even though, admittedly, I have not seen much of her acting work; not even her TV hit series "Glee." Lynch's writing style in this book is genuinely smart and honest; it is also quite funny, though Lynch does not try to get laughs at any cost. The book's title refers to people she met by chance and parts she was offered, following long stretches of rejection after rejection. The book is quite enjoyable and I recommend it highly for its wit, nuggets of wisdom, and humor.

(2) Dunham, Lena, *Not That Kind of Girl: A Young Woman Tells You What She's Learned*, audiobook on 5 CDs, unabridged selections, read by the author, Random House, 2014.

If you are a fan of Lena Dunham and like her hit TV series "Girls" (which I have not seen), then you may enjoy this book. For my taste, the book contains a bit too much whining, accounts of phobias, and tidbits seemingly included for shock value only. It has become fashionable in recent years for 20-somethings to write their life stories, before they have lived long enough to have substantial experiences to share. This book can be viewed as a perfect example of such premature memoirs.

(3) Crystal Billy, *Still Foolin' Em: Where I've Been, Where I'm Going, and Where the Hell Are My Keys?*, unabridged audiobook on 7 CDs, read by the author, Macmillan Audio, 2013.

Some passages in this book, written by one of my favorite comedians, are really funny, while others seem somewhat artificial. Here's an example of what made me laugh out loud. At one point, Crystal shames those who call America a Christian nation, reminding them that while there aren't very many of us Jews in the country, neither are there many penguins, yet their problems are front and center in movies and elsewhere (not an exact quote). If you like Crystal's brand of humor, you will enjoy this book.



2015/08/28 (Friday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) Women in computing history: Ada Lovelace, pictured here, is well-known as the world's first computer programmer. She worked on devising sequences of instructions for Charles Babbage's Analytical Engine, a machine that was never built. However, the roles played by many other women remain unrecognized in our field's history. The article "Innovators Assemble: Ada Lovelace, Walter Isaacson, and the Superheroines of Computing" (*Communications of the ACM*, Vol. 58, No. 9, pp. 20-27, September 2015) tries to remedy this problem. I have an audiobook of Isaacson's 2014 book *The Innovators*, which I will review in the coming weeks, after I have listened to it.



(2) Kurdish folk music: ["Sheh-Powli Sheit"](#) ("The Crazy Wave"; "Mowj-e Divaaneh" in Persian) performed by Hani Mojtabaei.

(3) Demand a plan to end gun violence: [Celebs speak up](#) against inaction and lack of political will to control guns.

(4) Modern Persian music: Marjan sings a [medley of her songs](#).

(5) Iranian bagpipes: Ney-anban (nayhamboon) is an instrument from Iran's Bushehr area on the Persian Gulf. In this video, Gholam Salimi plays the ["Ey Iran" anthem](#), accompanied by Mehdi Pour-hashem on daf.

(6) Kurdish music: [Spirited dancing](#) on a Swedish street.

(7) Wonderful morphing sculpture: [Head of Franz Kafka](#) by David Cerny in Prague, Czech Republic, featuring HepcoMotion rings.

(8) College soccer: In their official 2015 season home opener tonight at Harder Stadium, the UCSB Gauchos defeated the Stanford Cardinals 1-0. It was an exciting game, and somewhat lucky for the Gauchos, who lost

the possession race to the Cardinals. It was also a rough game, with several injuries and many yellow cards. Prior to the men's game, the women's teams for the two schools played to a 1-1 tie.

(9) Final thought for the day: "Do not seek to follow in the footsteps of the wise. Seek what they sought." ~ Matsuo Basho

2015/08/29 (Thursday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Infinite fall: Here is an animated form ([GIF image](#)) of one of Maurice Escher's famous drawings, in which a man is shown tumbling down the stairs. And here's [another GIF image](#) for the ever-rising stairs.

(2) How the US Secret Service protects the President on the Internet: A number of agents constantly sift through [hateful on-line comments](#) to discover would-be assassins or potential terrorists.

(3) Computer science education pioneer [dead at 83](#): Joseph F. Traub, trained as a physicist, was instrumental in establishing computer science departments when the discipline was taking shape some five decades ago. In particular, he helped establish and shape strong programs at Carnegie Mellon and Columbia Universities.

(4) The two faces of Iran: The official/public face vs. the unofficial/private version. [[10-minute video](#) of Masih Alinejad's "Tablet" TV program (in Persian).]

(5) Richard Feynman interview from 1984: Physicist extraordinaire describes our then-current understanding of the physical world and what led him to a life in science. [[37-minute video](#)]

(6) Suspect who killed journalist and cameraman, as they were interviewing a subject, [kills himself](#): The perpetrator had grudges against the two victims and the TV station because of what he viewed as racism. Guns are, of course, key contributors to such tragedies. We should certainly make gun control an issue in 2016. But we should also stop and ponder the recent trend toward taking revenge and vigilantism. It does not always appear as murder; often it shows up in the form of public shaming and prosecution in the media. Gun control efforts should go hand-in-hand with tacking the aforementioned social/psychological problem of people taking justice into their own hands.

(7) Fun fact of the day: Centuries ago, scientists tended to use long titles for books or articles. Here's [a sample](#) from British philosopher Bishop George Berkeley's writings in 1734: "The Analyst; or, a Discourse Addressed to an Infidel Mathematician. Wherein It Is Examined Whether the Object, Principles, and Inferences of the Modern Analysis Are More Distinctly Conceived, or More Evidently Deduced, than Religious Mysteries and Points of Faith."

2015/08/26 (Wednesday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Cartoon of the day: Sisyphus meets Indiana Jones.

(2) Pope Francis to address a joint session of US Congress on 9/24: I will tune in to watch this most effective Democratic campaign event and to observe the Republicans' eyes roll as the Pope outlines his views on tolerance, social justice, and environmental stewardship.

(3) Deaths on the road: Traffic deaths in the US leaped 14% for the first half of 2015. There are still worse countries, of course. Here is the number of traffic deaths per one million residents for a few countries: Dominican Republic 417; South Africa 319; Egypt 132; USA 114; Australia 61; Sweden 30. [Info from: *Time* magazine, August 31, 2015]

(4) China's "duplitecture": China has been building full-size or scale models of many of the world's architectural marvels, as well as reproducing the looks of various European and American towns. [[11-minute video](#)]

(5) Quote of the day: "I am the inferior of any man whose rights I trample under foot." ~ Robert Green Ingersoll

(6) Ashley Madison and the expectation of privacy: I shed no tears over the fates of the cheaters whose identities were exposed for the world to see through the recent hack of the "discreet" cheaters Web site. However, I do abhor the voyeurism that afflicts our society, taking joy in other people's downfall. It is said about the justice system that several criminals being acquitted is better than one innocent person being convicted. The same goes for privacy. Yes, it's good to catch cheaters and criminals, but at what cost to our institutional and interpersonal trust? Loss of privacy is a slippery slope. Some do-gooders may use it for a noble cause, but there is also potential for abuse by interest groups and perhaps even the government.

(7) The two Koreas [reach an agreement](#) to ease border tensions: North Korea has apologized over a landmine incident and South Korea has promised to refrain from broadcasting propaganda across the border. It is quite interesting that two sworn enemies with a long history of bitter conflict can reach a political agreement. Perhaps this approach will become a new norm in our world.

(8) Suggested hikes in San Luis Obispo (California): The September 2015 issue of *Westways* (AAA magazine) suggests the strenuous 3.5-mile "Bishop Peak" hike, which rewards you with 360-degree vistas. Or you can go on the more leisurely 5.5-mile "Poly Canyon" hike, which takes you through an interesting "architecture



graveyard."

2015/08/25 (Tuesday): Book review: Copeland, Cyrus, *Off the Radar: A Father's Secret, a Mother's Heroism, and a Son's Quest*, Blue Rider Press, 2015. [This review is also a featured post on [Iranian.com](#).]

This book tells the life story of the author, as he set out to discover the truth about his father, an American executive with Westinghouse, who was arrested in Iran for spying at the time of the 1979 hostage crisis and was tried for his life in a Revolutionay Court.

[Spoiler alert: Skip this entire paragraph if you intend to read the book and would like to follow the author's uncertainty as he interpreted clues and followed leads.] While Cyrus Copeland is still uncertain about whether his dad, Max Copeland, was a CIA spy (his final verdict is that his dad's CIA association is "extremely probable" [p. 315]), his pursuit of clues over many years led him to know his father better and to repair, posthumously, the troubled relationship he had with his dad as a kid. Cyrus's mother was apparently convinced of Max's CIA connection, much more so than Cyrus, who leaves the door slightly ajar. As a young man, Max befriended, and was mentored, by a known CIA operative, making it likely that he was indeed recruited by the Agency.

The author was bothered by his father's demeanor, including his gentleness: He wanted a strong, disciplinarian dad who'd take hold of him and make him shut up. After his diggings, Cyrus discovered that Max wasn't the drab, uninteresting person he thought him to be. He was indeed more adventurous than most people thought and had been a globetrotting idealist as a young man who wanted to make a difference.

There are two other main characters in the book: Cyrus's mother Shahin Maleki, an educated woman from an influential and rich family, who met Max in the US (where she also met and was courted by Sadegh Ghotbzadeh, a Khomeini protege who was Iran's foreign minister, and entertained a presidential run, at the time Max got in trouble) and Cyrus's younger sister Katayoun who makes an appearance from time to time. [Note: "Shahin" is a female Persian name, not to be confused with the male name "Shaahin," which is sometimes also spelled "Shahin."]

The book is organized into chapters, each of which bears the name of one of the three main characters as its title (Cyrus, Max, Shahin; I will use first names to refer to the main characters, as the author does in the book), indicating the character that is the focus and the primary storyteller in each chapter.

While the book has a great deal of historical references to the events of pre- and post-revolutionay Iran, it is not a history book. The "Author's Note" section (pp. 345-346) disclaims historical accuracy and warns readers that the book contains a very personal story in the context of the difficult Iran-USA relationship, which was made even more difficult in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution.

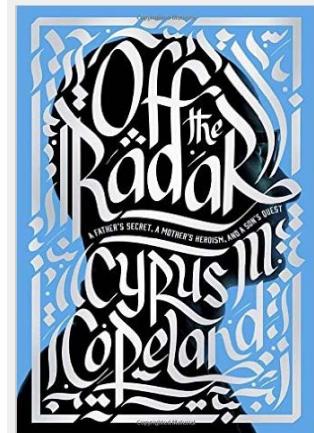
The tools Cyrus used in his pursuit of the truth about his father were talking to his dad's friends, contacting his employer (not very helpful), and requesting info from the CIA (which, per standard protocol, could not confirm or deny whether it employed Max). In 2014, Cyrus headed to Iran for 2 weeks, trying to get the missing parts of his father's story from family members and acquaintances there. He found out during the latter trip that too much history had been rewritten for him to discover much. Nevertheless, he had a spiritual experience as he visited the Shah Cheragh shrine in Shiraz and a nearby scenic valley he frequented with his father as a kid. He also survived multiple attempts at matchmaking, which he humorously characterizes as "a form of terrorism" [p. 320].

The intrigue begins early in the book, when one night, Max did not return home because he was detained on spying charges, an event that kicked his wife Shahin into action, using her family connections and her friendship with Ghotbzadeh, whom she visited at the foreign ministry. To Cyrus, learning that his dad had been imprisoned almost came as a relief: an indication that his dad's life was really more exciting than he thought!

Upon visiting Ghotbzadeh, Shahin found out that he was sheltering Bruce Laingen and two other Americans at the foreign ministry (they had been "arrested," so that they did not have to be returned to the hostage-takers at the US Embassy). Ghotbzadeh was reluctant to openly intervene to help Shahin for fear of jeopardizing the fate of the US Embassy hostages. Nevertheless, he did find out the whereabouts of Max in prison with one phone call. For him, Max's ordeal represented an impossible balancing act between helping a friend in need and keeping the radicals in the new regime at bay.

Here is a brief description of how Max got in trouble (of course, one must take the account with a grain of salt, as it represents the Copeland family's version of the events and motives).

Many Westinghouse employees left Iran, along with some 5000 other Americans, who were evacuated in short order. Max took on, and was later put in charge of, the task of liquidating the evacuees' personal belongings as well as company assets. The spying charges came from Max being caught trying to ship a number of console radar machines back to the US. It turns out that 90% of the cost of the radar equipment had been paid by the



Iranian Air Force, which failed to make the final payment in the post-revolutionary climate. Westinghouse considered the radar equipment its property, citing Iran's breach of contract, while Iranian authorities (rightly) considered the equipment theirs.

Shahin defended Max in court, after the couple found it impossible to recruit a defense attorney. Her strategy was to create some separation between Max and Westinghouse, which the Islamic government accused of helping the Shah and pilfering money. She impressed the judge with her knowledge of the Quran, as she recited verses pertinent to each discussion. Despite Shahin's valiant efforts, Max got a 20-year jail sentence with no appeal. The judge, however, commuted the jail sentence to house arrest and set a 14M-toman bond, which Shahin paid by selling the last of the family properties.

Woven into the story of Max's ordeal are biographical facts about Cyrus and Shahin. For example, we learn that while studying in England, Shahin translated Shakespeare's "Macbeth" into Persian and played the role of Lady Macbeth for BBC Radio; later, she became a BBC Persian news anchor.

There are 8 pages of black-and-white photos between pages 146 and 147 of the book, including this family portrait from November 1979 that shows, from left to right, Cyrus, Shahin, Katayoun, and Max. Max was sometimes placed in the same group as the US Embassy hostages (some unofficial list of American hostages included his name, even though he was never at the Embassy). Another eerie fact is that, coincidentally, Max shared his last name with CIA agent Miles Copeland, who overthrew the government of Mohammad Mosadegh for a mere \$60K (800 deaths). This coindidence was certainly unhelpful to him during his trial.



Once Max's sentence was commuted to house arrest, he and Shahin began plotting to escape. The idea was for Shahin and the kids to return to the US first, with Max to follow in some way. Ironically, as a convicted spy, Max still needed to approve of Shahin's leaving Iran per Islamic laws governing women's travels. There were multiple attempts to get Max out of Iran.

First, there was an unsuccessful 3-day trek through the Kurdish regions into Turkey (on an injured horse, whose condition became much worse after a wolf attack). We, and the author, discover toward the end of the narrative that the US government actually did try to win Max's freedom by asking the New Zealand embassy to assist him at almost exactly the same time they were helping several American hostages of the "Argo" fame. They prepared fake documents for Max that would identify him as a meat inspector. New Zealand reps had met with Khomeini in Qum to convince him to change his edict about forbidding frozen lamb meat, so the meat inspector cover made perfect sense. In the end, Max left Iran via the airport under his own name through arrangements by Shahin's (undisclosed) connections.

Other than the horse-ride to Turkey, details of the other attempts are missing. This is likely intentional for the last (successful) attempt during spring 1980, perhaps to protect those who helped. Details of the New Zealand attempt are missing because some of the people involved in it had passed away by the time Cyrus found a lead. The five countries of Australia, Britain, Canada, New Zealand, and USA had intelligence cooperation in Iran (it was later discovered, through documents released by Snowden, that the five countries also spied on each other).

A recurring theme is the author's ambivalence about his two home countries, as they pursued hostilities for several decades. He laments, "I have the blood of the Great Satan and the Axis of Evil in my veins" [p. 4], and then again "'Iranian Go Home' signs hurt just as much as the 'Yankee Go Home' and 'Death to America' cries that punctuated my childhood" [p. 203]. We read a couple of pages later, "American in Iran. Iranian in America. I wonder if the two halves of myself will ever be whole." Once more in the epilogue [p. 319], "I am Iranian-American. I am the hyphen caught between two homelands that hate each other."

When Max and Shahin finally reunite in the US, the narrative shows virtually no sign of joy or affection, just a sense of gratitude on the part of Max for Shahin's efforts in getting him out of Iran, and a sense of nostalgia on the part of Shahin, who mourns the loss of her old country and her Shah. In fact, throughout, the couple's relationship comes off as very dry, with no signs of affection. Max converted to Islam to marry Shahin, out of respect for her father who was a devout man. So, Shahin may have felt a sense of debt to Max as she put her efforts into defending him and getting him out of Iran. Max's involvement with radar smuggling was his "extramarital affair," and it apparently had a similar effect on his marriage.

After returning to the US, Max gave many talks to diverse groups: women, students, professors, economists, managers, both Iranians and Americans. During these talks, he sidestepped questions about SAVAK or how he felt when Americans were taken hostage. Later, Max accepted a job in Saudi Arabia; it is difficult to believe that someone not working for the CIA would take such a job after he barely escaped with his life from Iran.

Max died of a heart attack at age 59. Few attended his funeral and Cyrus found it difficult to eulogize him. This event forced Cyrus to reexamine his own life, make new friends, and write. One product of this change of focus

was a book of eulogies.

The book is a good read and many, particularly Iranian-Americans, may find it interesting, either because they identify with events and locations or share the author's sense of not truly belonging in either country. The author is prone to exaggeration in some passages, such as when he describes the horse-ride of Max through the Kurdish territories and when, speaking on behalf of Max during his final escape, expresses fear that his plane may be shot down, once authorities catch wind of his being on it.

2015/08/24 (Monday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

- (1) Cartoon of the day: Tweets, old and new.
- (2) Quote of the day: "Do you have serious questions?" ~ Bernie Sanders, to a reporter who asked him about Hillary Clinton's hair
- (3) A brilliant idea: Anti-gun group **opens a gun shop** in NYC and tags each gun with its past story of harm and death.
- (4) A side benefit of Uber: Ride-hailing apps have a side benefit not often mentioned. They reduce drunken-driving deaths by making rides easy to get and affordable. It is estimated that some 500 deaths per year could be avoided if Uber and its likes became available nationwide in the US. [Info from: *Newsweek* on-line]
- (5) Rampant student cheating in China now extends to academic publishing: "Got a spare \$14,800? If so, you can be first co-author on a new research paper about cancer. Want to add a friend? That'll be \$26,300." Thus begins an article in *Time* magazine, issue of August 31, 2015, that discusses continued scientific misconduct in China and elsewhere, despite having been exposed by the journal *Science* in a 2013 sting. The Web site "**Retraction Watch**" keeps track of retractions (the practice of removing an already published paper from public domain after discovery of cheating or other misconduct by the authors). The site lists Yoshitaka Fujii, a Japanese postoperative nausea expert, as the person with the most (183) retractions to his name. I know from personal contacts that the problem is also serious in Iran, where award of advanced degrees and university promotions are based on publishing papers in certain "approved" journals. A number of Iranian companies openly advertise their services in writing of theses/dissertations and research papers for a fee.
- (6) China's GDP growth: According to *Time* magazine, issue of August 31, 2015, the rate of growth of China's GDP has been about \$1T per year, taking it from under \$3 trillion in 2006 to \$10.4 trillion in 2014.
- (7) Move over DNA evidence: Scientists have succeeded in tracing cell phones to their owners using their bacterial signatures, raising hopes for a new forensic tool. [Info from: *Time* magazine, August 31, 2015]
- (8) Ageless movie stars: We are 15 years into the 21st century and some movie stars (notably Sandra Bullock, Halle Berry, and Tom Cruise) still look as they did in the 20th century, and they can play pretty much the same roles they played then. [Adapted from an essay by Susanna Schrobosdorff, *Time* magazine, August 31, 2015]



2015/08/23 (Sunday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

- (1) Cartoon of the day: New embodiment of "Can't take it with you."
- (2) Gunman subdued on Amsterdam-to-Paris high-speed train: The terrorist, who belonged to a jihadist group, had already fired several rounds from a Kalashnikov when a Brit and three Americans **disarmed and hog-tied him**.
- (3) Ben & Jerry's adds new "**Iran Deal**" flavor: Some who are allergic to this new ice-cream flavor have asked for the addition of a "Bomb Iran" flavor. Just kidding about the latter flavor.
- (4) Mass shootings are very American: Yes, they happen elsewhere too, but with less than 5% of the world's population, the US had 31% of mass shootings worldwide during 1966-2012. [Info from: *Newsweek* on-line]
- (5) Dumbest study-of-the-year candidate: Groundbreaking research discovers it's possible to be single and happy. "Duh!" respond many singles. [Info from: *Newsweek* on-line]
- (6) UCSB men's soccer is off to an impressive start: A good-size crowd was on hand last night for a scrimmage game between UCSB Gauchos and their crosstown rivals, Westmont College. The Gauchos led at halftime 3-1, with Westmont scoring on a penalty kick in minute 45. The final score was 4-1. UCSB next faces the perennial powerhouse Stanford on Friday. A welcome addition this year is a **video-streaming** feature.
- (7) "Papa": One of my favorite Paul Anka songs (**live performance**, with lyrics).
- (8) Paul Anka's "Night of a Lifetime" concert: This **71-minute video** contains many of Anka's memorable songs, performed live at the Mirage Hotel in Las Vegas, including "Papa" mentioned above.
- (9) Blues guitarist following his dream: Retruning from today's carillon concert on the UCSB campus, I heard blues music coming from a parking structure adjacent to Isla Vista. Going to the upper level to investigate, I



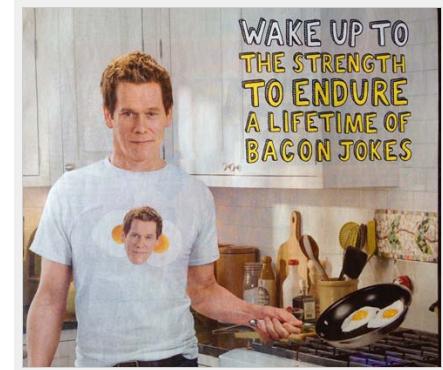
found a 50-something man all by himself, playing the guitar. I was the only other person there. He explained that he learned to play the guitar 5 years ago and that he aspired to play music for a living. He came to the parking structure to play in the open and to escape from the heat at his residence. He also liked the fact that he could play at full blast, without disturbing anyone. This is his rendition of a [Jimmy Hendrix song](#).

2015/08/21 (Friday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) Wake up to eggs with Bacon: Actor Kevin Bacon, who has endured his share of bacon jokes in good spirits, does a magazine ad for eggs.

(2) Quote of the day: "Despite the Trump distraction, Black Lives Matter won't be sent to the back of the bus." ~ Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, writing in *Time* magazine, issue of August 24, 2015

(3) The agency that scares the \$13 trillion lending industry: The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau represents one of the passions of Elizabeth Warren and it now exists because of her relentless fight against big banks. Some 25M consumers have been helped by the Bureau's regulatory actions and they have gotten a total of about \$11B in relief. [The full article is available to *Time* subscribers only, but you can [read the introduction here](#).]



(4) A century of women's fashions [in 2 minutes](#): Style trends from 1915 to 2015.

(5) This is so cruel, but I think it should be shared to show the extent of animal abuse in Iran. This guy is administering [corporal punishment](#) to a goat, apparently guilty of something that displeased him.

(6) Humorous sign of the day: "We can shoot your wife and frame your mother-in-law. If you want, we can hang them too." ~ Sign seen in front of a photographic studio

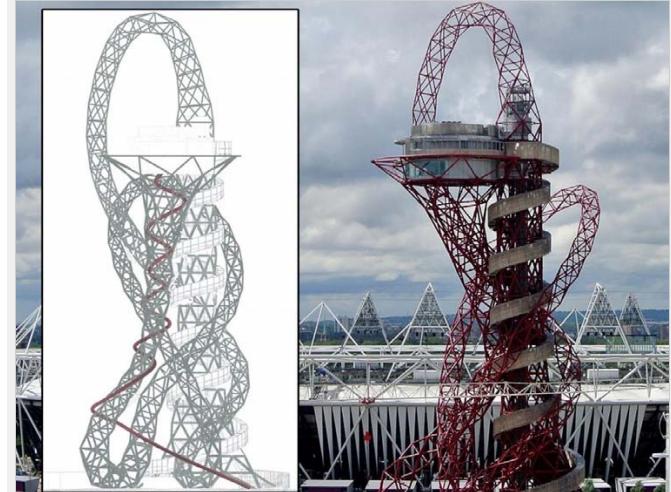
(7) An architectural marvel: Computer-augmented [aerial view](#) of the Sagrada Familia (Sacred Family) cathedral in Barcelona shows how this magnificent building, whose construction began in 1882, will look like upon completion in 2026.

(8) Religious scams: [John Oliver demolishes](#) several money-hungry televangelists who fly in private jets and live in multimillion-dollar mansions. He then exposes, practically, how easy it is to set up a "church" (his is called "Our Lady of Perpetual Exemption") that meets IRS guidelines and start raising money.

(9) Cinema under the stars: Tonight's film at Santa Barbara Courthouse's Sunken Gardens was "Cabaret" (from 1972) the last installment of this summer's "Great American Musicals" series.

2015/08/20 (Thursday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) The longest slide in the world: The ArcelorMittal Orbit tower in London's Olympic Park is adding a third way (besides elevators and stairs) for visitors to descend from the 375-foot structure: a tubular slide.



(2) A look at the companies that make up Alphabet (the new parent company of Google):

Calico: Extend the human lifespan

Fiber: Broadband Internet service

Google: Search, YouTube, Android

Google Capital: Invest in late-stage growth companies

Google Ventures: Invest in competing products

Google X: Self-driving cars, wearables, etc.

Nest: Smart homes of the future

Sidewalk Labs: Technology to improve city life

(3) Stop the bullets. Kill the gun: A very effective [anti-gun video message](#) from the 2000s.

(4) American schools begin too early, and that's hurting student performance: This discussion isn't new, but *Time* magazine (issue of August 24, 2015) has provided some new information. Research by the American Academy of Pediatrics shows adolescents are better off rising later than falling asleep sooner (i.e., forget about the "early to rise, early to bed" advice for the young ones). Early classes impede the ability of students to sleep the optimal 8.5-9.5 hours per night. Currently, in 42 US states, at least 75% of schools start before 8:30 AM. A 2014 study indicated that in Minnesota high schools with classes that began at 8:30 or later, 60% of students slept at least 8 hours per night.

(5) Dead people should [stop tweeting](#): It is dishonest to use dead people's name recognition to promote ideas or advance various agendas. I would add that Facebook and other social media should ban accounts in the name

of dead celebs, except as tribute or fan pages, clearly marked as such.

(6) A wonderful Country-music-style cover of "[Save the Last Dance for Me](#)" by Emmylou Harris.

(7) Apparently "LOL" is very old-fashioned: According to findings by Facebook's data science team, reported in *Time* magazine (issue of August 24, 2015), only 1.9% of Facebook users type out "LOL" (I am one of those guilty of this dated practice). Most use "haha" (51.4%), "hehe" (13.1%), or emoji (33.7%).

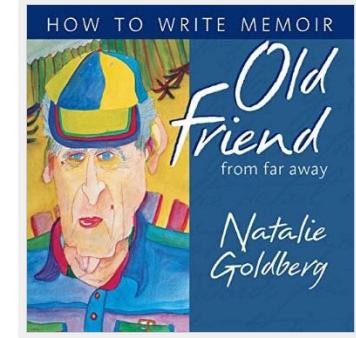
(8) Final thought for the day: "Courage is knowing what not to fear." ~ Plato

2015/08/19 (Wednesday): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Brief workshop review: Goldberg, Natalie, *Old Friend from Far Away: How to Write Memoir*, a writing workshop on 2 CDs, Sounds True, 2002.

This recording of a workshop, based on the thesis that your mind is the most potent writer's tool, aims to give your written words power and authenticity. Goldberg explores techniques for connecting with your senses, making your memory vibrant, pulling out the natural structure of the stories you carry within, and freeing yourself from the past by writing about it.

It is said that every American wants to write a memoir, making workshops of this kind a lucrative business. Goldberg reminds us that, like everything else, good writing requires practice. You should develop the discipline to write at all times, about everything.



What you jot down may become part of a structured piece at a later time, but you should not worry too much at the start about structure. You must also be prepared to throw a lot of writing away and to start anew.

Paying attention to details and capturing them in writing is essential to rousing and keeping the readers' interest. Sometimes, you don't remember such details, in which case, you should feel free to make them up based on your experiences and sensibilities. The very act of writing about the details jogs your memory, leading to a lot more detail than you thought you remembered.

Someday, after I retire, I may write my own memoir. At that time, I will probably need a refresher workshop of this kind to help me tell my story properly and engagingly.

(2) Quote of the day: "Trump is the dinner guest who will not leave. Brutal questions from Fox News and attacks from rivals only stoked the loyalty of his angry, disaffected supporters." ~ Zeke J. Miller, writing in *Time* magazine, issue of August 24, 2015

(3) The illuminated cello: The days of boring, uniform-looking musical instruments may be over. Using LED lighting, projection, and other high-tech methods, visual artists are transforming musical concerts into rich and engaging **multimedia experiences**. The said cello makes an appearance at the 02:45 mark.

(4) Buddha statues **temporarily resurrected**: A laser light projector, developed by a wealthy Chinese couple, beamed 3D images of the 53- and 35-meter Buddhas that were blown up by the Taliban.

(5) HONY to feature **Humans of Iran**: Brandon, who runs the "Humans of New York" Facebook page, is having a second trip to Iran this summer. He writes that his first trip of 3 years ago was early in HONY's development and he hopes to provide deeper coverage during this revisit.

(6) Final thought for the day: "The best defense against bulls--- is vigilance. So if you smell something, say something." ~ Jon Stewart, bidding farewell on "The Daily Show"

2015/08/18 (Tuesday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) Cartoon of the day: The egosystem (by John Atkinson).

(2) Quote of the day: "Prosperity is a great teacher; adversity is a greater. Possession pampers the mind; privation trains and strengthens it." ~ William Hazlitt

(3) Bonus quote of the day: "Prosperity makes friends, adversity tries them." ~ Publilius

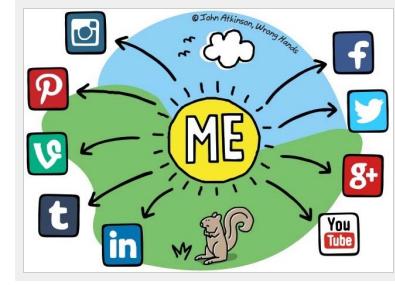
(4) The 1000-mph auto: Commercial jetliners fly at 500-600 mph, so this **fastest auto** designed by a band of British engineers goes almost twice as fast as modern passenger planes.

(5) Skydiving formation record set: A group of 164 skydivers from Spain, Australia, and the US smashed the vertical skydiving formation **world record** set by a 138-man team in 2012.

(6) A classic musical video clip from 1969: "[Girl from the North Country](#)" (by Bob Dylan and Johnny Cash).

(7) At 40 meters, Y40 is the **deepest indoor pool** in the world.

(8) Scientists and jury duty: Astrophysicist Neil de Grasse Tyson tells these stories about how he was twice excused from jury duty. The first time, in 2002, after answering questions about astrophysics and what it means, he was asked about what he taught at Princeton. He replied that he taught "a class on the evaluation of evidence and the relative unreliability of eyewitness testimony." A few years later, he was dismissed when he asked the judge why the defendant was accused of possession of 1700 mg of cocaine, rather than the



equivalent 1.7 g (less than the weight of a dime). I was too dismissed twice (once by the prosecutor and once by the defense attorney), when questioning revealed my education and line of work.

(9) Final thought for the day: "When things are bad, we take comfort in the thought that they could always get worse. And when they are, we find hope in the thought that things are so bad they have to get better." ~ Malcolm Forbes

2015/08/17 (Monday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Brief book review: Strayed, Cheryl, *Tiny Beautiful Things: Advice on Love and Life from Dear Sugar*, unabridged audiobook on 8 CDs, read by the author, Books on Tape, 2012.

Strayed, the best-selling author of Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail (which was made into a movie, starring Reese Witherspoon) and a successful essayist, also led a secret life as an advice columnist using the pseudonym "Sugar." In this collection of compassionate, honest, and humor-filled essays, written in response to questions from advice seekers, Sugar covers a broad spectrum of life challenges, from cheating or controlling lovers to loss of a family member or a job.

She demonstrates how most perceived troubles are really non-problems. In responding to a writer who complains about the difficulties of her job, Sugar quotes herself (i.e., Strayed): "Writing is hard for every last one of us. ... Coal mining is harder. Do you think miners stand around all day talking about how hard it is to mine for coal? They do not. They simply dig." She then tells the advice-seeker to get over it; to get out of her own head, to get over herself, and reach!

Every single essay in this book is engaging and eye-opening. Throughout the narrative, Sugar's attitude is to view life's challenges not as paralyzing tests in which we might fail, but as gifts or opportunities for personal and professional growth. I enjoyed this book immensely and recommend it highly.

(2) Quote of the day: "This is going to be a game changer." ~ Dr. Margaret Chan, Director General of WHO, on an experimental Ebola vaccine with 100% effectiveness rate in a trial

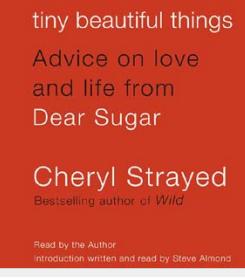
(3) Apple building a self-driving car: Code-named **Project Titan**, Apple's effort in the area appears to be further along than many suspected.

(4) Iranian women win 7-2 in a futsal match against Uzbekistan: This is really interesting! Women (even female reporters) aren't allowed to watch other women play sports! **This photo** was presumably taken by a male reporter. And don't get me started on how the restrictive clothing puts Iranian female athletes at a disadvantage against international opponents. As we say in Persian, "Shotor savaari dolla-dolla nemisheh."

(5) Fun fact of the day: France uses **12 different time zones**, the most of any country in the world. Bear in mind that France has possessions such as Guiana and Polynesia. Metropolitan France uses the Central European time zone (UTC + 1:00), with daylight saving time observed from the last Sunday in March to the last Sunday in October. PDT is UTC – 8:00, so France is 9 hours ahead of us right now.

(6) Interesting juxtaposition (**entry gate** to an Islamic religious center in Iran).

(7) Zhino Band (duo with vocals, santoor, and daf) performs **Persian oldies** "Simin Bari" and "Shaaneh."



Read by the Author
Introduction written and read by Steve Almond

2015/08/16 (Sunday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

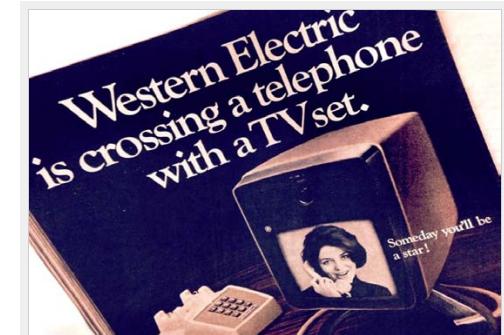
(1) Magazine ad from the 1960s: Before FaceTime or Skype, there was Western Electric's Picturephone.

(2) Forecasters predict **strongest El Nino effect** in more than six decades: Drought-stricken western US states may get some relief because of heavy rains during the forthcoming winter and spring. The heavy precipitation will be a mixed blessing, given the dangers of mudslides and infrastructure damage, like those in 1997–98.

(3) Parents pass math anxiety to children: **A study** published in *Psychological Science* suggests that children of parents with high math anxiety tend to suffer from the same condition. Thus, we need methods to break the cycle.

(4) A 75-minute interview (**sound file**) with the prolific Iranian musician/composer Sadegh Nojouki, featuring brief samples of his work. If you do not know Nojouki, you will be delighted to find out that he has had a hand in some of the nicest, most-popular Iranian songs. Nojouki raises a number of important points about the music scene in Iran, including how indifferently composers and songwriters are treated within the Iranian culture. For example, songs are often identified with singers (e.g., Ebi's song), rather than being attributed to those who actually created the music and lyrics.

(5) Modern Persian music: Marjan Farsad, a newcomer to the music scene with virtually no formal training,



sings her own song "**Portagh-e Man**" ("My Orange"). Farsad's inexperience shows in this live performance, but her recorded music, also found [on YouTube](#), is much more polished.

(6) Selfie drone: The latest [gadget for adventurers](#) who wants to document their deeds.

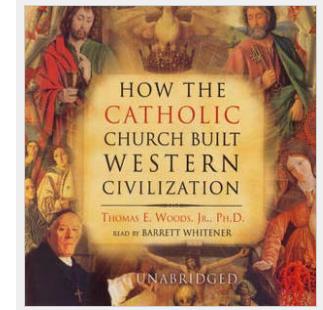
(7) Cartoon of the day (by Farshid Rajabali): Iranian prisoner talking on the visitor phone to his mother, who expresses concern for his well-being in the face of hardships: What hardship? It's like a dream. All the celebrities have gathered here! [\[Image\]](#)

(8) Robot mama builds robot babies, mimicking evolution: This [universal robotic arm](#) improves its offspring with each generation, by monitoring their performance, keeping positive traits, and avoiding negative ones.

(9) Final thought for the day: "I ask not for a lighter burden, but for broader shoulders." ~ Jewish proverb

2015/08/15 (Saturday): Brief book review: Woods, Thomas E. Jr., *How the Catholic Church Built Western Civilization*, unabridged audiobook on 6 CDs, read by Barrett Whitener, Blackstone Audiobooks, 2005.

The most immediate, and surprising, fact that one learns from this book is that the so-called dark ages contained some bright spots, including the formation of universities as centers of learning and research. Another key observation is that scientists of 2-3 centuries ago were priests or devout Catholics; many others counted learned priests among their most prized correspondents. Thus the church's impact on civilization goes far beyond its early contributions through monks copying manuscripts so as to preserve the wisdom of classical antiquity.



In one passage, the author quotes historians who claim that the condemnation of the Aristotelian view about the impossibility of vacuum (based on the omnipotent God being able to create anything He wants, including a vacuum) facilitated scientific progress, because it made scientists re-examine some ancient beliefs. This may be so, but one can cite many other condemnations that stifled, rather than encouraged, scientific inquiry. Even in this particular case, the condemnation was based on a blind belief that happened to coincide with the truth. The author's glossing over some inconvenient truths and cherry-picking of facts aside, listening to this audiobook gave me enough new knowledge that I can recommend it to others as a worthwhile perusal. I would have been less skeptical about this book had the author used the word "Influenced" instead of "Built" in the title.

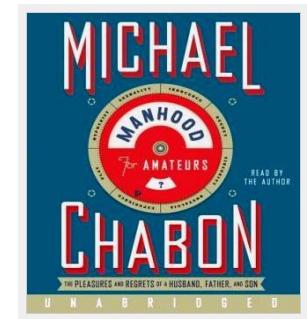
This [27-minute video](#) interview with the author, which touches upon all key ideas, may be considered a good substitute for reading (or listening to) the book.

2015/08/14 (Friday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Brief book review: Chabon, Michael, *Manhood for Amateurs: The Pleasures and Regrets of a Husband, Father, and Son*, unabridged audiobook on 7 CDs, read by the author, Harper Audio, 2009.

At the very beginning of this audiobook, which made one of my long car trips bearable in both directions, the author informs us: "The handy thing about being a father is that the historical standard is so pitifully low." He then elaborates that we fathers are complimented for doing trivial things for our kids that moms do routinely with little fanfare.

This is a very enjoyable collection of lighthearted essays containing advice for men, presented with ample humor.



Besides "male" advice for various age groups (boyhood, manhood, brotherhood, fatherhood), Chabon laments the loss of the simple joys of childhood, as rudimentary toys and stories he enjoyed as a boy are replaced by the hegemony of Disney-style "family" entertainment set "in a zoo, or in a forest, or on a farm, or under the sea, or in 'Africa'" for his children; the kind of entertainment that doesn't leave anything to the child's imagination.

(2) The US flag raised in Cuba for the first time in 54 years: Secretary of State John Kerry officially dedicated the reopened [US Embassy in Havana](#).

(3) Firoozeh Dumas strikes again: The latest book of the *Funny in Farsi* best-selling author, titled *It Ain't So Awful, Falafel* will be available in May 2016 (pre-orders are being taken by Amazon).

(4) "It's a Man's World": An unusual, but powerful, [musical pairing](#), James Brown and Luciano Pavarotti.

(5) Bernie Sanders lectures Alan Greenspan: An [eloquent and effective question](#) posed by Sanders to Greenspan in a 2003 hearing, fully 5 years before the Great Recession of 2008.

(6) The US FDA against Kim Kardashian: [She twitted about](#) her positive experience with a morning-sickness drug, but the FDA considers the drug endorsement misleading because it is effectively an ad that fails to mention risks and side effects. This is the latest episode of the clash between celebrity culture and science.

(7) A wonderful quintet and its music: A [4-minute sampling](#) of music by the very talented Zamar quintet. Here are their renditions of "[Argentinian Tango](#)," Piazzolla's "[Libertango](#)," and a serene instrumental version

of "[You Raise Me Up.](#)" Look for more of their music on YouTube.

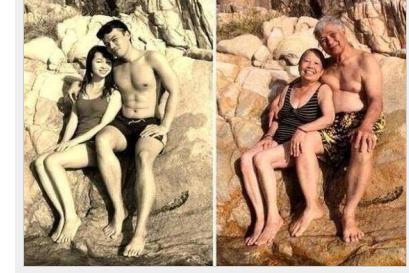
2015/08/13 (Thursday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

- (1) Cartoon of the day: The nuclear deal with Iran is radioactive.
- (2) Imprisoned Iranian artist Atena Farghdani receives, in absentia, CRNI's "[Courage in Cartooning](#)" award.
- (3) Quote of the day: "The world is but a canvas to our imagination." ~ Henry David Thoreau
- (4) Millions of black balls [cover Los Angeles reservoir](#): This action, whose \$35M cost is much less than the estimated \$300M for a tarp cover, is to prevent precious water from evaporating.
- (5) Comedian Sarah Silverman [praises Bernie Sanders](#) at a campaign rally introduction.
- (6) Melissa Gilbert [to run for US Congress](#): The actress of the "Little House on the Prairie" fame, who in recent years has advocated on behalf of women's issues and also served as President of the Screen Actors Guild, is set to run in Michigan's 8th Congressional District.
- (7) "Septembers of Shiraz": This is the title of a movie to be released in September 2015 at the Toronto International Film Festival. Based on Dalia Sofer's first novel bearing the same title, the film was shot in Bulgaria and stars Salma Hayek, Adrien Brody, and Shohreh Aghdashloo.
- (8) "Peace Symphony": Parts of [musical piece](#) composed and conducted by Majid Entezami.
- (9) Ventura County card-skimming at gas pumps: Watch this [KEYT news report](#), even if you don't live in Ventura County, because similar scams are becoming commonplace in many areas. Criminals install hidden skimming devices on gas pumps to collect your credit-card information.



2015/08/12 (Wednesday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

- (1) Cheers to a 51-year relationship, 1963-2014: Perhaps 52 by now.
- (2) Quote of the day: "Art is how we decorate space; music is how we decorate time." ~ Anonymous [P.S.: Please just enjoy the nice parallel and do not invoke Einstein's spacetime.]
- (3) A girl who didn't let her limitations define her: An [inspiring TED talk](#) by a young woman, who went from losing both of her lower legs and a couple of internal organs as a result of a preventable disease (there is a message here about the importance of vaccination) to winning gold medals in competitive snowboarding.
- (4) Some Bollywood cheer: Bride leads wedding guests in a spirited [Indian dance routine](#).
- (5) Beware of 1-800-GET-THIN: Cindy Omidi, who with her two sons Michael and Julian runs the weight-loss surgery business, [has been convicted](#) of money laundering, getting 3 years of probation in lieu of jail time. A more serious lawsuit, involving insurance fraud (billing insurance companies for unnecessary or even fictitious procedures), is pending and may lead to criminal prosecution.
- (6) Ukrainian hackers and their Wall-Street collaborators made \$100M on insider trading: In the [biggest scam](#) of its kind, hackers gained access to prepared, but as yet not public, corporate announcements and exploited the time gap of a few hours to a few days to benefit from the information in trading.
- (7) China's currency continues to fall: Unlike most other currencies, yuan's fall isn't due to market forces. Rather, the Chinese government sets whatever exchange rate it pleases, which some in the West view as currency manipulation. We in the US will benefit as consumers, but the devaluation will hurt our economy in the jobs area.
- (8) Don't forget the [Perseid Meteor Shower](#) that peaks August 12-13, 2015.
- (9) Final thought for the day: "A goal is a dream with a deadline." ~ Napoleon Hill



2015/08/11 (Tuesday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "The mind, once stretched by a new idea, never returns to its original dimensions." ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson
- (2) Extreme sports in Dubai: Not for the weak-hearted! [[2-minute video](#)]
- (3) A wonderful jazzy rendition of Britney Spears' "[Oops! ... I Did It Again](#)" in 1940s style.
- (4) One small bite for man ... : Astronauts at the International Space Station begin eating lettuce and other vegetables they have [grown in space](#).
- (5) Sting performs "[Desert Rose](#)": A wonderful mix of Western and Arabic music!
- (6) Bernie Sanders is on a roll: [He drew crowds](#) of 28,000 in both Portland and Los Angeles campaign rallies.
- (7) Man lets daughter drown at sea rather than violate an Islamic edict: He prevents rescuers from saving his

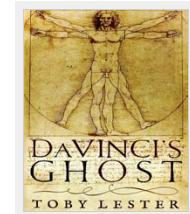
20-year-old daughter, because the rescue would entail strangers touching the girl. I read this [news story](#) from several sources to make sure it is real. It is indeed real. How backward and heartless can a man be to allow his daughter to die because of an abhorrent belief. These are the same fathers who would kill their daughters if they were raped. Of course, the lifeguards who obeyed the father are also responsible for the girl's death.

(8) Google plays corporate shell games: Mergers and splittings of companies are often motivated, if not primarily then to a good extent, by tax-saving/evasion schemes. Google's formation of the parent company,

Alphabet, is no exception. Nominally, the new company's announcement claims that moving some of Google's fringe or "far afield" activities (such as its health efforts) under the new umbrella will make their operations streamlined and thus more efficient. However, I suspect that the plan was hatched by the company's corporate accountants and tax gurus. It seems that Google wants to monopolize the alphabet letters for its various activities, using G for what remains of Google, X for its X-lab, and perhaps H for health.

(9) Final thought for the day: "The more a society drifts from the truth, the more it will hate those that speak it." ~ George Orwell

2015/08/10 (Monday): Lester, Toby, *Da Vinci's Ghost: Genius, Obsession, and How Leonardo Created the World in His Own Image*, unabridged audiobook on 5 CDs, read by Stephen Hoye, Tantor Audio, 2012.



This book focuses on the artist/philosopher who lived at a pivotal time in the history of Western thought, when the Middle Ages were giving way to the Renaissance. Da Vinci dreamed big and was in a sense too ambitious, often lacking the ability to finish the projects he conceived. But those big dreams paid off handsomely in projects that did come to fruition.

Da Vinci was a researcher in today's sense of the term. He learned through observation and experimentation, spending many days looking at and examining the human body and body parts, for instance. He believed in microcosmic man, the notion that the human body is a microcosm of the entire universe. For example, what one learns from blood vessels and blood flow in the body has implications for the flow of water in rivers.

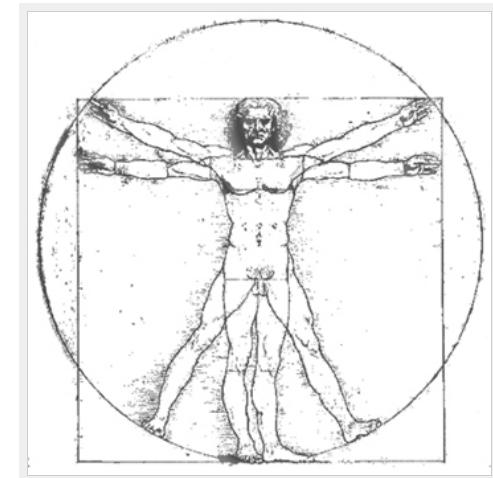
The ubiquitous image of a man, standing with arms and legs outstretched in a circle (representing the heavens and the divine) and a square (representing the earth and the secular), is used today for various purposes, including celebration of the beauty of the human form. This Vitruvian Man, named for its originator, the Roman architect Vitruvius, is the defining idea in this book.

Through it, Da Vinci's ambitions and numerous contributions to art, architecture, design, and science are discussed and put in the context of earlier and later developments.

In addition to other worthy projects, Da Vinci set out to map the human body, using drawings and representation schemes he borrowed from architecture. He was very disappointed with the illustrations that accompanied medical and biological texts of his time and thought that images could be used to great effect to clarify concepts and to enlighten readers.

His drawings of human organs and their cut-through views set a new standard for scientific communication, giving further credence to the maxim that a picture is worth a thousand words.

Just as illustrating the Vitruvian Man, based on Vitruvius' word description in his magnum opus, *Ten Books on Architecture*, have contributed to our understanding of the human form and its beauty, so too other observations by Da Vinci (and background notes jotted down and diagrams drawn in his meticulously kept notebooks) have opened windows to the world as it existed and imagined then, and as we understand it today.



2015/08/09 (Sunday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) UCSB library extension nears completion: I look forward to the return of normalcy to central campus, as the huge construction site gives way to a usable building in mid November. Ceremonial grand opening will take place in early winter 2016.



(2) Rick Astley for President: Multiple social-media friends have posted calls for supporting Rick Astley as a US Presidential candidate. Reasons cited for this support include the facts that he will never: Give you up; Make you cry; Let you down; Say good-bye; Run around; Tell a lie; Desert you; Hurt you.

(3) China is building the [world's largest telescope](#): Upon completion in 2016, the 500-meter-aperture

spherical telescope in southern China will displace the now-largest Arecibo Observatory in Puerto Rico.

(4) Vibrations of guitar strings, [as seen from inside the guitar](#) while it is played.

(5) This is [how engineers look like](#) these days. #ILookLikeAnEngineer

(6) Sweet dreams are made of cheese ... [\[Photo\]](#)

(7) Wonderful performance of "[We Are the World](#)" by a group of children.

(8) Water drainage on the Equator: [This demo](#) shows that water drainage creates no vortex when the sink is placed exactly on the Equator, whereas clockwise or counterclockwise vortex is observed when placing the sink slightly to one side of the Equator. In reality, no such effect will be observed (i.e., this is a hoax, performed and propagated by many). Here is an expert's explanation: "This myth comes from applying a scientific principle to a situation where it does not fit. The Coriolis deflection causes cyclonic systems to rotate counterclockwise in the Northern Hemisphere and clockwise in the Southern Hemisphere. It was inevitable that someone would suggest (without checking) that a sink should drain in a similar manner. However, a cyclone is more than 1000 kilometers in diameter and may exist for several days. By contrast, a typical sink is less than a meter in diameter and drains in a matter of seconds. On this scale, the Coriolis force is minuscule. Therefore, the shape of the sink and how level it is has more to do with the direction of water flow than the Coriolis force."

(9) Emergency declared in Colorado after EPA accidentally pollutes river: The US Environmental Protection Agency has taken responsibility for [an incident](#) that led to the release of water contaminated with heavy metals. The Navajo Nation is planning to file a lawsuit against EPA.

2015/08/07 (Friday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Restaurant at Disney's Hollywood Studios, Florida:

The restaurant looks like a 1950s [drive-in theater](#), complete with a screen, convertible-car booths, night sky, and a panoramic view of Southern California.

(2) Quote of the day: "Brevity is the soul of wit." ~ William Shakespeare

(3) International Olympiad of Astronomy and Astrophysics: A team of high-school students from Iran has won the championship at the [9th IOAA Olympiad](#), held in Indonesia.

(4) Hip-hop music in Iran: [Interview](#) with a rapper and samples of rap music by Iranian artists.

(5) Fossil fuels are [half gone](#): In just 2000 years, we humans have burned up most of what took 400 million years to form. The rate of energy production by earth's lifeforms is estimated to be a factor of 400 smaller than energy consumption. In other words, it takes 400 years of life on earth to produce one year's worth of energy.

(6) NASA's description of [2015 meteor showers](#): Including the spectacular Perseids Meteor Shower that peaks August 12-13, during which 100 meteors per hour are expected. According to *Los Angeles Times*, the best places to watch the spectacle include national parks and forests (anywhere with low light pollution), including California's Joshua Tree and Lake Tahoe areas.



(7) Teaching belly dancing, using [skeleton dancers](#). Watching the skeletons probably gives you a better idea about the nature of the moves than watching a live dancer.

(8) Horror movie set in Isla Vista: Right when UCSB and its surrounding community were making excellent progress in recovering from the mass shooting horrors of May 23, 2014, comes the October 2015 release of "Del Playa" [trailer], a horror movie based on those events. A petition is being circulated to stop the film's release. I consider this petition misguided. Just like anyone else in this community, I am appalled by the greed that makes someone try to benefit from the tragedy. However, freedom of speech is at issue here. Many horror films have been made based on life stories of real criminals, in which the story unfolds in real settings (e.g., high schools, shopping malls, small towns). This is no different. If it's a well-made movie, with or without a social message, then people will pay to watch it. Otherwise, it will be ignored, just like many other trash films, horror or otherwise.

2015/08/06 (Thursday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) La Fiesta Pequena (aka Old Spanish Days) opened last night: Hordes of dancers and other performers took to the stage in front of the Santa Barbara Mission, in festive opening ceremonies. Here are samples of [singing](#) and [dancing](#) from last night, recorded from a TV screen.

(2) The neuroscience of meditation, and the virtues of shutting up: This is the title of a [Newsweek on-line article](#), posted yesterday and subtitled "What 10 days of silence can do for your brain." I knew that others shutting

up can do wonders for me, but had no idea that my own shutting up is also good. Seriously though, this article relates the experiences of Zoe Schlanger, who took part in a 10-day intensive program of meditation in which the participants weren't allowed to read, write, or talk to one another, to the point of not even acknowledging each other's presence by a smile or a nod. While this is extreme, some toned-down version of keeping quiet is advised by many Persian philosophers and poets, with their musings in this area having achieved the status of adages and proverbs in the Persian culture.

(3) On Tuesday, FLOTUS Michelle Obama wished her husband a happy birthday by tweeting: "Happy birthday to a loving husband, wonderful father and my favorite dance partner. 54 looks good on you, @POTUS! -mo"

(4) California is now **debt-free**: About \$15B in Wall-Street debt (and ~\$5B in interest), taken to balance the books during hard financial times a decade ago, has just been paid off by the state.

(5) Dynamic art: Rain falls in this dynamic painting of a street scene. [[GIF image](#)]

(6) Part comic, part crusader: Even a comic such as Jon Stewart finds it hard to laugh at our current foibles in the political arena. I'll be watching the final installment of "[The Daily Show](#)" with Jon Stewart tonight, as an era comes to its end after 16 years.

(7) Several close aides of Ahmadinejad have been indicted or are serving prison terms: There are hints that the former President himself may be prosecuted for financial improprieties. It seems that accusations against Ahmadinejad and his aides hover around recommending certain individuals to banks and other financial institutions, which were then scammed by the said individuals. If recommending a crook is a basis for prosecution, then the person who recommended Ahmadinejad to the Iranian people and caused his election as President should also be prosecuted.

(8) You're fired: It is rumored that during tonight's debate show on Fox, Donald Trump will fire all other Republican presidential candidates and will declare himself the GOP nominee.

(9) Final thought for the day: "How come a cheese that has been aged for 7 years gets moldy in your fridge after only 7 days?" ~ Anonymous

2015/08/05 (Wednesday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Book review: Gallo, Carmine, *Talk Like TED: The 9 Public Speaking Secrets of the World's Top Minds*, unabridged audiobook on 6 CDs, read by the author (with Fred Breman and Kathleen McInerney), Macmillan Audio, 2014.

The series of talks known as TED (acronym for Technology, Entertainment, Design) began in 1984 based on the notion that ideas are the currency of our modern world and communicating them effectively is an urgent requirement. The success of the series led to the expansion via local franchises known as TEDx.

TED speakers are the best of the best in terms of captivating and engaging the audience. Carmine Gallo, a public speaking coach and best-selling author of *The Presentation Secrets of Steve Jobs*, captures the most important attributes of a TED speaker and a TED talk and presents them as advice to aspiring speakers and leaders.

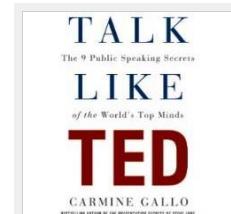
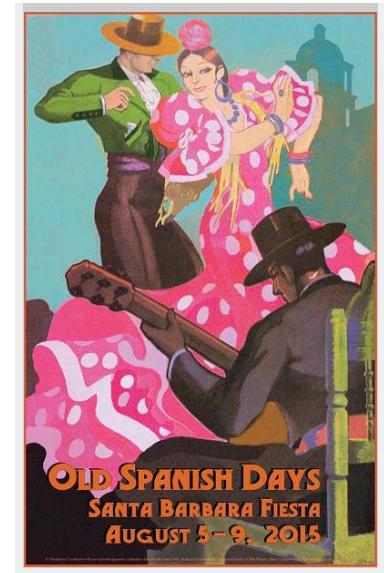
One of the key observations is that telling stories is a much more effective way of gaining the audience's attention and impressing ideas in a memorable way than talking in abstract terms. This may be a direct consequence of the human brain putting everything into a story or narrative, making one up even if presented with a series of unrelated facts. Stories also bring out the human element, making abstract concept more relevant to the audience's day-to-day existence.

Other important pieces of advice include sticking to the 18-minute time limit, unleashing the master within (talking about what you know best and are passionate about), and delivering jaw-dropping moments (e.g., surprising facts and figures).

(2) **Rapping to Mozart**, with some excellent advice in the lyrics.

(3) Hidden camera prank: Nun **carrying a huge box**, and the look of disbelief on the faces of macho guys when they can't.

(4) European women learn **Persian dancing**: Dance instructor Helia Ghiasabadi faces the challenge of teaching



nuances of Persian dancing, such as "Eshveh" and other uniquely Iranian cultural elements to European women.

(5) Defiant Iranian women: Women are not allowed to sing solo in Iran, but Iranian people, in all social and age groups, beg to differ. This grandmotherly lady performs "["Zan-e Ziba"](#)" ("Pretty Lady"), made famous by Viguen.

(6) Azeri music: Ayshan Mehriyeva sings "["Yar Injidi"](#)" ("Lover Was Hurt"; "Yar Ranjid" in Persian), accompanied by a large orchestra.

(7) Final thought for the day*: "There is a fine line between a numerator and a denominator." ~ Anonymous
[*Only a fraction of you will understand this post.]

2015/08/04 (Tuesday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) Natural art gracing building wall: From Hamburg, Germany.



(2) Quote of the day: "Drawing on my fine command of the English language, I said nothing." ~ Robert Benchley

(3) Elizabeth Warren's [passionate and highly effective speech](#) against the Republican plan to defund Planned Parenthood.

(4) Iran [forges a WikiLeaks cable](#) to embarrass the UN and its human rights investigation of the Islamic regime.

(5) "Ain't Nobody": Fabulous [7-minute rendition](#) of the soulful tune by Aqui y Ajazz and jazz violinist Regina Carter.

(6) Kris Kristofferson's rendition of "["Sunday Morning Coming Down"](#)" in an emotional tribute to Johnny Cash.

(7) Trevor Noah [pokes fun](#) at British colonialism: The future host of "The Daily Show" tells a British audience that they should blame themselves for lots of people wanting to enter Great Britain, because they went and introduced their great country to people who were minding their own business in Asia and Africa.

(8) City of Isfahan, as seen by a [woman in wheelchair](#): Many countries have emulated our trailblazing ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act). Iran obviously has not.

(9) Final thought for the day: "1, 2, 3, 95, 98, NT, Me, 2000, XP, Vista, 7, 8, 10." ~ Bill Gates counting to ten

2015/08/03 (Monday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) An effective reminder about extinction: For a short period of time, NYC's Empire State Building became the face of extinction.



(2) Quote of the day: "All art is autobiographical. The pearl is the oyster's autobiography." ~ Film director Federico Fellini

(3) UC salary disclosures: According to the Associated Press, the 10-campus University of California System had 28 employees who made more than \$1M in 2014. The list consists primarily of athletic coaches (UCLA football and men's basketball coaches topped the list at \$3.5M and \$2.7M), doctors, and hospital chief executives. The UC President, Janet Napolitano, isn't on the \$million-plus list (she made only \$585K). For comparison, the somewhat smaller University of Texas System had 9 employees with \$million-plus earnings, while the twice-as-large State University of New York System had none.

(4) Finding veins is a snap: I never cease to be amazed by the benefits of modern technology, in this case to readily [find veins](#) for drawing blood.

(5) How to read subscription-based Web sites free of charge: If you are denied access upon clicking on a link, try copying the title of the story and perhaps the source (e.g., *Newsweek*) into Google search bar. I believe that search engine results are exempted from subscription restrictions by many sites, so clicking on the search result may get you through to the story, despite not being a subscriber.

(6) A wonderful rendition of "["All About That Bass"](#)": When I first heard this song, I was convinced that it was an old one covered by this group and other singers. I was surprised to learn from Wikipedia that the song isn't old at all; it was written by Meghan Trainor in 2013 and [recorded in 2014](#). I distinctly remember a song (perhaps from the 1970s) that has the melody of the part with the words "My momma she told me don't worry about your size ..." I'll continue looking for that song. Perhaps the words will come to me in time.

(7) Conveniences that we take for granted: Yesterday morning, the pump that disposes of the sewage in our housing complex by pushing it into the city sewage system became non-functional and all residents were advised to refrain from flushing and washing. I did a few hours of gardening earlier that morning (weeding, general clean-up, trimming of rose bushes), and when I came inside to clean up and take a refreshing shower, I encountered the e-mail notice about the malfunctioning sewer pump. So, for a while, I was sitting at my

computer, rather disgusted with myself, trying to get some work done, and thinking how we tend to take our everyday conveniences for granted.

(8) Final thought for the day: "I just want someone to love and accept me for who I pretend to be on the Internet." ~ Anonymous

2015/08/01 (Saturday): McWhorter, John, *The Story of Human Language*, a 6-DVD course in the "Great Courses" series (plus three guidebooks, one in each 2-DVD package), The Teaching Company, 2004. [Review also featured on [Iranian.com](#)]

We are all interested in language, because it defines us as a species and presents us with many interesting questions about origins, reasons for multiplicity and variations, processes of change (decay, growth), and extinction. Dr. McWhorter does a great job of explaining how a single tongue spoken more than 100,000 years ago evolved into the estimated 6000 languages used around the world today. Each DVD in the package contains 6 half-hour lectures, whose summaries are presented below.

01. "What Is Language?" Language, as we know it today, is unique to homo sapiens and arose about 50-100K years ago. We can teach various animals to speak, but for them it is a game, not a means of communication.

02. "When Language Began." The ability to speak has a genetic basis and it can be learned only during childhood. A girl who had been put in a closet and not allowed to interact with others up to age 13 never learned to speak.

03. "How Language Changes: Sound Change." Changing sounds are natural outcomes of laziness in speech, not a sign of language decay. "February" is difficult to pronounce, so its sound naturally changes to "February."

04. "How Language Changes: Building New Material." Suffixes used for conjugation used to be separate words that merged with the words they modified and contracted to 1-2 letters over time. This is known as grammaticalization (concrete words changing into grammatical tools).

05. "How Language Changes: Meaning and Order." Meanings of words and phrases change over time ("semantic drift"). For example, "silly" meant "blessed" in early English, but changed in a step-by-step fashion to carry its modern meaning.

06. "How Language Changes: Many Directions." Word meanings change over time, including through "semantic narrowing" and "semantic broadening."

07. "How Language Changes: Modern English." Change isn't limited to archaic languages, but has occurred in modern English as well. We don't want to admit it, but most of us do not understand Shakespeare when we listen to dialog at normal speed (reading is different, because we can pause and re-read.)

08. "Language Families: Indo-European." Evidence that languages have a common root shows up in the form of similar words and similar grammatical constructs. Indo-European languages include virtually all languages of Europe (with a few exceptions), Persian, and Indian languages.

09. "Language Families: Tracing Indo-European." Proto-Indo-European language cannot be reconstructed in full, because there are no written records of that language. But by looking at similarities of the descendant languages, some features of it can be deduced and we may even be able to construct a few sentences.

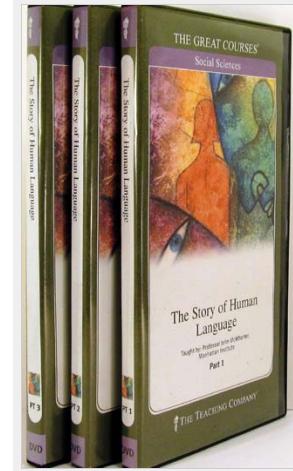
10. "Language Families: Diversity of Structures." Afro-Asiatic family of languages includes Semitic languages (Arabic, Hebrew, Aramaic) as a sub-family. Semitic languages have 3-consonant roots that are transformed into words by inserting vowels between them and attaching prefixes and suffixes to the result. East Asian languages belong to multiple families.

11. "Language Families: Clues to the Past." There are many language families across the globe, some small (a dozen or so languages) and others very large (hundreds of languages). Within each family, scientists strive to find/guess common roots for words or grammatical constructs.

12. "The Case Against the World's First Language." Some claims made about a single common root for all of the world's language families are too far-fetched to be believable.

13. "The Case for the World's First Language." Whereas there may not exist a single ancestor to all world languages, the case for superfamilies is fairly clear. Languages stretching from Europe, through Asia, and into North America exhibit similarities that cannot be accidental (e.g., the sound "m" in words having to do with me-ness and the sound "t" being associated with you-ness; remember that "you" was once "thou"). These similarities persisted because they constitute high-use elements of languages.

14. "Dialects: Subspecies of Species." What eventually becomes a new language may begin as a "bad" dialect of some language. For example, early forms of French were viewed as undesirable dialects of Latin. Each language is a bundle of dialects, which are often nothing but steps in the direction of new-language creation. An official dialect, that defines a language and its written form, is often the dialect spoken by those with "the juice"



(money and guns).

15. "Dialects: Where Do You Draw the Line?" There exist dialects that should be viewed as separate languages. Conversely, we have languages that are really dialects of one language. Hindi and Urdu are basically the same language, but for political and religious reasons, their speakers consider them different. When the Danes ruled Sweden, the language we now know as Swedish was a dialect of Danish.

16. "Dialects: Two Tongues in One Mouth." Arabic is often viewed as a single language, but some of its "dialects" have little in common, except the script. What constitutes a separate language is often based on sociopolitical considerations. There are some 200 languages with "official" or "written" forms and about 200 countries. Only a quarter of the countries recognize 2 languages and only 4 (India, Singapore, Spain, Luxembourg) recognize 3 or more. Official forms are often more formal than dialects.

17. "Dialects: The Standard as Token of the Past." Changes in languages are the norm rather than the exception. The establishment of written or standard forms, as well as proliferation of literacy, slow down the pace of change. When a written form exists, uttering the word "dog" brings to our mind the letters "D," "O," and "G," making gradual drift less likely.

18. "Dialects: Spoken Style, Written Style." In virtually all languages, the written form is fundamentally different from the spoken form. We don't utter statements such as, "Our vacation, which begins in August, will be fun." Spoken vocabulary is much more limited: 1000s of words vs. 100,000s. We have the word "ruthless" and the English dictionary still contains "ruth" (meaning "mercy"), but no one uses "ruth" in speech. Spoken language isn't necessarily inferior to the written form: One can be very articulate in spoken form.

19. "Dialects: The Fallacy of Blackboard Grammar." Grammar is a fairly recent notion (about 200 years old), as is the constant worrying of the speakers of a language about making a mistake in their speech. Many grammatical rules are arbitrary and were made-up by a couple of people who first wrote about it. For example, why is "you was" (with singular "you") considered incorrect? Double-negatives existed in Old English and persist in many current dialects.

20. "Language Mixture: Words." Languages are like stews: Occasionally you see something in them that you don't recognize, except perhaps by sending it to a lab for analysis. English has an extensive vocabulary of borrowed words; and this isn't just for things like "sushi" and "taco" (according to OED, 99% of English words come from other languages, rather than Old English).

21. "Language Mixture: Grammar." One mechanism for language change is its adjacency to other languages. This is why, for example, the Indian branch of the Indo-European family is very different from the European varieties, not just in terms of words but also word order in sentences.

22. "Language Mixture: Language Areas." When languages mix in the same geographic area, they tend to become similar, in the same way that a married couple tends to develop similarities over time.

23. "Language Develops Beyond the Call of Duty." Languages tend to grow and be embellished far beyond the need of effective human communication. Some nuances in expression are nice, but they are not worth the complications they produce in teaching and learning a language. Like computer software, languages collect "features" that are not helpful at all.

24. "Language Interrupted." Contact between languages tends to inhibit over-growth. So, the complexity of a language is often an indication of how much interaction it has endured. Thus, isolated, less-advanced societies tend to have more complex languages. The world's least complex languages are the ones that are spoken, primarily, as second languages.

25. "A New Perspective on the Story of English." English is very different from other Germanic languages because of the way it interacted with other languages. It borrowed words from languages spoken by invaders (such as the Vikings), who married into Old-English-speaking communities and began to learn English as a second language; this led to simplifications, such as English losing its word genders and other inessential nuances.

26. "Does Culture Drive Language Change?" Navajo language has word variations based on object shapes. So, if one gives a set of objects to Navajo kids, they tend to classify them by shape, rather than by color, which is the case for English-speaking kids. This is an example of interesting interactions between culture and language.

27. "Language Starts Over: Pidgins." Pidgin is a rudimentary form of a language consisting perhaps of a few hundred words and a few basic grammatical rules (such as word order). These forms often develop in trade regions, where people with different languages interact. For example what has come to be known as Russenorsk (a cross between Russian and Norse) was a very simple language that was adequate for basic conversations. It lacked the embellishments of either language. There was once a Native American Pidgin English used to communicate with the "White Man."

28. "Language Starts Over: Creoles I." Creole is a language that is stripped down (like a pidgin) and is then built back up through extended use. We humans have a basic need to communicate in a nuanced fashion and using a pidgin language is very unsatisfying for extended time periods. Most creoles were created in plantation settings.

29. "Language Starts Over: Creoles II." Saramaccan, which was developed by African slaves who escaped plantations in Suriname and formed their own communities in the interior, is a good creole example. It uses words from several different languages. The casual language of Hawaii is also a creole that developed from a pidgin in just one generation.
30. "Language Starts Over: Signs of the New." A key feature of creole languages, besides being mixed, is their streamlined grammar. Creoles lack gender or conjugation markers, and they do not use Chinese-style tones. Their short periods of development make them devoid of words such as "understand," in which it is unclear how/why the prefix "under" came to be.
31. "Language Starts Over: The Creoles Continuum." Semi-creoles are languages that are not quite separate languages but also are a bit more different than the original language compared with its dialects. Afrikaans, spoken in South Africa, is a semi-creole based on a highly simplified form of Dutch.
32. "What is Black English?" It is an English dialect that some people call "Ebonics." Black English has its slang, but that is the least interesting part of it. The sound system gives Black English its distinctive flavor. The grammar is also different. As in Russian, the verb "to be" is often left out in Black English: "She my sister."
33. "Language Death: The Problem." Most languages have no written form, so when they skip a generation, they are gone forever. One language on earth disappears every two weeks. Often a language on the path to extinction devolves into the pidgin stage through lack of use. The complicated parts of a language are the first to go.
34. "Language Death: Prognosis." There are many language preservation movements around the world. Both extremes of everyone speaking one language (English?) and of preserving all 6000 languages are highly unlikely. Urbanization favors major languages and facilitates the demise of peripheral languages with few speakers.
35. "Artificial Languages." Artificial languages include Volapuk (had a brief vogue, because it was difficult to learn), Esperanto (relatively successful in that it has 1M speakers, only 16 rules, user-friendliness, some translated classics), Solresol (music-based), and sign languages. English has become the default universal language and it is unlikely to be replaced by something else.
36. "Finale: Master Class." Words have peculiar histories and tracing their roots and variations tells us a lot about how languages develop, change, and intermix. Examples of word transformations include "alone" (all one) and "good-bye" (God be with you).

2015/07/31 (Friday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

- (1) Cinema under the stars (actually, under a very yellow "blue" moon): Screened at Santa Barbara Courthouse's majestic Sunken Gardens was "An American in Paris," a film in the "Great American Musicals" series.
- (2) Tonight's full moon wasn't quite blue: But the event is **rare enough** to be celebrated. Blue moon, often defined as the second full moon in a calendar month, occurs once every 2.5 years on average. Though this doesn't make it very rare, it's certainly rarer than birthdays!
- 
- (3) The mystery of Mullah Omar's death: There seems to be no quarrel that the Taliban leader is dead, but the various stories floating around the Internet differ in virtually all important details, including his death's cause (illness, murder), location (Pakistan, Afghanistan), date, burial, those who knew about it, and why it was not disclosed earlier. This **Newsweek story** presents one of the competing versions.
- (4) Source of the **miles-long oil sheen** off Goleta Beach still a mystery: The US Coast Guard, UC Santa Barbara, and city officials are cooperating to figure out whether natural seepage of oil from underground deposits or something else is the cause.
- (5) Exascale computing gets a boost: Computer performance improves at a steady pace, even without government funding, but once in a while, a forward-looking research initiative provides a boost that speeds up development. The first gigaflops supercomputer was the result of a milestone set by a research program, as was the first teraflops (aka terascale) machine. Petascale computing was reached way ahead of normal schedule as a result of the Department of Energy's ASCI (Accelerated Strategic Computing Initiative) Program. Now, we are moving irreversibly toward exascale computing and DoE is again taking the lead. DoE's interest stems from the fact that high-performance computing is important to simulation studies in weapons and energy research. According to the journal *Science*, President Obama has endorsed a **concerted effort** to reach the next milestone in computing performance, a plan that will likely meet with support from the US Congress.
- (6) Use of 3D printers to make **lightweight and affordable prosthetics** for people missing fingers or wrists.
- (7) Drought reveals remains of old towns that became submerged decades ago: **This story** contains photos (including some historical ones) and a drone-shot video of the extent of water decline at Lake Mead.
- (8) The Iran deal and continued chants of "Death to America": Writing in the *New Yorker* magazine, Robin Wright provides an **insightful analysis** of why the hostile chants continue, even after one of the most

remarkable political deals in memory. The answer depends on who you ask. Some say that it is a habit that won't go away quickly. Others attribute it to a tiny group of zealots and a small minority of sheepish followers who don't dare to confront them. I do think that it would be appropriate to ask Iran's FM Javad Zarif in one of his interviews to elaborate on the kind of death the chanters and those who orchestrate the chants mean.

2015/07/30 (Thursday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Brief audiobook review: Fears, J. Rufus, *Books that Have Made History: Books that Can Change Your Life*, 36 lectures in the "Great Courses" series, The Teaching Company, 2005.

Dr. Fears is David Ross Boyd Professor of Classics at University of Oklahoma. The 34 books selected for discussion in this course include ancient mythologies (e.g., *Gilgamesh*), religious texts (*Book of Exodus*, *Gospel of Mark*, *The Quran*), Greek and Roman classics (*Oresteia*, *Republic*, *Iliad*, *Aeneid*), and works from the past few centuries (*Julius Caesar*, *Faust*, *Walden*, *Gandhi: An Autobiography*). Each book is treated in a single lecture, with Goethe's *Faust* spanning lectures 28 and 29. The first lecture also elaborates upon the question of what makes a great book and the final (36th) lecture is devoted to lessons learned from the books discussed.

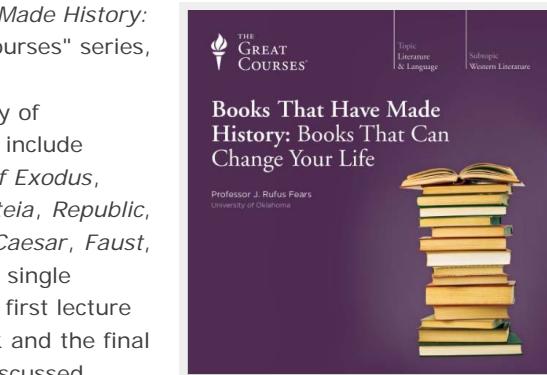
I learned the following from this lecture series (my notes do not include the source, and I couldn't find the quote on-line): "No harm can come to you unless you form the opinion that you have been harmed."

Here is the on-line [course description](#), including lecture-by-lecture summaries.

(2) Low-tech **construction methods**: Some 20 people doing the job of one machine.

(3) Taliban leader Mullah Omar is confirmed dead: The death reportedly occurred at a Pakistani hospital two years ago. Why the death took two years to be disclosed is of course a matter for speculation. Taliban officials, who have been issuing statements in his name until very recently, also have some explaining to do.

(4) I put together this composite image as a contribution to the ongoing discussion about trophy-killing of wild animals.
Please write your own caption.



(5) The Harlem Globetrotters of soccer: [Amazing moves](#).

And, of course, the team with red jerseys just plays along like the hapless Washington Generals!



(6) A very funny **ventriloquist routine**: It's the first one I've seen with audience volunteers (or are they planted human assistants?) used as dummies.

(7) Last concert in the park for the 2015 season: Fortunate Son, widely known as the best CCR tribute band, played CCR and John Fogerty tunes. Here are videos for parts of their performance. I shot the second video from the side of the stage, to better capture the crowd, the dancers, and the sing-along. The third video contains shots of the beautiful blue-white-gray afternoon sky.

[["Looking out My Back Door"](#)] [["Down by the Corner"](#)] [["Good Golly Miss Molly"](#) (not a CCR original)]

2015/07/29 (Wednesday): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) An amazing night shot near Meshkin Shahr in Iran, showing the Milky Way Galaxy over Mt. Sabalan.



(2) The Trump + 15 Show: Trump is reportedly considering Sarah Palin as running mate or cabinet member. I guess he wants to raise the average IQ of his team. What a great team they would make! Comedians are already salivating over the prospects of the rug man and the rogue woman.

(3) Most-admired people: These results are from polls in early 2015, but they bear repeating. Bill Gates and Angelina Jolie are the most-admired man and woman in the world, with Barack Obama, Xi Jinping, Malala Yousafzai, and Hillary Clinton polling closely behind them. A poll in Britain placed Stephen Hawking and Queen Elizabeth II at the top. *The Independent* story also reports on **separate polls** for the US (Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton), France (The Dalai Lama and Simone Veil, current head of the European Parliament), and Germany (Helmut Schmidt and Angela Merkel).

(4) Air traffic control for drones: NASA, Amazon, and Google are working together to design an automated air traffic system for unmanned aircraft. It is anticipated that in about a decade, most homes will have a drone and

will act as a drone airport. Unlike the doomsday view of drones flying haphazardly over our cities, such vehicles are envisaged as following multi-tiered highways in the sky, coordinating themselves like a bee colony. Some accidents will of course be inevitable (remember the early days of aviation?), but with advanced control and cell-phone-based communication capabilities already in place, such a system will quickly converge to an acceptable level of safety.

(5) Forgetting is essential to good memory: The short story "Funes the Memorious," published by Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges in 1942, is about a man who remembers everything in great detail, but this capability, instead of helping him and improving his life, bogs him down and makes him lost in details, unable to focus and to generalize. There have been real people with this experience who have been subjects of numerous research studies on memory and cognition. In this digital age, we are all inundated with too much information, from facts and life events to our photos and those of our friends. Managed by Leibniz University in Hannover, the European project "**ForgetIT**" is investigating the introduction of a kind of planned forgetting into information management environments. Project scientists focus on the idea of making more conscious decisions about which content is really important and which content we can, and should, forget. To appreciate the importance, and difficulty, of the process, think of your personal photo collection. If you were allowed to keep only 20% of your photos, which ones would you choose to keep? What criteria would you use to make the selection?

(6) Final thought for the day: "Beware of monotony; it's the mother of all the deadly sins." ~ Edith Wharton, American author (1862-1937)

2015/07/28 (Tuesday): Here are six items of potential interest.



(1) New York magazine publishes group photos of 35 women, currently aged from the early 20s to 80, in a cover story about accusations of sexual assault against comedian Bill Cosby.

(2) Quote of the day: "Let a child show a flicker of talent for math and she's suddenly put on the precalculus track." ~ Jeffrey Kluger, writing in *Time* magazine, issue of August 3, 2015, pondering the disappearance of normal children living normal childhoods

(3) Cartoon of the day: Some disappointing moments in history. [By John Atkinson]

(4) EU's Foreign Policy Chief visits Saudi Arabia and Iran: The Saudis have a worse record in the area of women's rights, but they do not force female visitors into wearing Islamic hijab. Iranian women are bent on taking back their right to choose their clothing, as a stepping stone to gaining full equality with men. Iranian authorities often cite mandatory hijab as the law of the land, which must be respected by natives and visitors alike. However, as stated by Louis D. Brandeis: "If we desire respect for the law, we must first make the law respectable." [Photo]



(5) A very effective PSA endorsing the nuclear deal with Iran and urging the US Congress to approve it: Appearing in this **3-minute video** are Jack Black, Morgan Freeman, Natasha Lyonne, Queen Noor of Jordan, Farshad Farahat, and Valerie Plame Wilson.

(6) Logical reasoning puzzle: You have two bags, each containing n flares. One of the bags (we don't know which one) has only good flares in it, while the other bag contains m bad flares and $n - m$ good ones. Testing a flare will use it up. You want to take $m - 1$ flares that are guaranteed to be good with you on a trip. How would you go about selecting the $m - 1$ to take? Hint: Begin with the simple special case $m = n$.

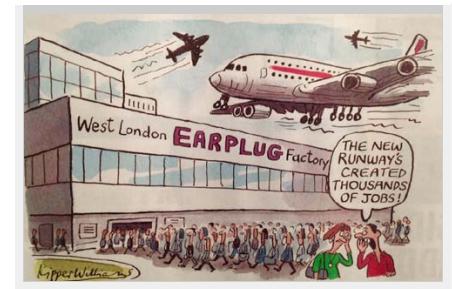
Challenge puzzle: What if you need to take not $m - 1$ but m flares that are guaranteed to be good with you? [Source: *Communications of the ACM*, issue of August 2015.]

2015/07/27 (Monday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Cartoon of the day: Noise pollution creates jobs! [From: *E&T*

magazine, issue of August-September 2015]

(2) Quote of the day: "The one major country more deep in debt than Greece is one you might not expect: Japan. Greece's debt-to-GDP ratio is a staggering 173% ... Japan's debt-to-GDP ratio? 246%. Yet despite major challenges, Japan has options and a dynamic economy, while Greece is on life support." ~ Ian Bremmer, writing in *Time* magazine, issue of August 3, 2015, on the ability to manage debt being more important than the size of the debt



(3) Firm running FAFSA accused of deceptive practices: Student Financial Aid Services Inc., which operates the Web site FAFSA.com, has been bilking consumers, charging money for help with filling out application forms and enrolling customers in annual subscriptions without their permission, according to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. The US Department of Education is slated to take over control of the domain FAFSA.com. [Info from: *Inside Higher Ed*]

(4) UCS3 the biggest landlord in Isla Vista: After purchasing three of Isla Vista's largest apartment buildings for \$156M (a record commercial real-estate transaction for the area), UCSB has become **the number-one landlord** in the student enclave adjoining its campus. This new step for getting involved in Isla Vista is a win-win for students (who are charged less by, and get better service from, UCSB than other landlords) and for the Isla Vista community (which has its share of slumlords). Such student housing projects are self-funded, with the costs covered by housing fees, not by state funds or students' tuition fees.

(5) Use of sarcasm and double-entendres is good for both sides of the exchange: "Sarcasm, often derided as the lowest form of wit, actually makes people brighter and more creative. People on the receiving end of sarcastic comments—and those who made them—were found to be up to three times more creative in a range of tests carried out by a team of researchers from Insead, one of the world's leading business schools, and Harvard and Columbia universities." [[Report in English](#)] [[BBC's Persian version](#)]

(6) Judging US presidential candidates by how they raise funds: According to *Time* magazine, issue of August 3, 2015, here is how much of the funds raised by the following candidates came from donors giving \$200 or less, as well as the total amount raised. Bernie Sanders, 69.2% of \$15.1M; Ben Carson, 67.8% of \$10.6M; Rand Paul, 46.4% of \$6.9M; Ted Cruz, 40.3% of \$14.3M; Marco Rubio, 27.8% of \$18.8M; Hillary Clinton, 17.2% of \$47.1M; Jeb Bush, 3.2% of \$11.4M; Donald Trump, 2.1% of \$1.9M.

(7) Final thought for the day: "The fact that women under 21 must retreat to dorm rooms and frat houses to drink makes them vulnerable." *Newsweek* magazine on-line, presenting one of the arguments for lowering the drinking age in the US

2015/07/26 (Sunday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) Cartoon of the day (from Iran): Meals must be Instagrammed before anyone is allowed to eat.

(2) Tonight's enjoyable concert by Blondie and Melissa Etheridge at Hollywood's Greek Theater: At 70 and 54, Deborah Harry and Etheridge are no spring chickens. In fact, early on, my daughter was looking around to see if there were any young people in the audience (there were). Blondie went on first and sang several of her standards ("One Way or Another," "Call Me," "Rapture," "**The Tide Is High**," "Dreaming," "Heart of Glass"), along with newer tunes that were frankly not as good.

Etheridge similarly mixed old favorites ("I Want to Come Over," "**Come to My Window**," "I'm the Only One") with songs from her new album.

Both artists sounded good and were accompanied by great musicians. Etheridge, in particular, was excellent all around (heartfelt singing and amazing guitar and harmonica playing), as she mixed her chosen songs with memories from her early days in Los Angeles as a struggling artist.



(3) Classical music on the accordion: Young man's **impressive performance** of music by Antonio Vivaldi.

(4) But where are you really from? **Hilarious spoof** of those who won't take "From San Diego" as an answer to the question "Where are you from?"

(5) A poem by Ghaem Magham Farahani for my Persian-speaking readers:

The first verse of this poem, in calligraphic Nasta'liq script by an unknown artist, is framed and hung on the wall in my mother's living room, prompting me to look for the rest of the poem and the identity of its poet.

روزگار است آنکه گه عزت دهد، گه خواردارد | چرخ بازیگر از این باتیچه ها بسیار دارد
مهر اگر آرد، بسی بی جا و بی هنگام آرد | فهر اگر آرد، بسی نلزاو بی هنجردارد
گه به خود چون زرق کیشان تهمت اسلام بندد | گه چوزهبان و کشیشان جانب کفر دارد

(6) A weekend surfer spends **only 17 minutes** on actually riding surfs during a typical year.

(7) An opening for regional cultures in Iran: University of Kurdistan in Sanandaj is slated to offer undergraduate

programs in **Kurdish language and literature**.

(8) Tabrizi youth **dance/exercise** in a park to Azeri music.

(9) Final thought for the day: "Lose an hour in the morning, and you will spend all day looking for it." ~ Richard Whatley

2015/07/24 (Friday): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Anything to attract customers! In case you can't read the middle sign, it says "The naked truth about our waitresses is that they only flirt with you to get better tips."



(2) Two more young lives lost to gun violence in the US: John Russell Houser, 58, entered a Lafayette, Louisiana, movie theater Thursday night and **opened fire** during a showing of the comedy "Trainwreck." He fatally shot two young women and wounded nine others before killing himself with a .40-caliber handgun.

(3) Quote of the day: "He who would learn to fly one day must first learn to stand and walk and run and climb and dance; one cannot fly into flying." ~ Friedrich Nietzsche

(4) Lily Afshar, the incomparable classical guitarist: In **this video**, she performs her arrangement of a piece by Johannes Sebastian Bach. And here is her performance of the **Iranian folk songs** "Rashid Khan" and "Mastom Mastom," with Mohsen Namjoo playing setar.

(5) Cinema under the stars: Cinema under the stars: Tonight's installment of the Great American Musical Movies series at Santa Barbara Courthouse's Sunken Gardens was "West Side Story," a 1961 Robert Wise film about an ultimately tragic story of love between a boy and a girl from rival NYC gangs, loosely based on Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet." Leonard Bernstein's music and Stephen Sondheim's lyrics have clearly stood the test of time.

(6) Final thought for the day: "We don't develop courage by being happy every day. We develop it by surviving difficult times and challenging adversity." ~ Barbara de Angelis

2015/07/23 (Thursday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Five math puzzles, all at once: I usually copy or adapt a puzzle or two from *IEEE Potentials* magazine for posting here. The July 2015 issue, however, contained five interesting puzzles. So, rather than taking them one at a time, I am posting all five at once.

Problem #5 is particularly interesting, as it seems to lack enough information in the problem statement.

(2) Quote of the day: "A day without sunshine is like, you know, night." ~ Steve Martin

(3) Joke of the day (from Iran): Niece: When you were young, auntie, did you wear support (the term used in Iran for a kind of women's legging discussed and criticized in the parliament as being immodest)? Auntie: No, dearie. We dressed very simply, with no such fancy stuff. We went out with a mini-skirt and bare legs.

(4) Hacking of vehicle electronics raises major safety concerns: A *Wired* magazine reporter allowed two cybersecurity experts to take over his car's electronic control system to demonstrate the safety hazards in Fiat-Chrysler's U-connect computer system. While **the experiment** was conducted with a particular Jeep model, there is no reason to believe that other cars are unhackable. Just as there are safety standards for nearly all parts of a vehicle, there must be standards for the security of on-board computer systems. Legislation is being

Problem #1: It Makes Complete Nonsense
You come across a strange mathematical system that, at first, seems like utter nonsense. You can't decipher how it works, yet you are sure that it has some relationship to the standard math we all know. Here are four, true, mathematical problems according to this system:

$$\begin{aligned} 2 + 2 &= 4 \\ 4 \times 1 &= 4 \\ 5 - 2 &= 25 \\ -3 + 2 &= 49. \end{aligned}$$

According to this system, what is $6/2$?

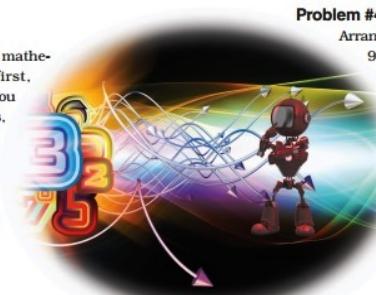
Problem #2: String Theory

There are six strings clustered together. One end of each string is at point A (the top), and the other is at point B (the bottom). Two of the ends at point B (randomly) are tied together, then two more are tied together, and finally the last two. Next, two ends at point A are tied together. Then two more are tied together, and then the last two. What is the possibility that all of the strings will be tied together in one large loop?

Problem #3: The Riddle of the Golden Troll

Trolls living under bridges these days ask the darndest riddles. Sample this stumper, which was rumored to have been asked by the troll under the Golden Gate Bridge just last week:

Which is greater, 2^{100} or 3^{700} ? Approximately how many times greater is it (to the nearest 10)? Can you answer this correctly and avoid being eaten?



NUMBERS—© CAN STOCK PHOTO/AGABANDREW
ANDROID—© CAN STOCK PHOTO/KIRSTY/PAGEREE

Problem #4: Alphanumeric Soup

Arrange the digits from 1 to 9 to make a 9-digit number $ABCDEFGHI$ that satisfies the following conditions:

- 1) AB is divisible by 2
- 2) ABC is divisible by 3
- 3) $ABCD$ is divisible by 4
- 4) $ABCDE$ is divisible by 5
- 5) $ABCDEF$ is divisible by 6
- 6) $ABCDEFG$ is divisible by 7
- 7) $ABCDEFGH$ is divisible by 8
- 8) $ABCDEFGHI$ is divisible by 9.

Problem #5: There's Nothing to Sphere but Sphere Itself

In the machine shop, you just drilled straight through the center of a solid sphere, resulting in a 6-cm-long cylindrical hole. What is the volume remaining in the sphere?

Hint:

$$\text{Volume of sphere} = \left(\frac{4}{3}\right)\pi(r^3)$$

$$\text{Volume of cap} = \left(\frac{1}{6}\right)\pi(3R^2 + h^2)h$$

$$\text{Volume of cylinder} = \pi(R^2)H$$

r = radius of sphere

h = height of cap

R = radius of hole (the cap and the cylinder share this radius)

H = height of cylinder (6 cm).

The portion of the sphere that was removed can be thought of as a cylinder with a cap at both ends. A cap is flat on one side (touching the cylinder) and spherical on the other side (the original surface of the sphere).

introduced in the US Congress to deal with privacy protection and security of automotive electronics.

(5) Quote of the day: "Leadership is solving problems. The day soldiers stop bringing you their problems is the day you have stopped leading them. They have either lost confidence that you can help or concluded you do not care. Either case is a failure of leadership." ~ Colin Powell

(6) The Democrats' dilemma in the nuclear deal with Iran: Republican lawmakers have it easy in the US Congress; they will vote against the deal, forcing President Obama to veto their disapproval and thus own any difficulties that might arise in its implementation. Democrats, on the other hand, want to help the President, but they are fearful of their re-election chances in the face of strong pressure from neocons and the Israeli lobby. The Jewish, pro-Israel Chuck Schumer is in a particularly tough spot, given his prospects for becoming the Senate Democratic leader, when Harry Reid steps down next year.

(7) Concert in the park: Tonight's performers at Santa Barbara's Chase Palm Park were Rainbow Girls, playing gypsy, Americana, funk, soul, and rock-n-roll tunes. Here are two samples of their music, taken from YouTube (both songs were played in tonight's concert, but one member of the 5-member band was absent due to preparing for her wedding). "**Step Down from the Mountain**" is a nice original song by the band, featuring African drum beat. "**She-Bop Nation**" is an example of their rock-n-roll music.

2015/07/21 (Tuesday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) *The New Yorker*'s take on the nuclear deal with Iran.

(2) Aftermath of flooding: Several **multi-story buildings collapsed** after flooding in Savadkooh, a county in northern Iran. And this is happening in a country that claims to have mastered the very complex nuclear technology! Like those pilfering billions of dollars from public funds they controlled, the developers of these buildings will likely go unpunished.

(3) Quote of the day: "Your inspirational quotes have inspired me to unfriend you." ~ From Sheryl Sandberg's repost of the essay "You Are Not My Friend," by Adam Grant, about how the word "friend" has been devalued by "friendships" of the Facebook kind, and seven tests of true friendship (face-to-face contact being the first one)

(4) Joke of the day: These unprecedented rains and floods, in the middle of summer, are parts of the frozen assets released under the nuclear agreement. Next, we will build ski resorts in the Lut Desert! Honest! [One of the many jokes circulating in Iran, in the aftermath of nuclear agreement with the 5 + 1 countries.]

(5) A beautifully composed **6-minute video** about the architectural wonders of Isfahan.

(6) Harvesting machines in action: **Machines for picking** berries, cabbage, and the like effortlessly.

(7) Kanzius cancer machine gets its **first human trial**: Having gotten ravaged by chemo treatments in 2003, radio engineer John Kanzius went into his basement and began working on a machine to destroy tumors by means of radio-frequency waves. Over the years, Kanzius learned a great deal about cancer and built connections with cancer researchers. Now in its sixth generation, the machine is finally getting used on human subjects. [This is just one of the fruits of engineers joining medical researchers via interdisciplinary fields such as bioengineering and bioinformatics.]

(8) Final thought for the day: "How inappropriate to call this planet Earth when it is quite clearly Ocean." ~ Arthur C. Clarke



2015/07/20 (Monday): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) *Time* magazine's report on the nuclear deal with Iran:

Bearing the title "Iran Rises: Tehran trades nuclear standoff for regional clout," the report by Massimo Calabresi, indicates that most of the provisions of the deal had been agreed upon by both sides hours earlier. The heated final debate was about a ban on the purchase and sale of conventional weapons, where the two sides met halfway: not lifting the ban completely, as had been asked by Iran, but doing so after 5 years, assuming other provisions of the deal are implemented by Iran. Because Russia sided with Iran on this item, the US had to show flexibility, or it would risk losing all the other gains.

For the US, the deal was a pragmatic decision. In the words of President Obama, related by an administration official: "[Y]ou can't put your head in the sand and pretend that Iran doesn't play a role in every single



important conflict in the region. ... There can't be a solution without them." In a sidebar to the report, Joe Klein writes, in part: "Yes, the Iran deal is risky. But we have been taking all sorts of bellicose risks since Sept. 11, 2001. Almost all of our military ventures have failed. So many lives have been lost. It's time, finally, to take a risk for peace."

(2) Cuban and US embassies open today, as the two countries **resume diplomatic relations**: The Cuban flag flew in Washington, DC, on July 20 for the first time in 54 years and the US flag will be officially raised in Cuba as John Kerry travels to Havana on August 14.

(3) Seven-year-old Angelina Jordan, Norwegian singer with a magical voice: She sings "[Fly Me to the Moon](#)"; here's her version of "[What a Difference a Day Makes](#)"; and in this [14-minute video](#), she sings 7 songs.

(4) President Obama is officially off the hook: After being named by a Fox News host as the most dangerous man on Earth for 6 straight years, he has lost the crown to Pope Francis, who was named the 2015 winner.

(5) Rumi's ghazal (ode) 1509, translated by Nader Khalili: "Love Showed Me the Way!"

I've traveled around | raced through cities | while I knew all along | no place could be found | like the city of love

If I could have known | to value what I owned | I would not have suffered | like a fool | the life of a vagabond
I've heard many tunes | all over the globe | all empty | as a kettledrum | except the music of love
It was the sound of | that hollow drum | that made me fall | from the heavens | to this mortal life
I used to soar | among souls | like a heart's flight | winglessly roaming and | celestially happy
I used to drink | like a flower that drinks | without lips or throat | of wine that overflows | with laughter and joy

Suddenly | I was summoned by love | to prepare for a journey | to the temple of | suffering
I cried desperately | I begged and pleaded | and shredded my clothes | not to be sent | to this world
Just the way I fear now | going away | to the other world | I was frightened then | to make my descent
Love asked me to go | with no fear to be alone | promising to be close | everywhere I go | closer than my veins

Love threw its spell | its magic and allure | using coyness and charm | I was totally sold and | bought everything with joy
Who am I to resist | love's many tricks | and not to fall | while the whole world | takes love's bait
Love showed me | a path but then | lost me on the way | if I could have resisted | I would have found my way
I can show you my friend | surely how you can get there | but here and now | my pen has broken down | before telling you how

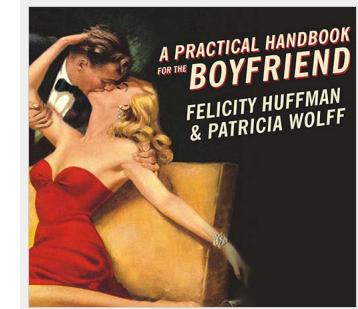
2015/07/19 (Sunday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Brief book review: Huffman, Felicity and Patricia Wolff, *A Practical Handbook for the Boyfriend: For Every Guy Who Wants to Be One, for Every Girl Who Wants to Build One*, unabridged audiobook on 4 CDs, read by Shelly Frasier, Tantor Audio, 2007.

In one of the very few dating books written for men, the talented star of "Desperate Housewives" and "Transamerica" and her co-author present an extensive list of dos and don't for men who want to have loving and harmonious relationships with their girlfriends. The authors use humor very effectively. For example, the cover declares "Boyfriend Not Included" (hinting that the book may be secretly targeted at women, more than at men).

The advice, wrapped in witty and super-funny prose, is quite common-sensical and well-thought-out. Some readers/listeners may find the frank language about intimacy offensive at times, but, if you get past those passages, you will be amply rewarded with a better understanding of what makes women tick and why they find some things that seem trivial to men extremely disturbing.

As the book's subtitle suggests, women can also benefit from this book by understanding why some men have no clue about how to maintain and nurture a healthy relationship and what women can do to change the situation.



(2) Iranian-American professor featured: [This article](#) discusses the Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies Program at Cal State Northridge, and its founder/director Professor Nayereh Tohidi. Dr. Tohidi is also active in gender and women's studies at CSUN. At UCLA, Dr. Tohidi directs the [Bilingual Lecture Series on Iran](#), a program that will resume this fall, beginning in October.

(3) First Paris skyscraper in 42 years approved for construction: The 180-meter, [triangle-shaped tower](#), slated for completion in 2020, will house offices and a hotel. [Info from: *Time* magazine, issue of July 27, 2015.]

(4) Drawing blood may become a thing of the past: Scientists are discovering less invasive ways of monitoring our bodies, using tools such as light, lasers, and fiber optics, alongside information about how various

compounds like glucose absorb infrared wavelengths. [Info from: *Time* magazine, issue of July 27, 2015.]

(5) Peer-to-peer lending takes off: Individuals with good credit scores can borrow on-line, with each member of a crowd providing as little as \$25 of the \$1000-to-\$35,000 loan. Traditional bankers are unhappy and are trying to figure out ways of getting a piece of the action. Banks make money by paying you trivial interest (currently way below 1%) on your deposits and charging upward of 6% on most loans. Even after factoring in the risk of non-repayment, they make a lot of money from the 6-point spread. Cutting out the middleman will pay great dividends to consumers. [Info in part from: *Time* magazine, issue of July 27, 2015.]

(6) Donald Trump's problems with the English language: I was just listening to a news report in which Trump was asked whether he would like to apologize for his statement about John McCain. He said that no apology was needed, as he only meant to say that veterans who return home (i.e., do not become POWs) are forgotten, whereas they are deserving of the same honors. I would like to give him the benefit of doubt about this point, which sounds reasonable to me. However, given that Mr. Trump has been forced to clarify his statements many times in the past, I suggest that he take English classes for immigrants (his mother and grandfather were immigrants) in order to be able to communicate clearly and unambiguously in English, a skill that is definitely needed for a US President.

(7) Final thought for the day: "I like presidents who weren't shot." ~ *Newsweek* magazine, dissing President Lincoln (ridiculing Donald Trump, who said John McCain isn't a war hero, because he was captured)

2015/07/18 (Saturday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "If we desire respect for the law, we must first make the law respectable." ~ Louis D. Brandeis

(2) The spread of religions: [This animated map](#) shows how major religions started and spread.

(3) The Magnus Effect: [A cool demonstration](#) of how the spinning motion of a body affects its travel path through the air.

(4) Record-breaking Rube Goldberg machine [to be unveiled today](#): A 16-member global team of chain-reaction machine builders will attempt a Guinness World Record before a live audience at the Michigan Science Center in Detroit. The Incredible Science Machine is built of 200,000 dominoes and thousands of props such as Hot Wheels race tracks, pulleys, balls and toy cars (a total of 0.5M parts).

(5) Kale and related trendy vegetables may be bad for you: This informative [Mother Jones article](#) tells of the dangers of eating too much kale, cabbage, and related vegis because of their potentially high content of thallium, a toxic heavy metal. It turns out that the kale family is very good at absorbing thallium from the ground, so if the soil is rich in thallium, eating too much of these vegis can spell trouble. The danger is greater in areas with nearby cement plants, oil drilling, smelting, and coal burning.

(6) Praising Iran's Supreme Leader: [This cleric](#) enumerates Ayatollah Khamenei's many positive traits (compared with other religious authorities), including his youthful energy and good looks. Near the end, he says (with a straight face) that Khamenei is the flag-bearer of unity among Muslims.

(7) Quarterlife and midlife crises: [This interactive chart](#) provides the ages at which company founders established their businesses (in 5-year intervals). The largest concentration is in the 20-year age bracket 25-44.

(8) What do the following have in common: The moon-landing didn't occur, Obama wasn't born in the US, and a spacecraft didn't fly by Pluto (i.e., [NASA faked the images](#) of the dwarf planet). They are all brainchildren of conspiracy theorists, who actually do a good job of justifying their crap to the uninformed. Historically, almost any important event generates some deniers and doubters.

(9) Five awful things done by the US conservative movement's golden boy, Ronald Reagan:

- Opposed Congressional efforts to impose sanctions on the Apartheid-era South Africa, thereby extending the suffering of its people by many years.
- Ignored AIDS until it had killed more than 20,000 Americans; contrast this with the recent Ebola outbreak that killed 3 Americans and was cited as a failure of President Obama.
- Presided over the Iran-Contra affair, a secret program that supplied arms to Iran in exchange for off-the-books money to be used in Nicaragua.
- Filled his administration with corrupt people, more so than even Richard Nixon's.
- After raising Social Security taxes, took money from the Social Security Trust Fund and dumped it into the general treasury to cover up the deficit created by his tax cuts.

2015/07/17 (Friday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Pluto may be [geologically active](#): We know this from the presence of fairly new mountains and lack of impact craters on Pluto. Geological activity is a sign of a molten core. This molten core together with surface ice raise the possibility of underground liquid water and, hence, potential for life. At half the speed of old dial-up connections, data collected by New Horizons will take a long time to arrive on Earth, but we have already learned enough to make the mission worthwhile, even without any further data.

(2) Modern Persian music: The popular song "**Dar Miaan-e Golhaa**" ("Among the Flowers") is performed by Vesal Alavi during a concert to honor songwriter Homayoun Khorram (lyrics by Bijan Taraghi).

(3) ISIS-inspired lone wolf kills 4 US marines: Muhammad Youssef Abdulazeez (various sources spell the name slightly differently), 24, also wounded several people, including a police officer, in two different locations in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

(4) Iranian woman discusses her **singing and acting career**: She does not like all the restrictions on women, but has come up with creative ways to circumvent them. In her words, women are learning to swim without getting wet. I applaud her efforts and positivism, but look forward to a day when women's energies are spent on advancing their talents rather than on figuring out how to circumvent senseless restrictions. That they can do so much under current circumstances is a good omen.

(5) Concert in the park: Last evening, Santa Barbara's Chase Palm Park was the setting for a heavily attended and quite enjoyable concert by **Captain Cardiac and the Coronaries**, a band formed ~1972 in the San Fernando Valley (a suburb of Los Angeles). This video of "**Stand By Me**" gives you a sense of the crowd and the extent of dancing to the band's 50s and 60s music. As the sun began to set, the band engaged with the crowd while singing "**La Bamba**," jokingly described as a Swedish folk song. Here's a **sample of the band's music**, with better sound quality than the videos above recorded by me.

(6) Cinema under the stars: Having spent much of the day cleaning up, organizing, and backing up my computer files, I went to see "The Wizard of Oz" at Santa Barbara Courthouse's Sunken Gardens, which were filled to capacity (I estimate an attendance of ~1500). The screening was part of UCSB Arts & Lectures Summer Cinema series, with the 2015 theme of "Great American Movie Musicals."

(7) Final thought for the day: "He said that his nation was the 'logical choice' to jumpstart negotiations between Obama and the Republicans because 'it has become clear that both sides currently talk more to Iran than to each other'." ~ Andy Borowitz, quoting Supreme Leader Khamenei, in a *New Yorker* humourous piece built around the notion of Iran mediating talks between the warring American parties

2015/07/16 (Thursday): Johnson, Steven, *Where Good Ideas Come From: The Natural History of Innovation*, Riverhead, 2010.

Let me begin my review by offering a one-sentence summary of the book: Innovations require connectivity between people and ideas and, thus, they thrive in the presence of platforms (such as big-city cafes, where people mingle, or the Worldwide Web) that facilitate connectivity. The flip side of this observation is that the age of inventions by lone geniuses working solo and in secret is over. The author likens the power of interacting ideas to the ecosystem of a coral reef, where organisms help maintain one another, because one organism's waste constitutes nourishment for others. This explains the book's subtitle, "The Natural History of Innovation."

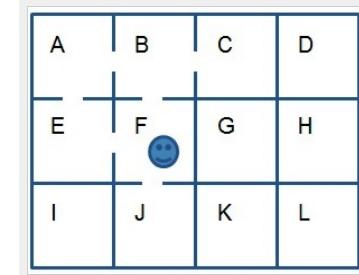
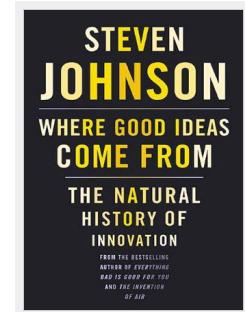
The narrative, presented in about 240 pages (excluding the appendix), supports the thesis above via numerous examples from diverse fields. The examples themselves are listed in a timeline entitled "Chronology of Key Innovations, 1400-2000," an 84-page appendix that begins with "double-entry accounting" (circa 1400) and ends with "gamma ray bursts" (1997).

Given the importance of interaction in the development of new ideas, it isn't surprising that innovation have been observed to grow superlinearly with the growth in the size of cities. This is because once things or ideas get combined, the space of possibilities for new combinations grows exponentially. The richness of the existing pool of things/ideas increases the chances of unusual combinations. This is why cities are more hospitable to creativity than towns or villages. The Web has led to a significant growth in adjacencies and thus possibilities for combining.

A collection of existing ideas leads to other ideas or discoveries in adjacent domains, referred to as the "adjacent possible." Once an idea is in the domain of adjacent possible, its discovery becomes inevitable. For example, sunspots were discovered by four individuals living in four different countries. Inventions and innovations come about when the requisite ingredients (ideas or physical things like measuring instruments) gather in one place.

We can liken ideas to chambers in an ancient secret monument. Suppose we discover idea A (refer to the figure visualizing adjacent ideas as chambers sharing a wall). Ideas B and E are part of A's "adjacent possible" and we may be led to them by discovering secret doors that connect the chambers.

According to the state shown in the diagram, ideas A, B, C, E, F, and J have already been discovered and ideas D, G, I, and K are within the adjacent possible. Getting to ideas H and L is impossible in the current state and requires further discoveries. As we explore the chambers, more and more ideas become part of the adjacent possible and will inevitably be discovered in



future.

We all live in our private versions of the adjacent possible. As we learn, new ideas become accessible to us and we discover new ways to break out of our standard routines. "The trick is to figure out ways to explore the edges of possibility that surround you. This can be as simple as changing the physical environment you work in, or cultivating a specific kind of social network, or maintaining certain habits in the way you seek out and store information." [p. 41]

Errors have a special role in innovation. Many inventions are the results of errors or random combinations of ideas (analogous to genetic mutations). But such errors or mere randomness aren't enough. There must also be a slow hunch, a problem formulation that has been brewing for a long time. This is basically the combination of ideas separated in time. You think of a problem but cannot solve it right away. The problem stays in the back of your mind and is, over time, combined with many ideas and tools, until something clicks. In the chambers analogy offered by the diagram, errors correspond to chambers that contain no useful idea themselves but that further exploration at their edges leads to discoveries. "[G]ood ideas are more likely to emerge in environments that contain a certain amount of noise and error." [p. 142]

The digital universe removes one of the problems of standard brainstorming sessions that require ideas to collide within the constraints of space and time. The right digital infrastructure allows hunches to persist, disperse, and recombine. Without a liquid network that allows ideas to connect, hunches come and go and they never get connected to form major advances. Most bright ideas come about in brainstorming or lab meetings, not with a solitary researcher working at a microscope.

Secrecy and protection of ideas comes at a great cost. "Protecting ideas from copycats and competitors also protects them from other ideas that might improve them, might transform them from hints and hunches to true innovations." [p. 124] Ideas grow through interactions. So, while patents, intellectual property, and similar laws are enacted with the best of intentions, they actually inhibit innovation. Yes, they motivate inventors and innovators with the prospects of financial rewards, but certain ideas will not come to a single inventor, no matter how motivated.

Charts presented by the author on pp. 225-229 show the distribution of innovations in 200-year time periods in four quadrants: (1) Market-driven, individual; (2) Market-driven, network; (3) Non-market, individual; (4) Non-market, network. The fourth quadrant, in which ideas flow through networking in a non-market-motivated way, is the main domain of innovation in today's world. During the period 1400-1600, quadrant 3 held most of the innovations, with its dominance challenged by quadrant 4 during 1600-1800. In the last 200 years, quadrant 4 has taken over as the main locus of innovation. Interestingly, throughout the 600 years studied, quadrant 1 held a small minority of all innovations. Quadrant 4 is where universities excel: "[O]pen networks of academic researchers often create emergent platforms where commercial development becomes possible." [p. 234] The Internet is the best example of the synergy between public- and private-sector innovations.

Let me end my review with a final observation from the book's concluding paragraph: "You may not be able to turn your government into a choral reef, but you can create comparable environments on the scale of everyday life: in the workplaces you inhabit; in the way you consume media; in the way you augment your memory. ... Go for a walk; cultivate hunches; write everything down, but keep your folders messy; embrace serendipity; make generative mistakes; take on multiple hobbies; frequent coffeehouses and other liquid networks; follow the links; let others build on your ideas; borrow, recycle, reinvent. Build a tangled bank."

2015/07/15 (Wednesday): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Stanford to launch Alzheimer's Disease Research Center: The new **NIH-funded center** will study the debilitating disease and its commonalities with Parkinson's.

(2) Modern Persian music: In this mini-concert with behind-the-scenes footage, old-time singer Hooshmand Aghili performs "Fardaa To Mi-aaee" ("Tomorrow You'll Arrive"), "Bordi az Yaadam" ("You Forgot Me"), "Khalegh-e Aalam" ("The Creator"), and "Shen-e Daagh, aka Daryaa" ("Hot Sand, aka The Sea"), accompanied by a youthful band. [**27-minute video**]

(3) Quote of the day: "My bank wants to know what my favorite color is, and 'I don't have one' isn't an option." ~ Time magazine columnist Joel Stein, on a snag he encountered when he decided not to memorize multiple passwords and to hit "I forgot my password" as a matter of course when accessing Web sites; now he has to remember answers to security questions in order to retrieve or reset his passwords



(4) Close-up image of Pluto on July 15 reveals **interesting features**: Youthful mountains (no more than 100M years old and as high as 3500 m) and no evidence of impact creators, yet.

(5) "Aazaadi" ("Freedom"): This is the title of **an anthem** that became popular immediately after the Islamic Revolution in Iran. The lyrics, a poem by Farrokhi Yazdi, extol the virtues of freedom and the sanctity of the

fight against dictatorship. It also states that clerics and conservatives are united in opposing the notion of freedom, verses that were removed in the post-revolutionary version. No wonder it has fallen out of favor in today's Iran!

(6) Spacetime versus the Quantum: This was the title of an expository GRIT (Ground-breaking Research / Innovative Technology) talk at UCSB's Pollock Theater this evening. UCSB Physicist Joseph Polchinski talked about the search for a theory that unifies quantum mechanics (~1925), which governs the very small, and general relativity (1915), which governs the very large; special relativity (1905), which deals with the very fast, is also part of the picture. According to Stephen Hawking, these big-small theories make conflicting predictions near black holes, a paradox that has ignited a still-continuing battle: either quantum mechanics must break down, or our understanding of spacetime must be wrong. "If quantum mechanics is to be saved, then an astronaut falling into a black hole will have an experience very different from what Einstein's theory predicts." Much of the fundamental physics research over the last century has been devoted to discovering how these three pieces of the puzzle fit together. Many new ideas are being proposed that may lead to the unification of these two great theories. I was pleasantly surprised to see that a few very young members of the audience (undergraduate students or perhaps high-schoolers) asked very intelligent questions. It came out during the lengthy Q&A session that whereas there are fundamental (mathematical) laws that are universally valid, there may be parts of our universe, as yet unseen, or perhaps what some people refer to as "parallel universes," where electrons, even if they exist, have different weights and other properties and where physical laws are different. These variations result from randomness within the framework of universally valid laws. Another interesting aspect of the discussions pertained to why matter in the universe appears in the form of stars and galaxies, rather than as uniform gas. A final interesting question was about the manner in which theoretical physicists weave new theories about things that aren't directly observable and may never become so. You may find part of the answer in the review of the book *Where Good Ideas Come From*, which I will post tomorrow.

2015/07/14 (Tuesday): Here are five items of potential interest.today.

(1) Nuclear deal with Iran announced: The world, by and large, is relieved and happy. Most Iranians are celebrating and congratulating each other and President Rouhani's government. But it would be naive to think that anything would change overnight. Both the US and Iran face opposition at home from fringe elements: US conservatives (along with their Israeli and Saudi supporters) will accuse the Obama administration of paving Iran's path to nuclear capability; Iranian hardliners have already indicated that they view the deal as unconditional surrender to the West.



These accusations have to be played out over time, but the prospects for peace and the eventual dividends are worth the effort. Unlike the normalization of US relations with Cuba, which will start paying dividends for both sides right away, the deal with Iran will be slower in its fruition. Make no mistake, however, that the mere statement by Iran that it wants to play by international rules is a major step. Even if there are compliance issues, any deviation from the terms of the agreement will lead to major embarrassment for Iran, now that it has signed on the dotted line. Additionally, it is now easier for the West to put the focus on human rights and women's rights issues. So, let's keep our fingers crossed and begin the hard work of rebuilding trust between the two countries. Set aside negativism and stop questioning the two sides' motives. This is a historic day for us Iranian-Americans!

President Obama's announcement of the nuclear deal. [[18-minute video](#)]

President Rouhani's 40-minute (mostly rhetorical) speech begins at 1:39:00 mark of the following video that, for some reason, covers all the prep and set-up work for the announcement (around minute 44:00 you see photos of Khomeini and Khamenei put up behind the podium). [[2-hour-19-minute video](#)]

(2) The state of the 2016 US presidential race: The Democrats are proceeding methodically, with Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders helping put important items up for discussion in shaping the eventual candidate's platform. The Republicans, on the other hand, are acting like a dysfunctional bunch, with extremists, such as Donald Trump and Ted Cruz, destroying their credibility with a wide spectrum of voters.

(3) Adapted from the "My Stealthy Freedom" Facebook page: Now that the Iranian government has concluded its negotiations with the Great Satan and other "enemies," perhaps it would be willing to sit down with friendly Iranian women and talk about their rights.

(4) Tehranis celebrate the nuclear deal by [taking to the streets](#).

(5) Something lighthearted, at the end of an eventful, historic day: **[Two kittens are fooled](#)** by the tablet image of a scurrying mouse.

2015/07/13 (Monday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Well, people constantly ask me why I'm single. If I was a young, rich, successful 28-year-old guy, everyone would be like, 'No doubt he's single, he's living the life, he's living the dream.' But I'm

single and everyone's like, 'Oh, what's wrong wih you, poor girl?" ~ Ronda Rousey, Olympics champion, mixed-martial-arts star, and author of a new memoir, when asked by *Time* magazine if she faces sexism as a female athlete

(2) CO₂-camera based on FLIR technology: Making carbon-dioxide and other invisible things visible to the human eye can increase our awareness and understanding.

(3) Beware of the **high salt content** in kosher meats: Kosher meats and other kosher foods are preferred by some Jews (based on their religious beliefs) and by many non-Jews (because they believe them to be cleaner or healthier). Unfortunately, whereas most people nowadays are aware of the health hazards of too much sugar, they don't seem to care about limiting their salt intake. Part of the problem is the difficulty of finding out exactly how much salt a particular food item contains. Because of the way they are prepared, kosher meats typically contain 4 to 6 times as much salt as regular meats. So, people suffering from, or at risk of, high blood pressure should take this into account.

(4) Art has become so difficult to recognize! [[Image](#)]

(5) Be My Eyes: This is the name of [a project](#) that allows sighted people to help the blind by lending them their eyes when the need arises.

(6) Interesting coincidences: Discussions in a fictional TV drama from 10 years ago bear **striking similarities** to the parameters of the nuclear deal with Iran, currently in its final stages of negotiation in Vienna.

(7) An eye-opening documentary: "Merchants of Doubt" exposes how major corporations, through funding a handful of scientists and lobbying groups, hiding behind "think tanks" or "citizens for this or that," try to cast doubt on scientific findings such as human-caused climate change. I watched the film on DVD from Netflix, but it is also available on-line for a fee. Here is an **8-minute sample** focusing on how climate-change deniers learned from big tobacco and its fight against scientists who linked cigarette smoking to lung cancer.

(8) New Horizons to "knock [our] socks off" with **Pluto fly-by**: It will take 16 months for all the data gathered by New Horizons to be transmitted back to Earth, so be prepared for a steady stream of scientific revelations.

2015/07/12 (Sunday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

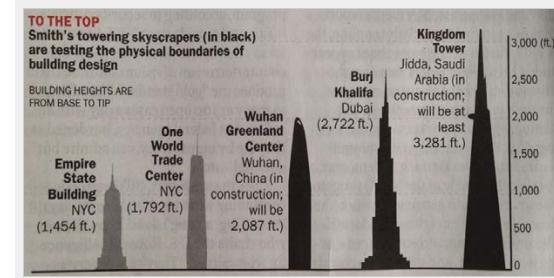
(1) The race toward the sky: Adrian Smith, the architect of Dubai's Burj Khalifa, currently the tallest building in the world, is set to outdo himself with the first-ever kilometer-tall building, The Kingdom Tower in Jidda, Saudi Arabia.

[Image credit: *Time* magazine, issue of July 20, 2015.]

(2) A wonderful **solo-piano rendition** of Michael Jackson's "Bad" and "Smooth Criminal."

(3) **Kurdish lullaby**: Part of a collection of lullabies from around the world.

(4) Quote of the day: "Heck, the new 'Terminator' movie is out, and audiences are starting to wonder if it's science fiction or a documentary." ~ Kevin Maney, writing about the new trend of former and current tech executives offering gloomy predictions about the effects of technology on society and, in particular, the dangers of robotics ("We're Doomed! And It's All Silicon Valley's Fault," [Newsweek on-line story](#), posted July 12, 2015)



(5) Michigan oncologist gets **45-year jail term**: Farid Fata treated 550 patients for cancers they didn't have, killing several and causing permanent damage, including organ failures, to others. Even though this is effectively a life sentence, perhaps a sterner sentence would have been appropriate for this monster of a criminal.

(6) L3D cube: Composed of an 8 x 8 x 8 array of LED lights, the **L3D cube** can be easily set up to display various patterns or to change patterns and colors to music. Here is a **32 x 32 x 32 version**.

(7) Another multiply-deported Mexican tied to a murder in California: An 18-year-old Santa Barbara cold case **has just been solved**, thanks to DNA evidence and smart investigative work by Detective Andy Hill, who is said to have a knack for listening and getting people to talk.

(8) Final thought for the day: "People generally see what they look for, and hear what they listen for." ~ Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*

2015/07/10 (Friday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) The stone carpet: This architectural marvel in Tabriz, Iran, is made of nearly 0.5M pieces of stone and measures 42 m (~160 ft) by 29 m (~95 ft). Its design is based on traditional Tabrizi carpets.

(2) Here is an **informative article** about how Facebook's News Feed feature came about, how it works now, and how/why it is about to change to provide more user



control.

(3) UCSB Arts & Lectures' 2015 Summer Cinema program:

"Singin' in the Rain" was screened tonight under the stars, at the Santa Barbara Courthouse's Sunken Gardens.

(4) Omar Sharif dead at 83: The Egyptian-born actor was best known for his roles in "Dr. Zhivago" (1965) and "Funny Girl" (1968), but I liked him and became a fan from "Lawrence of Arabia" (1962), his breakout role. It was my first time experiencing an epic, fact-based historical film, with thousands of extras and fantastic music (by Maurice Jarre), which I used to listen to over and over. RIP!

(5) Oregon has taken the lead in free community college education: Oregon legislature has passed the "Oregon Promise" bill that will pay the community college fees for Oregon students who apply within six months after graduating from high school, apply for federal and state grants, and maintain a minimum grade point average of 2.5. Eligible students will only have to pay \$50 per term to attend community colleges in Oregon.

(6) Are these people **standing on ledges or hanging from them** to flee a disaster? Or are they trying to help victims trapped in a building? Neither one: These are parents and relatives of Indian students trying to help them cheat in an exam by passing notes!

(7) Accurate heading is a big asset in soccer: **These guys** take it to the extreme!

(8) Woody Allen is back with **another tale** of a young girl falling for a middle-aged man: The middle-aged love interest used to be played by Allen himself, until he became too old for the romance to be believable (in fact, it wasn't believable even when he was much younger). Anyway, in "Irrational Man," Joaquin Phoenix plays a "morbid, cynical, dissolute, paunchy, middle-aged" professor who finds a new lease on life when he jumps into bed with a young student (Emma Stone) and an unhappily-married fellow professor (Parker Posey).

2015/07/09 (Thursday): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) An iconic photograph: This ~1971 photo, posted by a Facebook friend, has been floating in cyberspace, gathering a lot of attention and "like"s as a symbol of peaceful coexistence among people with diverse personal beliefs. It shows a group of female high-school students on a field trip to the Bisotun historic site, located in Iran's Kermanshah province. Most of the students are hijabless, while others don Islamic hijabs of various kinds.



(2) Quote of the day: "[T]he subliminal purpose of the tabloid rape-murder headline is to provide male readers with enough stimulation for fantasy ... women who die violently in New York City and who fall into the category of young, white and beautiful are memorialized in tabloid headlines and story copy that attests to their physical appeal to men, whether or not their physical appeal was actually related to the crime." ~ Feminist author Susan Brownmiller, in her 1975 book, *Against Our Will*, about rape [Quoted in a *Newsweek* on-line story, posted on July 8, 2015, about NYC's dark history of sexual crimes and how the coverage given to such crimes is, in effect, a way of slut-shaming single women. **The story**, by Alexander Nazaryan, is entitled "You Can't Kill Mr. Goodbar."]

(3) Only one airline (Southwest) does not charge for the first checked bag: JetBlue has discontinued its policy of free checked bag, now charging \$20 if paid on-line and \$25 at the check-in counter. Given that 81% of all passengers check at least one bag, baggage fees essentially constitute airfare price hikes. [Source: *Newsweek* on-line, posted July 8, 2015]

(4) Siavash Kurdistani to head UCLA's Department of Biological Chemistry: This **Daily Bruin story** provides background on Dr. Kurdistani, including how, as a teenager from an oppressed minority group, he had to escape war-torn Iran via the mountainous path to Pakistan with little food, a highly effective diet regimen that led to a 15-pound weight loss in 10 days!

(5) Concert in the park: Today, I enjoyed roots swing music by Lost Dog Found at Santa Barbara's Chase Palm Park. The following three videos represent samples of the music.

The band described this one as a **classic Disney song**.

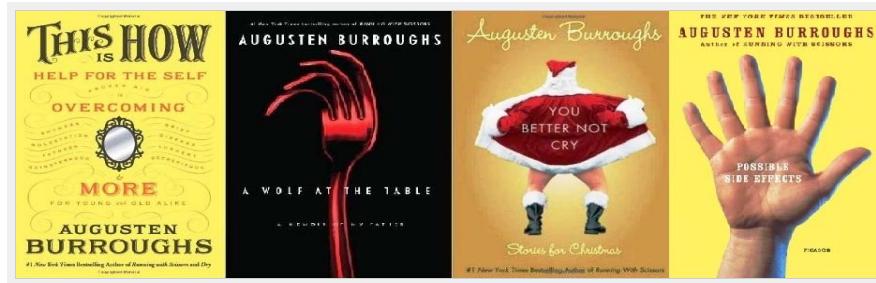
More upbeat **swing music**.

The concert is nearing its end, as the sun begins to set. The crowd, having expended a lot of energy dancing, appreciates the slower pace of **this song**.

(6) Final thought for the day: "Always read something that will make you look good if you die in the middle of it." ~ P. J. O'Rourke

2015/07/08 (Wednesday):

Brief reviews of four audiobooks by Augusten Burroughs: The author (born Christopher Robison) is a prolific writer, famous for his best-selling memoir, *Running with Scissors*, which was turned into a movie with the same title.



The author's reading style adds to the enjoyment of the audiobooks (I have heard that others are not as impressed with his reading), although I am not always comfortable with his language. He reads deliberately, with high emotion, sometimes pausing after each word in a sentence for effect: "I—was—very—upset." I listened to these four audiobooks over the past 8 months, but it took me a while to put my notes together in the form of these brief reviews.

(1) Burroughs, Augusten, *A Wolf at the Table: A Memoir of My Father*, unabridged audiobook on 8 CDs, read by the author, Macmillan Audio, 2008.

I listened to this audiobook during a car trip from Santa Barbara to the San Francisco Bay Area. The contents, and the author's reading style, so engrossed me that I barely noticed the passage of time during the 5.5-hour drive each way. This is a serious, heartfelt, and in all likelihood difficult-to-write memoir, which unravels the grating relationship of the author with his parents, particularly his often-drunk, violent father, who would shove him away every time he tried to hug him.

The audiobook is actually quite a production, not just straight reading. The author does an excellent job of conveying his emotions and state of mind in various chapters. There are also sound effects and music, including 4 original songs that the author asked songwriters he liked to contribute, after reading the book's final draft, and all four obliged: Patti Smith (song title and recording not found on-line); Sea Wolf, "[Sound of the Magpie](#)"; Ingrid Michaelson, "[Spare Change](#)"; Tegan Quin, "[His Love](#)".

(2) Burroughs, Augusten, *Possible Side Effects*, unabridged audiobook on 8 CDs read by the author, BBC Audiobooks America, 2006.

The back-cover blurb of this audiobook warns the reader/listener about the possibility of "inappropriate, convulsive laughter, a tingling sensation in the limbs, and sudden gasping," going on to recommend that the reader ask his/her doctor about possible side effects. Throughout much of the book, the author's black humor surprises and entertains, although some sad stories are included too. The essays in this book are autobiographical, but some are rearranged and augmented for effect. An editorial disclaimer warns us about the embellishments, perhaps to avoid the fate of other authors whose dishonesty led to their downfall.

(3) Burroughs, Augusten, *You Better Not Cry: Stories for Christmas*, unabridged audiobook on 5 CDs, read by the author, Macmillan Audio, 2009.

This book is a compilation of several autobiographical essays focused on the author's Christmas experiences (almost all unpleasant), from his childhood spent with disengaged parents to celebrating with various boyfriends as an adult. The last piece, about a house he built with a boyfriend in Massachusetts being flooded on Christmas Eve is very touching. A kindhearted, resourceful woman, who lived next door, exhibited the Christmas spirit by assisting them in the removal of water from the building, until professional help arrived.

(4) Burroughs, Augusten, *This Is How: Proven Aid in Overcoming Shyness, Molestation, Fatness, Spinsterhood, Grief, Disease, Lushery, Decrepitude, and More—for Young and Old Alike*, unabridged audiobook read by the author, Macmillan Audio, 2012.

As the title implies, this is a book of advice, or a how-to and how-not-to manual. It isn't a parody of the self-help genre, as anyone who has read Burroughs' other books might expect, but an actual self-help book. In most cases, Burroughs seems to be speaking from experience, having lived a highly unusual life, both as he was growing up and during his working years, trying his hands at several different careers (he got his GED at age 17 and never went to college). The advice he dispenses is reasonable and appeals to common sense, though he goes against the grain in dismissing AA and affirmation methods.

2015/07/07 (Tuesday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Carli Lloyd [walks into sports history](#): Her drone strike from midfield to score the third goal in a hat trick during women's soccer World Cup final, while being watched by the largest TV audience ever for a US soccer match, men's or women's, was amazing. Telemundo announcer, Andres Cantor, reacted to Lloyd's 50-yard strike with a 38-second "gooooooooooooool!" scream.

(2) Santa Barbara news personality **loses battle to cancer**: I am so sorry to hear this! I liked Debby Davison. She delivered the news with authority, dignity, and style.

(3) Few are surprised about the new **Bill Cosby revelations**: He can't be prosecuted for old crimes, but he owes his victims a formal statement of apology, not just for what he did to them, but also for calling them names when they came forward.

(4) Countries with most students studying abroad: The **top-10 list** includes China at the top by a wide margin, India, Korea, and Germany in the next tier, and Saudi Arabia, France, USA, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Iran with comparable numbers.

(5) Is this **4-year-old boy** being trained to become a call-center operator?

(6) Two old-timers perform a **Kurdish folk song**.

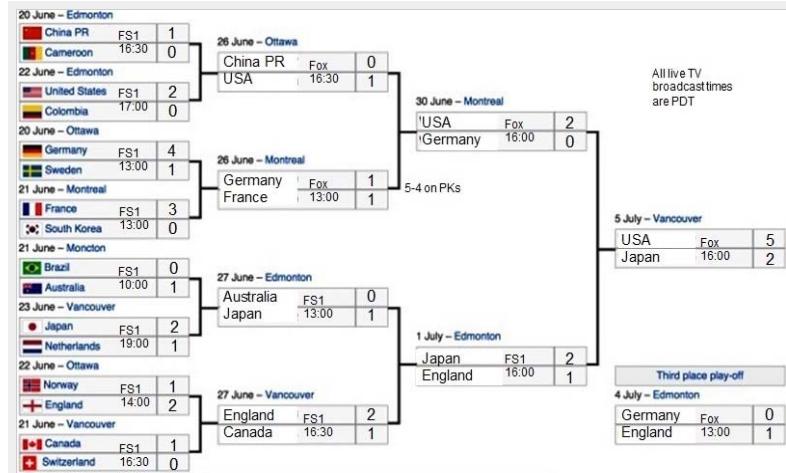
(7) Classic musical dubbed in Persian: "Edelweiss" from "The Sound of Music," performed **with Persian lyrics**. The song has the correctly translated title "Gol-e Yakh," but the dubbed film had been given the unrelated title "Ashk-haa va Labkhand-haa" ("Tears and Smiles").

(8) Nuclear talks with Iran extended to July 10: The remaining differences are reportedly over IAEA inspection of military sites within Iran and the timing of sanctions relief (immediate vs. phased). Inspection of military sites makes sense, and Iran knows it full well. Why would the West agree to exclude some sites from inspection if full compliance with restrictions on research and enrichment activities is at issue? Perhaps the Iranian negotiating team wants to show its domestic foes that it really tried and that there was no way to force the exclusion. Phased sanctions relief also makes sense, given Iran's extensive record of deception and establishment of covert nuclear facilities. President Rouhani, a former nuclear negotiator himself, openly boasted during his election campaign that several years ago, his team slowed down and extended the negotiations to give Iran time to expand its enrichment capabilities. Any agreement reached will not be fool-proof. However, it will carry at least two benefits, regardless of the details: It will give the proponents of reconciliation with the West a victory over their hard-line opponents in Iran, who continue the chants of "Death to America," and it will give the West a solid basis for taking more drastic actions should any violation of the agreement on the part of Iran come to light (as they will for sure, given intelligence sources and the willingness of many Iranians to speak up when faced with policies they perceive to be against national interest).

2015/07/06 (Monday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) The 2015 woman's soccer World Cup is now history: In the final two matches, USA beat Japan 5-2 on Sunday 7/5 to take the championship (despite Japan having a 52%-to-48% possession advantage) and England prevailed 1-0 over Germany on 7/4 to finish 3rd. The **USA-Japan encounter**, a rematch of the 2011 World Cup final won by Japan on penalty kicks, was a record-setting women's final: it was the highest-scoring final (7 goals in all) and it held the first-ever hat trick (Carly Lloyd, who scored 3 smart goals in a mere 16 minutes).

The image above shows the completed knockout-round bracket with all the scores (after the preliminary round had pared the teams from 24 to 16).



(2) Amazing **pyrotechnics display**: The Chinese recreate Jacob's ladder; or is it a tribute to Led Zeppelin and his "Stairway to Heaven"?

(3) Ta'arof revisited: Much has been written to explain this Iranian custom, but **this article**, from *Los Angeles Times*, hit home, because the setting is Westwood Village and, in particular, the Saffron and Rose ice cream shop on Westwood Blvd., between Wilshire and Santa Monica Blvds.

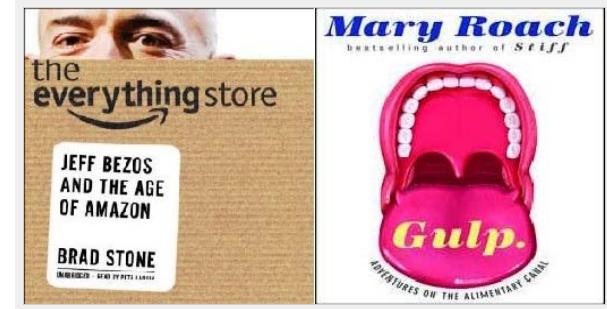
(4) Neuroscientist-in-the-making: Congrats to my daughter Sepideh, who has just published her first scientific journal article entitled "Brain Activity Mapping at Multiple Scales with Silicon Microprobes Containing 1024 Electrodes" (J. L. Shobe, L. D. Claar, S. Parhami, K. I. Bakhurin, and S. C. Masmanidis; to appear in *J. Neurophysiology*; **published on-line** on 1 July 2015).

(5) Free summer "Concerts in the Park" series for 2015: Thursday evenings at Santa Barbara's Chase Palm Park, 6:00-8:30 PM (bring the entire family, lawn chairs, blankets, and a picnic). Here is the schedule. July 02: The Long Run (experience the Eagles)

July 09: Lost Dog Found (roots swing)
July 16: Captain Cardiac & the Coronaries (50s & 60s rock 'n roll)
July 23: Rainbow Girls (Americana, gypsy, funk, soul, and rock 'n roll)
July 30: Fortunate Son (tribute to John Fogerty & Creedence Clearwater Revival)
(6) Free summer cinema is back: The 2015 series, "Over the Rainbow: Great American Movie Musicals," will be screened on Wednesdays 7:30 PM at UCSB's Isla Vista Theater and Fridays 8:30 PM, under the stars, at Santa Barbara County Courthouse's Sunken Gardens (bring a blanket and a picnic). Here is the schedule.
July 08 & 10: "Singin' in the Rain"
July 15 & 17: "The Wizard of Oz" (costume contest on Friday, July 17)
July 22 & 24: "West Side Story" (pre-screening discussion with Julie McLeod, an original Broadway cast member)
July 29 & 31: "An American in Paris"
August 5 only (due to Fiesta): "Mary Poppins"
August 12 & 14: "The Sound of Music"
August 19 & 21: "Cabaret"
(7) Final thought for the day: Remember that separation of religion and state does not only protect civil liberties and social institutions from theocratic dogma; it also protects religion from secular politicization.

2015/07/05 (Sunday): [I am going through my notes on books read or heard, and writing reviews that aren't as long as my usual ones, in the hopes of clearing the large backlog of reviews before the summer's end. Here are brief reviews of two audiobooks on science and technology, the first one just finished and the second one from several months ago.]

(1) Roach, Mary, *Gulp: Adventures on the Alimentary Canal*, unabridged audiobook on 7 CDs, read by Emily Woo Zeller, Tantor Audio, 2013.



The author was motivated to write this book because the digestive system is not adequately described in the popular science literature, whereas many books are available on the workings of the human nervous system and other parts of the human anatomy. Perhaps one reason is that the functioning of the digestive system isn't as mysterious (we all experience it daily) or as glamorous as, say, the nervous system. In fact, there are many instances when the reader/listener of this book feels disgust at the facts disclosed or is tempted to scream "gross!" out loud. The author, a well-known science writer with a knack for one-word book titles (*Stiff*, about human decomposition; *Bonk*, about human sexuality; and *Spook*, about the possibility of afterlife), doesn't make it easy, because she gleefully discusses many unpleasant routine processes, such as the workings of saliva and digestive juices, as well abnormalities, such as stomachs rupturing from colonoscopy or overeating, carrying contraband or explosives in body cavities, and "reverse defecation" (you don't want to know what it is). Overall, Roach's book teaches us a lot about how food makes its way from one end of the body to the other, in a normal, healthy person, and how various digestive ailments come about and are treated. Along the way, she also dispenses dietary advice.

(2) Stone, Brad, *The Everything Store: Jeff Bezos and the Age of Amazon*, unabridged audiobook on 11 CDs, read by Pete Larkin, Hachette Audio, 2013.

Jeff Bezos, the founder of Amazon.com, which first changed how we bought books and then revolutionized the retail business, always dreamed big. He contemplated building a warehouse in which at least two copies of every book ever printed would be housed (a sort of Noah's Ark for book species). He later pondered about warehousing every product ever manufactured. These dreams are, of course, both impractical, but the current Amazon.com comes close to the latter goal via a distributed warehousing scheme that outsources much of the storage function. This book provides a window into what makes Bezos tick and how he transformed a company that began in a tiny garage into the world's largest retail business (\$140B worth, 200M active customers) in just two decades. While he was setting up shop in the garage and various subsequent (still small) headquarters, he used desks that he built out of doors bought at Home Depot (a feature that persists as a tradition in today's Amazon). During early days of Amazon, Bezos and his small number of employees had their coffee breaks at a nearby Barnes & Noble, an irony that Bezos mentions often in his speeches. Stone is obviously a fan of Bezos, but this admiration doesn't stop him from exposing the eccentric billionaire's nasty side, which makes him averse to loyalty, even to his most important underlings. We learn from this book that the Amazon business model thrives on the power of the "long tail"; brick-and-mortar stores stock the most popular items and sell many items in each class, while Amazon also profits from products with extremely small sales. The technology behind Amazon's success is very complicated, and this book doesn't teach us much about that aspect of Amazon's

success story.

2015/07/04 (Saturday): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Happy July 4th to everyone: Today, I celebrate the birthday of my adopted home country; the one that gave me and my family shelter and opportunities, when my motherland decided that Islamic principles, as interpreted by misguided and narrow-minded people, are more important than human dignity and minority rights (of course, majority rights don't fare much better there).



This is my 27th July 4th in the US and (counting my graduate studies in the US and some 2.5 years in Canada) it coincides with my having spent more years outside Iran than inside it for the first time.

(2) US music and film superstars **honor America**.

(3) Fighting the next big epidemic: **According to Bill Gates**, whereas the risk of large-scale death from nuclear war is non-zero, it is tiny compared with the threat of an epidemic that spreads like wildfire in this age of global connectivity. Spending a small fraction of the US defense budget on medical research and preparedness for such an epidemic, which may be much worse than the recent Ebola scare and on par with the Spanish flu right after World War I, can help eliminate or reduce this threat.

(4) Women's World Cup soccer 2015 winding down: Today, England defeated Germany 1-0 to claim 3rd place. The championship match between USA and Japan, a rematch of the 2011 final, will take place tomorrow.

(5) kills man: I have read multiple versions of a story about a man killed by an auto assembly-line robot a few days ago, finding them all sensationalized and highly misleading. Industrial accidents kill a lot of workers, which is unfortunate. This latest event is no different. A robot, like other factory equipment, has moving parts and a worker can be struck by those parts or be entangled in them, through neglect, inadequate safety procedures, or malfunctioning hardware. "Robot kills man" implies something more than a mere mechanical accident.

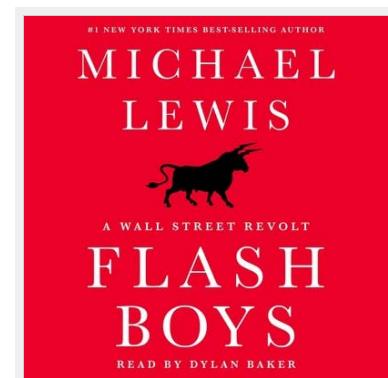
2015/07/03 (Friday): Lewis, Michael, *Flash Boys: A Wall Street Revolt*, unabridged audiobook on 8 CDs, read by Dylan Baker, Simon & Schuster Audio, 2014.

A small group of Wall Street guys figured out that the US stock market was rigged for the benefit of insiders and that this symbol of capitalism and free trade was tightly controlled by big banks. They set out to create an exchange in which high-frequency trading, a key source of the most intractable problems, would confer no advantage whatsoever.

Several of the main characters in this book walked away from lucrative financial-sector jobs to set up watchdogs over the operations of big banks and to expose how Wall Street operates and generates profits. This is an uplifting story of morality overcoming greed.

We learn early on that traders took advantage of stock price discrepancies between Chicago and NYC. The faster traders became aware of such discrepancies and the quicker they could trade, the more money they could make. Usually, signals took 16-17 ms (milliseconds) to go from Chicago to NYC and back. At the time, one of Verizon's paths offered a slightly better delay of 14.5 ms. Traders who chanced upon this higher-speed line (Verizon was unaware of the gold mine it owned), could beat the competition and make vast sums of money. When trying to take advantage of this quirk, someone saw that the fiber-optic cable path between the two cities wasn't quite straight. Several of the bends were due to legal restrictions about where cables could be laid, but from a detailed study of maps and a road trip to inspect the route up close, he saw that he could shave about 100 miles from the length of the cable, leading to a couple of ms roundtrip advantage for electronic signals. It was estimated in *The Value of a Millisecond* that each millisecond time saving along that route was worth about \$20B per year.

The problem was, of course, not limited to the Chicago-NYC markets. The author and some co-workers discovered that when a large stock buy order was submitted that needed fulfillment from multiple exchanges (collectively showing availability of the requisite sell offers), only a fraction of the order was typically fulfilled, with the rest of the sell offers mysteriously disappearing. It turned out that the electronic orders to different exchanges experienced different transmission latencies. When the fastest signal arrived at its destination, traders got a wind of the buy order and bought the remainder of the stocks before slower signals arrived (within a few milliseconds). They would then turn around and offer the same stocks for a slightly higher price. This type of high-frequency trading (HFT), though not illegal, smacks of favoritism and use of insider information not available to ordinary investors. The ticker-tape data we see on TV is a mere illusion that feeds to us stale information about the market. Even run-of-the-mill traders do not see the true market on their computer screens. Things that change in microseconds aren't even visible to anyone who wants to investigate possible wrongdoings. Market snapshots are recorded every second, and what happens between those second ticks leaves no trace for inspection.



The author notes the irony of one of the big-bank programmers, who took a copy of the trading program he wrote for the bank upon termination of employment, remains the only person prosecuted in the aftermath of the 2008 US financial meltdown. His charges were in effect based on the said program's potential use for market manipulation, begging the question why the bank owning the software was not guilty of the same charge. I enjoyed listening to this audiobook and learned a great deal from it. It is a cautionary tale to all those who think they understand the market and believe that, as ordinary investors, they are provided with an accurate picture of the market in financial Web sites and news media. High-frequency trading has now been tamed, but there is no reason to believe that other types of quirks are not being exploited by insiders capable of writing the complex software systems running the markets.

2015/07/02 (Thursday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could do only a little." ~ Edmund Burke

(2) Historic **fly-by of Pluto** in a couple of weeks: NASA's New Horizons spacecraft will do a first-ever fly-by of Pluto on July 14, 2015. It will also get a glimpse of Charon, Pluto's moon. Once past Pluto, the spacecraft will look backward to search for any possible rings around the dwarf planet, and it will use sunlight reflected by Charon to image a continuously dark region of Pluto. We already know a great deal about our Solar System, but exploration of Pluto will go a long way toward completing the picture for us.

(3) Florida homeless man **displays his talents**: He delights passersby by playing a public piano in Sarasota.

(4) The **Newport-Inglewood fault** in Southern California deeper than previously thought: Discovery of helium-3 leaking in Orange County indicates that the fault is connected to the Earth's mantle, the only possible source of helium-3.

(5) Women's soccer World Cup finalists determined: Yesterday, Japan (the reigning world champ) prevailed 2-1 over England (newcomer to the women's World Cup) on a last-minute goal, after the two teams played to a 1-1 draw in the first half. Both first-half goals were scored on penalty kicks.

Japan will be heading to Vancouver to face USA in the championship match on July 5 at 4:00 PM PDT. The third-place match between Germany and England will take place in Edmonton on July 4 at 1:00 PM PDT. Both matches will be carried live by Fox TV.

(6) Whole Foods CEOs **apologize for overcharging customers** and attribute the problems to "some mistakes": I find this explanation hard to swallow (pun intended), given that the company paid an \$800,000 settlement resulting from similar charges in California last year.

(7) History made 110 years ago: Here is **Physics Today Facebook post**, containing a photo of Albert Einstein and a page of his article (written in German) on the electrodynamics of moving bodies, which he submitted to the journal *Annalen der Physik* to introduce special relativity.

2015/07/01 (Wednesday): Yousafzai, Malala (with Christina Lamb), *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban*, unabridged audiobook on 9 CDs, read by Archie Panjabi (prologue read by the author), Hachette Audio, 2013.

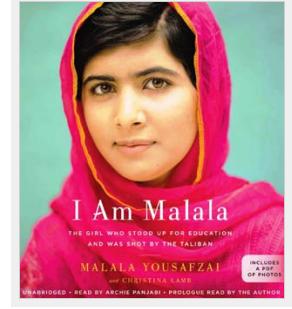
This is the life story of Malala Yousafzai, the girl who was shot in the head by the Taliban at age 15 and co-won (with Kailash Satyarthi from India) the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize at age 17. The book's title is a response to the Taliban gunman who, after entering the bus carrying a group of Pakistani school girls inquired, "Who Is Malala?" She did not answer at the time, but this book is, in effect, her defiant response to that ignorant and self-righteous man and his ilk.

From the beginning of the Taliban takeover in Swat Valley in Pakistan and their explicit orders to halt all schooling for girls, Malala, whose father as a school teacher and principal encouraged her to study and to think big, refused to be silenced by them and fought for the rights of children, girls in particular, to be educated. She began writing an anonymous blog to put forward her ideas, but her identity was soon exposed, leading to threats against her life and the lives of her family members.

During Taliban's rule, schools were bombed routinely to intimidate the locals, and a young extremist cleric preached against girls' schooling in radio broadcasts. The cleric praised the killing of a female dancer, and his goons killed a teacher who refused to pull up his pants above his ankles the way the Taliban did; they also shot the man's father.

Malala's recovery from the gunshot wound to her head was long and arduous. Few expected her to survive, yet her own determination, her family's support, and financial and logistic assistance from the government of Pakistan and a large number of well-wishers allowed her to seek medical treatment in the UK, where she and her family are currently residing.

Malala is still in school and is looking forward to college next year. During her recent appearance on the "Daily



Show," host Jon Stewart teased her about the need to beef up her resume with extracurricular activities and awards to have a better chance of getting admitted to highly selective colleges! She is very serious about school and limits her travels as an ambassador of children's education rights to summer months and periods of school recess. Her travels take her to many countries, where she meets with political leaders and education advocates. This past weekend (on June 27, 2015), Malala appeared at Santa Barbara's Arlington Theater as part of her advocacy efforts to raise awareness for the plight of children in developing countries, where many are denied educational opportunities. The main venue sold out quickly, so I attended a simulcast of the event at UCSB's Campbell Hall (there was also another sold-out simulcast venue in downtown Santa Barbara). This is a welcome sign that Malala's message resonates with many and that international efforts to improve children's education and other rights might bear fruit.

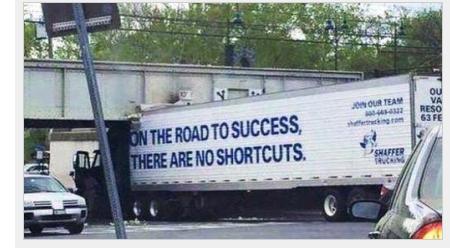
During her Santa Barbara appearance, Malala was asked about her legacy. She replied that before being shot, she was known as the girl who advocated schooling for all children. Later, she became known as the girl who was shot in the head by the Taliban. She went on to say that she doesn't want her legacy to consist of being shot by the Taliban. So, she is working hard to reclaim her original reputation as an advocate for children's education.

Malala's life will be the subject of a documentary film, "He Named Me Malala," to be released this fall. [\[Trailer\]](#)

2015/06/30 (Tuesday): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Great advice, aptly illustrated: "On the road to success, there are no shortcuts."

(2) Hear love thunder tonight: The planets Venus (named after the Roman Goddess of Love) and Jupiter (named after the God of Thunder) will **appear very close** to each other tonight. Their locations in the night sky will be about 1/3 of a degree apart, even though, in reality, they will be 416 million miles from each other. The two planets will remain close until July 4.



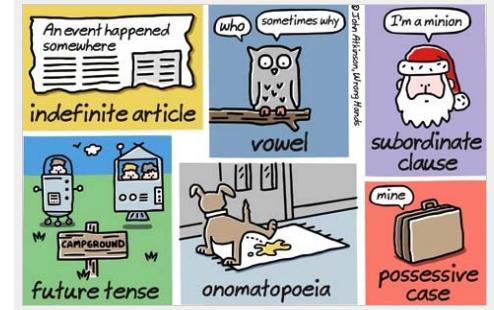
(3) Both sides **threaten to walk away** from the nuclear talks in Vienna, as the deadline is extended by a week: This is just 11th-hour gamesmanship, which is common in sensitive negotiations. Iran has more to lose if the talks fail, yet it is behaving as if it has the upper hand. I can't imagine that Iran will be able to continue by blaming the US for all future troubles, should the talks fail. I think the Iranian team is just trying to get a few bread crumbs, so to speak, so that they can declare a win. Resuming the nuclear program in the aftermath of failed talks, as threatened by President Rouhani, will not be viewed as a win by the Iranian people.

(4) Quote of the day: "The substance of his encyclical on the environment wasn't particularly groundbreaking; that it was received with such surprised fanfare speaks to how little we expect from religious figures when they weigh in on science." ~ Ian Bremmer, writing in *Time* magazine, double issue of July 6-13, 2015

(5) The battle of the 1st- and 2nd-ranked women's soccer teams: USA beat top-ranked Germany 2-0, scoring on a penalty kick and a toed-in served ball from the left side, after Germany had failed to take a 1-0 lead on a PK. It seems that the US team peaked at the right time, playing its best game in the tournament thus far. The US will play tomorrow's England-Japan winner on Sunday 7/5, 4:00 PM PDT. Germany will play in the third-place match on Saturday 7/4, 1:00 PM PDT. Both the final and third-place match will be on Fox TV (the regular Fox channel, not one of its sports channels). [\[Game highlights\]](#)

2015/06/29 (Monday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Cartoon of the day: Pictogrammar. [Image credit: *Time* magazine, double-issue of July 6-13, 2015.]



(2) Quote of the day: "I found it to be shocking, disappointing and completely unlike this historically progressive and generous company." ~ Taylor Swift's criticism of Apple for not paying artists during the 3-month trial period for its new streaming music service, a decision that the company reversed less than 24 hours later

(3) 3D-printed bridge: The Dutch firm MX3D has partnered with Autodesk to build a **bridge-printing machine**, to be tested over an Amsterdam canal in 2017.

(4) Portable power sources enter a new era: Cobra JumPack is a portable power source (~\$150) that provides juice not only for your smartphone and laptop on the go, but is even capable of starting a car multiple times. [Info from: *E&T* magazine, issue of July 2015.]

(5) Aliens practice Econ 101 (math puzzle): An alien species is capable of invading the Earth and is considering whether it is cost-effective to do so. The mission, if implemented, will have an immediate cost of 1 trillion AB (Alien Bucks) and will take 50 years before they see any return. After 50 years, an income of 100 billion AB per

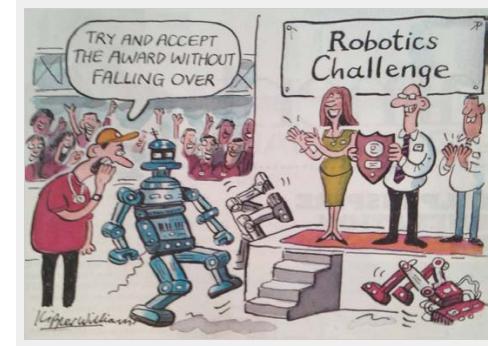
year will be generated for 100 years, until Earth resources are completely exhausted. Like us humans, these aliens prefer money now to money in future. If the projected interest rate is 3% per year for the aliens during the entire 150-year period, would the mission be cost-effective? [Adapted from: *E&T* magazine, issue of July 2015.]

(6) Donald Trump learns a tough lesson about capitalism: If you are considered a liability, you will be unceremoniously dumped by the same organization that praised and courted you as a financial genius. After Trump's incendiary remarks about Mexican immigrants, **NBC followed Univision** in severing all ties with him. In related news, Trump pinatas are selling like hotcakes in Mexico.

(7) New **Alzheimer's treatment** restores memory function: "Australian researchers have come up with a non-invasive ultrasound technology that clears the brain of neurotoxic amyloid plaques—structures that are responsible for memory loss and a decline in cognitive function in Alzheimer's patients." Human trials are expected in 2017. [Thanks to Farideh Kioumehr.]

2015/06/28 (Sunday): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Cartoon of the day: By way of clarification, this cartoon refers to the recent DARPA Robotics Challenge, in which biped robots were supposed to complete a set of tasks within the allotted time. Many of the robots fell over at some stage of the competition. Walking on two feet is harder for robots than most people think! [Image credit: *E&T* magazine, issue of July 2015]



(2) Robot hotel: The first hotel with robotic hospitality staff will open in Japan next month. Phase 1 of the Henn-na Hotel, aka the "Strange Hotel," will have 72 rooms. It will be managed by Kawazoe Lab, The Institute of Industrial Science, University of Tokyo, and Kajima Corporation. [Info from: *E&T* magazine, issue of July 2015.]

(3) Recent terror attacks are part of the Iran-Saudi proxy war: The parallel, though apparently not coordinated, **terror attacks** on three continents (Tunisian seaside resort, killing 38 and injuring roughly the same number; Kuwaiti Shi'i mosque, killing 25 and injuring 200; Lyon chemical plant explosion, following the beheading of the terrorist's boss) may be the work of ISIS or inspired by ISIS, but looking at the bigger picture, they can be blamed, directly or indirectly, on the ongoing proxy war between Iran's hardliner Shi'ite regime and Saudi Arabia's Wahhabi Sunni regime. Each side vilifies not just the other side's government but also its religious tenets. And both sides are vocal about the need to fight non-Muslim infidels, one side by rhetoric and military aid and the other side by financial contributions via covert channels.

(4) Quote of the day: "Our problem is not all kooks and Klansmen. It's also in the cruel joke that goes unchallenged." ~ Hillary Clinton, on racism in America

(5) *Time* magazine's "The Answers" double-issue (July 6-13, 2015): Here are some answers that intrigued me. What are Americans most afraid of? Walking alone at night (a very unexpected answer). How do fetuses breathe? They don't (they get oxygen through the placenta and umbilical cord). What's the world's deadliest creature? Mosquitoes (sorry sharks, you aren't even in the top 10). Which country has the fastest Internet? South Korea (average end-user speed of 23.6 Mb/s). What's the healthiest vegetable? Watercress (highest density of 17 most-important nutrients)

(6) Low-cost drones are here: For about \$1000, you can buy a Robotics Solo drone with a high-end processor in controller and body, which features open-platform support and is easier to control and film with than rivals. [Info from: *E&T* magazine, issue of July 2015.]

2015/06/27 (Saturday): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) An afternoon with an amazing young woman: Given that "An Afternoon with the 2014 Nobel Peace Laureate" at Arlington Theater (the main venue) was already sold out by the time I heard about the event, I listened to Malala Yousafzai via simulcast at UCSB's Campbell Hall, one of the two simulcast venues. Malala provided a very brief overview of her life and causes and then answered questions from a moderator and a few submitted by students at several local institutions. Malala's life will be the subject of a documentary film, "He Named Me Malala," to be released this fall.



Here is a snippet from Malala's comments (not an exact quote): Before I was shot, I was known as the girl who advocates schooling for all children. Later, I became known as the girl who was shot in the head by the Taliban. I don't want my legacy to consist of being shot by the Taliban. I am trying to reclaim my original reputation as an advocate for children's education, girls in particular.

(2) Ojai Valley Lavender Festival: Today, I enjoyed fresh air and wonderful aromas at a beautiful festival held at

Ojai's Libbey Park. The Lavender Festival is known for its friendly atmosphere, fresh/dried flowers & herbs, handicraft & skin-care items, art displays, entertainment, and food/drink, including lavender-flavored items such as lemonade and ice cream. Several musical groups performed at the festival. In [this video](#), the Steel Cut Band performs a Bob Dylan song.

(3) Women's soccer World Cup semifinalists: USA (1-0 winner over China PR) and Germany (prevailing 5-4 on PKs, after playing France to a 1-1 draw) will face each other on Tuesday 6/30. In the other semifinals match, Japan (1-0 winner over Australia) will face England (2-1 winner over the host Canada) on Wednesday 7/1. Both matches will be at 4:00 PM PDT (Fox TV).

(4) Wonderful performance of "["Je Suis Malade"](#)" by a young girl with a big voice in a talent competition.

(5) Modern Persian music: Mohsen Namjoo performs "["Yaar-e Jaani"](#)" ("Beloved Friend").

(6) Humor: The Star Trek Enterprise crew [can't bear watching](#) Miley Cyrus music videos.

2015/06/26 (Friday): Here are four items of potential interest.

(1) Marriage equality affirmed by the US Supreme Court: With a 5-4 margin (the norm on controversial cases), the high court affirmed marriage rights for gay and lesbian couples. This [MSNBC story](#) has an animated map at the end that traces the spread of acceptance for marriage equality in the US, from the single state of Massachusetts in 2003 to all 50 states in 2015. By 2014, more than half the states had legalized same-sex marriages. Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote the majority opinion. The four dissenting justices were unequally ticked off at the decision, it seems, because they wrote separate dissenting opinions. [This map](#), that allows you to drag a pointer to explore how the laws changed over time in various states, is also useful.

(2) Iran beats volleyball world champion Poland 3-2: That's the good news for Iran. The bad news is that Iranian women are still banned from watching their national team, while foreign women can attend the games, as evident in this photo.



(3) Today in women's World Cup soccer: The two matches played paired 2nd-ranked USA with 16th-ranked PR China (USA won 1-0) and top-ranked Germany against 3rd-ranked France (Germany won 5-4 on PKs, after a 1-1 draw in regulation and a scoreless overtime). Germany and USA will face each other in the semifinal match on Tuesday 6/30 (4:00 PM PDT, Fox TV).

The other semifinal match on 7/1 (4:00 PM PDT, Fox Sports 1) will be played by the winners of tomorrow's Australia-Japan and England-Canada matches.

(4) Final thought for the day: "Adam and Eve have belly buttons on all their depictions over the centuries. Think about it ... Take as much time as you need." ~ Anonymous

2015/06/25 (Thursday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) Women's World Cup soccer bracket, as the quarterfinals begin: TV broadcast times shown are for the US West Coast.

(2) Donald Trump, you are fired! Spanish-language Univision TV network won't broadcast the next Miss-USA pageant, and will cut all other ties with Trump, over his inflammatory remarks about Mexican immigrants.

(3) Creativity needs [no fancy tools](#): A lowly cucumber and a sharp knife suffice.

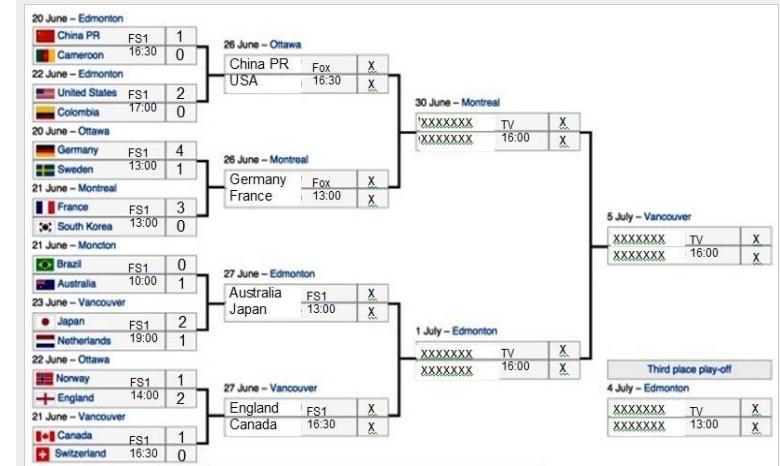
(4) Women against DAESH: From the young Kurdish Peshmargas to a music icon, women are [on the front lines](#) of the fight against the misogynistic group.

(5) US academic delegation [visits Iran](#): The reception has been described as "extremely warm," perhaps because the current Iranian cabinet has more US PhD holders than any other government in the world, including that of the US. A reciprocal visit is anticipated.

(6) The Affordable Care Act [clears another hurdle](#): The US Supreme Court has ruled 6-3 that subsidized premiums are not unconstitutional.

(7) Do you know how soap opera actors are prepared for a scene in which they have to feel genuinely sad or in pain? [[18-second video](#)]

(8) The US finally embraces lighter cars: Whereas many European auto manufacturers have been using



aluminum frames for years, the US has been slow in abandoning the heavier, but no stronger, steel sheets. Now, with the federal fuel economy mandate (average of 54.5 mpg in 2025) looming, more US car manufacturers are willing to experiment with light-weight material, including various carbon fibers. [Info from: *Westways* (AAA magazine), July-August 2015.]

(9) Final thought for the day: "Outside of a dog, a book is a man's best friend. Inside of a dog, it's too dark to read." ~ Groucho Marx

2015/06/24 (Wednesday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) UCSB celebrates light and light-based technologies: On the afternoon of October 8, 2015, 1:00-6:30 PM, UCSB will hold a symposium to mark the International Year of Light and Light-Based Technologies.

(2) Meat glue: What seems like a prime cut of meat may have been put together from bits and scraps with a "[glue" material](#). Yet another reason not to eat rare steak! When meat is glued together, what was the outside surface will be on the inside and thus harder to cook properly.

(3) Bollywood special effects: Realism does not get in the way of FX artists in [this film clip](#). There should have been a dance scene right at the end.



(4) The "Undo Send" feature in GMail: An opt-in [feature of GMail](#) allows you to undo a send if you are plagued by sender's remorse. This feature gives you a few extra seconds to retract your message, before it is sent off toward its destination. Don't become reliant on this feature, though. The best policy still is to be thoughtful about what you send. My advice: In all but very routine messages or responses, sit on the message for a while (overnight, perhaps) before you send it.

(5) Tonight, I watched the [1965 movie "She"](#) on TCM: This is apparently the 4th film version of H. Rider Haggard's story about gods and myths in east Africa, and it stars Ursula Andress in the title role, alongside a host of old-time actors, such as Peter Cushing, John Richardson, and the recently deceased Christopher Lee. Princess Soraya has a brief appearance as a nightclub dancer. There are multiple mentions of ISIS in this film, but not the recent beheading kind. The score by James Bernard is fantastic.

(6) The jihadists vs. J. Lo: There is a pending [court case in Morocco](#), filed by conservative Islamist against Jennifer Lopez for her booty-shaking performance before a crowd of 160,000 cheering fans. No beheadings, no violence, no death threats! Not yet, anyway.

(7) Sting performs live: "[Englishman in New York](#)" (with lyrics), an old song I just discovered. And here is Sting's "[Fragile](#)": A wonderful rendition by Sting and Stevie Wonder.

(8) James Taylor at the Apollo Theater: He performs "[Today, Today, Today](#)" (a song from the new album "Before This World," his first to hit #1 on Billboard 200 Chart.)

2015/06/23 (Tuesday): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Two World Trade Center: After much controversy and give-and-take, the plans for the 81-story office tower (NYC's third tallest building) have been finalized and it is slated for opening by 2020. It is composed of blocks arranged in a stair-like fashion. The top of each block will house a small park, where people working in the building can relax.



(2) Quote of the day: "This scandal could not be any more Canadian if public money was used to get Drake to drink maple syrup on Niagara Falls." ~ John Oliver, on "Last Week Tonight," referring to the Canadian Senate audit

(3) Bonus quote of the day: "If you want to bake a pie, that's great. If you want to have a career, that's great too. Do both or neither. It doesn't matter. Just don't judge what someone else has decided to do." ~ Leslie Knope (Amy Poehler), on the TV series "Parks and Recreation"

(4) The US volleyball coach on his team's [trip to Iran](#): "Tonight, Iran affected the way we played. We got beat by a better volleyball team by significant margin. They outplayed us in every facet of the game: block, defense, passing, serving, and offense. ... My first impression [of Iran] was that everyone here has been incredibly hospitable. Everyone has been very nice. They have gone out of their way to make sure that we had really nice experience here. I think we have enjoyed it tremendously. ... I think, what I know and have known from spending time with Iran and the United States both last year and this year is that the relationship between the people is not reflective of the relationship between our governments and that the Iranian people are wonderful people and have treated us kindly. I think we have shown the same because America is a wonderful country with wonderful people too. Yes, it a great place, so the message we would bring back is this: it was a great trip and we look forward to coming here again. And I think we have much better understanding of what the

environment is both inside the arena and outside."

(5) Jewels of Allah: In this **2-minute teaser**, Nina Ansary's new book is introduced by a number of individuals, each of whom relates what appear to be his/her own deeds, but, in reality, belong to an Iranian woman.

(6) Oscar-winning composer James Horner dead at 61: The composer of **timeless movie themes** for "Titanic," "Avatar," "A Beautiful Mind," "Apollo 13," and "Field of Dreams" died in a plane crash near Santa Barbara.

2015/06/22 (Monday): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Cartoon of the day: Low-tech gift options, according to *Time* magazine, issue of June 29, 2015. [Alas, too late for Fathers' Day!]

(2) Quote of the day: "You ever wonder why there was a job opening?"
~ Owen (Chris Pratt), in the film "Jurassic World," after he rescues a new raptor handler from attack

(3) Bonus quote of the day: "Rachel Dolezal cracked the holy grail of black secrets: black woman's hair ... [which] is even secret to black men. They don't know anything about it—they just know not to touch it."
~ Robin Thede, on "The Nightly Show"

(4) Women's World Cup soccer: USA and Colombia played to a scoreless draw at halftime in their round-of-16 match. A disappointing outcome for the US side, which was heavily favored to advance to the quarterfinals! Colombia showed some sparks, making me a bit nervous for the second half. In the end, USA won the match 2-0 on goals in the 53rd and 66th minutes, the latter on a penalty kick, despite missing an earlier penalty kick in the 50th minute. On Friday 6/26, USA will face China PR (a team that has historically given the US tough matches) and Germany will face France. On Saturday 6/27, England (today's 2-1 winner over Norway in an exciting match that gave it a first ever knockout round win) and Australia will face the Japan-Netherlands winner, to be determined tomorrow.

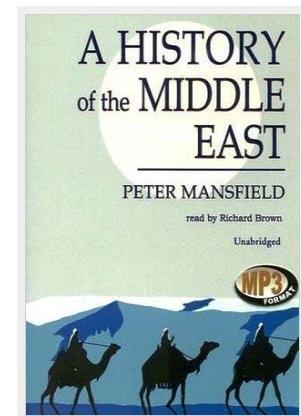
(5) Brief book review: Mansfield, Peter, *A History of the Middle East*, unabridged audiobook on 14 CDs, read by Richard Brown, Blackstone Audio, 2011 (original print book published in 1991).

The Middle East has provided a setting for epic struggles between great civilizations, cultures, and religions for at least 4000 years. The 20th century brought to the region different kinds of struggle over low-cost access to natural resources (oil in particular) via installing, courting, and feeding the ego of one dictator after another, as the European powers competed for influence. Then there was the establishment of Israel that added immensely to complications in the region's recent history.

This book is a gem in terms of coverage and balance; a work of synthesis, in which the author, drawing on his experience as a journalist and a historian, explores two centuries of history in the Middle East, from Bonaparte's invasion of Egypt to the start of the first Persian Gulf War.

Thus the account contains nothing about the intrigue and chaos that came about after the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, the ensuing Arab Spring, and the rise in Islamic fundamentalism and its attendant violence. There was no way Mansfield could have foreseen these new developments when he discussed Saddam Hussein and the prospects for the future at the end of the book.

I enjoyed listening to this audiobook and recommend it highly to anyone who wants to understand the historical roots of the current difficulties in the region.



2015/06/21 (Sunday): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) A father's open letter to his children: Fathers' Day is a day when kids express their appreciation to their dads. Taking a cue from *Time* magazine, which asked a number of influential dads to write brief essays in the form of open letters to their children (issue of June 22, 2015), I decided to write such a letter for the occasion.

Let me start by stating that no physical gift for Fathers' Day would match the gift of your existence and the motivation it provides to me for trying to be not just a better dad, but also a better person.

I gave you much fatherly advice as you were growing up, but I also collected life experiences that changed me in important ways. I am not the same man I was before having you, so our influence on each other has been mutual. Now, as I approach the end of my professional life and contemplate retirement, I hope that all three of you will be as happy with your career choices as I have been with mine over the past 42+ years.

Leading healthy, happy, and fulfilling lives is the best present you can give me on Fathers' Day in the years to come. I love you!



(2) A few entries from the Urban/Devil's Dictionary.

Adult: A person who has stopped growing at both ends and is now growing in the middle.

Chickens: The only animals you eat before they are born and after they are dead.

Inflation: Cutting money without damaging the paper.

Mosquito: An insect that makes you like flies better.

Secret: Something you tell to one person at a time.

Tomorrow: One of the greatest labor saving devices of today.

Wrinkles: Something other people have; similar to your own character lines.

(3) Women's soccer World Cup: With five of the eight round-of-16 knockout matches played, there were some expected advances (China 1-0 Cameroon, Germany 4-1 Sweden, France 3-0 S. Korea) and a couple of upsets (Australia 1-0 Brazil, Canada 1-0 Switzerland). The Norway-England and USA-Colombia matches tomorrow and the Japan-Netherlands match on Tuesday 6/23 will determine the remaining three teams in the quarterfinals, to be played on June 26-27.

(4) A logical puzzle: See if you can answer the following four multiple-choice questions.

Q1. The first question with A as the correct answer is: A. 2; B. 3; C. 4

Q2. The answer that appears most often is: A. C; B. B; C. A

Q3. The answer to Question 1 is: A. B; B. A; C. C

Q4. The answer that appears least often is: A. A; B. C; C. B

(5) Final thought for the day: "Racism isn't born, folks. It's taught. I have a 2-year-old son. Know what he hates? Naps. End of list." ~ Denis Leary

2015/06/20 (Saturday): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) On Iranian women being banned from attending men's sporting events:

Boy holds up a sign that reads "Hi mom: Wish you were here too!"

(2) A beautiful and heartfelt [Persian poem](#) by M. Shafagh, in protest to Iranian authorities' renegeing on the promise to remove the longstanding ban on women attending men's sporting events.

(3) Are stealthy freedoms and calls for women to be allowed into sports arenas mere distractions? Some think so, and are very vocal about their views on social media posts that rail against compulsory hijab laws and social restrictions. I, for one, believe that any step in the direction of improved human rights, civil rights, and social justice should be applauded. There is room for harsher resistance, but people dismissing these gradual steps as time-wasting usually aren't the ones who take such steps, even while hiding under pseudonyms for the most part. Bear in mind that the Islamic government of Iran, did not impose the restrictions on clothing, education, professional participation, and the like in one fell swoop, even though it had all the instruments of power, such as oil income and guns. What makes the opponents of this incremental resistance think that women (and their male supporters) taking to the streets will return all the rights to them at once?



(4) A brilliant idea: The bike shown in [this video](#) is powered by a treadmill-like mechanism. If it proves practical, it may be a game-changer, given that it's much easier to get on/off it.

(5) On racism in the US: One by one, Republican politicians and presidential candidates, who opine about the Charleston mass shooting incident, say something to the effect that "we will never know what motivated the shooter ..." Isn't it clear enough that the hateful shooter wanted to "start a race war" (his own words), feared that blacks were taking over "his" country, was a fan of apartheid, and dreamed of re-segregation? We already know what motivated him. So, instead of avoiding the "R" word like the plague, try to communicate your plans on confronting domestic terrorism with the same fervor that you use when talking about international terrorism.

(6) [I will post my own thoughts about Fathers' Day tomorrow. Meanwhile, I enjoyed reading the following essay by a divorced woman and am sharing it here.]

Happy Father's Day to my ex-husband: This is the title of a touching and insightful [personal essay](#) by Susanna Schrobsdorff (*Time* magazine, issue of June 22, 2015), reminding divorced parents that Mothers' and Fathers' Day gifts as our kids were growing up represented "gestures of love and gratitude that we as parents were giving each other—for making the coffee, for patience in the wee hours, for being the sane one today and just for showing up the next. ... In doing so, we're teaching our children to say thank you to their parents, the very people whom they could reasonably take for granted." After divorce, "If you are lucky, you will be sitting next to this person at graduations, weddings, baby showers and, yes, funerals for the rest of your lives. There is no divorce from the kinds of celebrations and crisis situations that require both of you to show up for your children and each other."

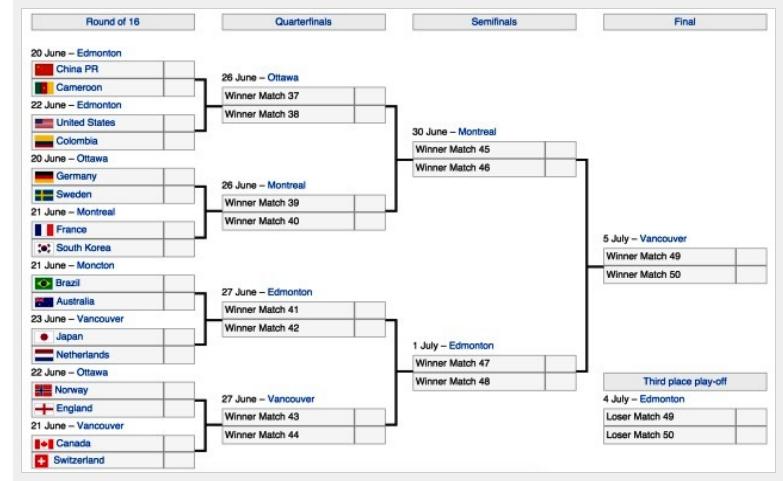
2015/06/19 (Friday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

- (1) Cartoon of the day: Phony hairs collide!
- (2) Bach in Lights: A [clever visualization](#) of one of Bach's most ambitious musical pieces.
- (3) A scarf, guided by air nozzles, dances to music. [[1-minute video](#)]
- (4) Secret section of 9/11 report released: The last 30 pages of the 9/11 Commission Report dealing with the Saudi connection [have been declassified](#). Before you get too excited, let me point out that nearly all of the text has been redacted out (roughly one page of inconsequential material remain).
- (5) A book about the goings on in Iran, immediately after the 1979 Islamic Revolution: *Off the Radar: A Father's Secret, a Mother's Heroism, and a Sons Quest* is about author Cyrus Copeland's quest to find out the truth about his dad, an American businessman accused of being a CIA spy in the anti-American climate around the time of the hostage-taking at the US Embassy in Tehran. With the author's Iranian mother defending his dad in court, the family eventually pulled through the crisis, but the author was always curious about the truth, which, following his father's death, became quite difficult to ascertain. [[Interview with the author](#)]
- (6) Are we oversensitive to racial or gender-related comments? In this [Daily Mail article](#), Tom Utley defends Tim Hunt's statements about women scientists and suggests that the reaction to them was overblown. I think the author is off-track when he writes that Hunt's statement about women crying is borne out by experimental evidence. It is accurate if one says that women cry more often; it is an entirely different thing to say that they cry in the face of criticism of their scientific ideas, which is what his statement implied. Firstly, the stats about crying are based on the general population and are not necessarily applicable to women scientists. Secondly, fact-based scientific debate is different from normal human interactions, in which emotions play a big role.
- (7) Final thought for the day: "Education is what survives when what has been learned has been forgotten." ~ B. F. Skinner



2015/06/18 (Thursday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

- (1) The women's soccer World Cup bracket is set: With 95%, the US team has been given the highest odds of advancing to the quarterfinals.
- (2) Before Neda, there was Mona: Today is the 33rd anniversary of the execution of Mona Mahmood-Nejad, a 17-year-old Bahai girl, along with 9 other Bahai women, by a regime that claims it imprisons no one based on political or religious views. Had she survived, Mona would have been 50 today. [[Video](#)]
- (3) Our Planet: A [13-minute montage](#) of amazing sights on our majestic Earth, set to beautiful music.
- (4) Stadium kiss-cam: [One of the targeted men](#) can't be bothered with the kiss-cam, because of an all-important phone conversation.
- (5) The labor of love that used to go into books: [Making a book](#) was labor-intensive in the early days of print technology. Remember to treasure your old books! Here is the [modern version](#) of the process (pre-e-books).
- (6) Hate and guns take more victims: Nine people died at an African-American church in Charleston, South Carolina, when a 20-something white suspect (now in custody) entered the church and opened fire. President Obama reacted in this way to the tragedy: "Now is the time for mourning and for healing. But let's be clear, at some point we as a country will have to reckon with the fact that this type of mass violence does not happen in other advanced countries." Unfortunately, however, something more urgent, be it ISIS atrocities, terrorism, or reignition of the Palestinian problem, will come up tomorrow and will deflect attention from the problem of gun violence in the US. Then, we won't mention gun violence until the next gruesome event.
- (7) Fun fact of the day: If printed on paper, Wikipedia will be a 7,471-volume encyclopedia, with at least 11 of those volumes carrying the designation "ART to ART" on their spines. The down side is that the printed version will cost \$0.5M. [P.S.: I don't know why Volume 869 is repeated in the photo accompanying [this article](#).]
- (8) Welcome news from the religion front: With all the beheadings, mass incarceration, torture, and human trafficking done in the name of religion in the Middle East, it is refreshing to see Pope Francis formulate an environmental agenda, urging his followers to take global warming seriously. Some US politicians and



presidential candidates are complaining that the Pope has no authority to interfere in such matters. However, if a religious leader can urge the well-to-do to help the poor by providing them with food and shelter, he can certainly ask for the poor's protection via a more responsible stewardship of the environment. The Pope notes correctly that environmental deterioration impacts the poor disproportionately.

2015/06/17 (Wednesday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "You often wonder, in this day and age, 'Can someone write 240 pages as well as they write 140 characters?' " ~ Publisher Eamon Dolan, on the proliferation of memoirs by women with neither long lives nor particularly notable and/or traumatic ones (quoted in *Entertainment Weekly*, Issue of June 19, 2015)
- (2) A **positive step** by Israel amid the stalemate in the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.
- (3) Genius at work: If [this video](#) isn't a trick (such as the guy looking at a webcam image of the Rubik's cube on a computer screen below), it is quite impressive that the young man can solve the puzzle by memorizing its initial configuration, and then proceed without looking.
- (4) Shift happens (2014 remix): An informative and entertaining [5-minute video](#) about the pace of change and the problems it can create.
- (5) Donald Trump's major philanthropic gift: He has exhilarated comics worldwide by declaring that he will run for US President in 2016.
- (6) A nerdy joke for computer science geeks: If P = NP, then courses that are graded on a pass/not-pass basis will become redundant.
- (7) In praise of Nasrin Sotoudeh: Golnaz Esfandiari's [article in Foreign Policy](#) profiles Nasrin Sotoudeh's efforts on behalf of human rights, civil rights, and social justice, in a country that has little tolerance for dissent. [P.S.: I realize that the article's writer intended to praise this fearless woman, but the "One Woman Stands Against the Iranian Government" heading chosen for the article is a disservice to many other women who are now in prison or are under constant threat of imprisonment.]

2015/06/16 (Tuesday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

- (1) End of academic year: In this photo, a crew is shown disassembling and carrying away the stage, chairs, and other props used during graduation weekend at UCSB. After taking this photo today, I walked home, passing by some dorms and through Isla Vista, where overflowing dumpsters told the story of the migration of various student species to their summer habitats. The streets will be cleaned up in a couple of days, first by the homeless and the regional poor, who go through the trash to salvage the items they can use, and then by the local trash-collecting company. Meanwhile, we have to live with the junk and associated smells.
- (2) Lady Gaga performs in Baku, singing "[Imagine](#)" at the opening of the European Games.
- (3) Quote of the day: "They're both professions where you're just trying to make observations about the world that have some resonance." ~ Aziz Ansari, on the challenges of combining a comedian's take with contributions by sociologist co-author Eric Klinenberg, as they collaborated on the book *Modern Romance*
- (4) A sporty night: The US women's soccer team defeated Nigeria and claimed first place in group D of the 2015 Women's World Cup. The 1-0 score, though getting the job done, does not bode well for future matches against powerhouses such as Germany and France. Australia also advanced from the same group, while Sweden must wait to find out if it can go to the knockout round as one of the 4 third-place teams.
Later in the afternoon, the Golden State Warriors played against the Cleveland Cavaliers in game 6 of the NBA championship series, trying to finish the job by securing their fourth win. They led 56-51 midway through the third quarter and went into the fourth quarter with a comfortable 73-61 lead. What appeared to be a runaway victory for the Golden State turned into a tight match in the final minute, with the lead cut down to 4 points. At the end, Golden State prevailed 105-97, winning the NBA championship series 4-2.
- (5) LED lighting commemorates last year's mass-shooting victims: I had written earlier about a light installation on the Pardall bicycle and pedestrian tunnel on the UCSB campus. I shot [this 1-minute video](#) today to show the lights and how using motion sensors, they track movements through the tunnel, lighting up alternate tracks of lights in sync with the motion.
- (6) Rouhani's government backtracks in the face of pressure from hardliners: After stating that women will be allowed to enter volleyball and basketball arenas as spectators, Iranian sports authorities declined to let women purchase tickets to watch the Iran-USA volleyball match in Tehran. Statements published by multiple groups of hardliners had equated women's attendance at sports matches with overt prostitution and had warned women



that their attendance might lead to violence against them. Now, given that these groups have clearly identified themselves in published statements, President Rouhani's government will have no excuses for not taking legal action against their bullying tactics and threats of violence.

(7) Final thought for the day: "Those who wish to sing always find a song." ~ Swedish proverb

2015/06/15 (Monday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) USS Enterprise is now a building: Chinese tech exec Liu Dejian, founder of the game developing giant NetDragon, spent \$100M to construct this **company building** that pays homage to "Star Trek."



(2) Quote of the day: "Those who claim sanctions do not matter are oblivious to people's pocketbooks." ~ Iran's President Rouhani, during his trip to northern Khorasan

(3) "Debt-free college" may become **a centerpiece** of the next US presidential campaign: Senator Bernie Sanders has offered a concrete proposal and Secretary Clinton is hinting that it could become part of her platform. No Republican candidate has embraced the idea yet.

(4) Joke of the day: A medical school student asks his physics professor about the relevance of the subject matter to their future profession. "Physics saves patients' lives," was the reply. "How come?" inquired the student. "Because it forces the dumber students to quit the program!" was the final explanation.

(5) Soccer mishaps: **Good for a chuckle**, on this post-graduation Monday.

(6) Living life according to movies is subject of "The Wolfpack" documentary: "This riveting doc tells the story of six brothers who spent their youth locked inside their Manhattan apartment. Their only exposure to the outside world was the films they watched—and meticulously re-created at home." ~ Film description from *Entertainment Weekly*, issue of June 19, 2015

(7) The intriguing race scandal that brought down an NAACP leader: Both biological parents of Rachel Dolezal are white, yet she **pretended to have a black father** and rose in the black community to an NAACP regional leadership position. The more I read about this case, the more I am convinced that it is quite complicated. Yes, she lied, and she should suffer consequences for that (she has already resigned from her NAACP leadership position). But why did she do it? Was she trying to gain benefits for herself or was she motivated by a desire to help? Is a person's racial identity physical or mental/cultural? And, if her lies were not discovered, could she have become an effective leader for NAACP? In a TV interview I watched earlier today, RD's parents, who exposed her lies, seemed normal and very concerned with their daughter's well-being; not the kind of parents a kid would run away from. The family had adopted several black kids (including three African-Americans), and RD's racial identity may have been shaped, in part, by those adoptions, as well as by her education at a historically black college. One story claims that she sued Howard University for discriminating against her as a white woman. She did not come clean when a reporter asked a question about her race, but she appeared to me like a deer in the headlight, scared by the prospects of her world falling apart right in front of her eyes. I don't see her as a nut-case, because she was apparently helpful in her social activities, but the elaborate web of lies she weaved is something to be examined and understood. Things will likely clear up in a few days.

2015/06/14 (Sunday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "I don't know how people can get so anti-something. Mind your own business, take care of your affairs, and don't worry about other people so much." ~ Betty White

(2) Kurdish music: Beautiful 53-minute **concert video** by the Kamkars Ensemble.

(3) Boeing 787-9's impressive near-vertical take-off: **This video** is from a practice run for the 2015 Paris Air Show. The landing also appears to need a very short runway.

(4) NBA finals, Game 5: Stephen Curry scored 37 points, 17 in the fourth quarter, to lead the Golden State Warriors to a 104-91 win over the Cleveland Cavaliers and a 3-2 lead in the 7-game NBA finals series.

(5) An Iranian man confesses to his sins: In a post made to the Facebook page "My Stealthy Freedom," Maziar Bani Asadi **expresses regrets and shame** for being influenced by a culture that has no respect for women or their freedoms and teaches men that it is okay to force a woman to do things against her will and to punish her if she doesn't obey.

(6) Impressive victories for Iran's volleyball: While Iran had never previously beaten Russia in international competition, it beat the Olympic champions in Russia twice, 3-1 and 3-0, in June 13-14 matches played as part of the FIVB World League Championships. The headline for the **story on the second match** reads: "Mirzajanpour majestic as Iran crush Russia"

(7) On helicopter parents: Recently, former Stanford University Dean Julie Lythcott-Haims criticized parents who direct their children too closely and over-schedule their lives to the point of stressing them out and stifling

their creativity. On an [NPR \(KQED\) post](#) of this story, interesting viewpoints are offered as comments. A sizable group of parents remind the Dean that the admissions processes of Stanford and other similarly prestigious universities are, at least in part, responsible for over-parenting, which is the only way to produce kids with perfect transcripts and loads of extracurricular activities such schools value. Others point out that our unsafe environment necessitates closer parenting; the days of 3-mile solo bike rides to friends' houses and staying out unsupervised until dark are long gone.

(8) Final thought for the day: "The universe is made of stories, not of atoms." ~ Muriel Rukeyser

2015/06/12 (Friday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "...'Shirt and shoes required for service' and 'No shirt, no shoes, no service' are equivalent due to De Morgan's laws and rules of inference." ~ Fred Murphy, in a [letter to the editor](#) of *Communications of the ACM*, issue of June 2015, suggesting that many of the concepts of computer science, besides the oft-used metaphor of "stack of trays," can be learned by observing a cafeteria's operation

(2) The Warriors even up the NBA finals series 2-2: The key to last night's win was neutralizing LeBron James. Up to the end of the third quarter, the Golden State Warriors would build up leads and then let the Cleveland Cavaliers get back in the game through turnovers. But they went on to dominate the fourth quarter, before winning big, 103-82.

(3) Learning from experience, a la the movie "Groundhog Day." [[5-minute video](#)]

(4) A new chapter in water-proof coatings: Nanotechnology-based **superhydrophobic coating** repels almost any liquid.

(5) Fun fact of the day: The US has about 4.5% of the world's population, but it is legally bound to defend a quarter of the world's population owing to various pacts and treaties signed with 60 different countries. [Source: *Time* magazine, issue of June 15, 2015.]

(6) On the latest faux pas by a Nobel Laureate: Once in a while, a male scientist puts his foot in his mouth and pontificates about how women are unsuitable for science, thus creating amusement for women scientists and an outlet for their sharp wits.

(7) Reggae music: A wonderful rendition of "[Wonderful Tonight](#)" by Kotch.

(8) Women's World Cup soccer: Three more days worth of results from group matches.

June 09: France 1-0 England; Spain 1-1 Costa Rica; Colombia 1-1 Mexico; Brazil 2-0 S. Korea

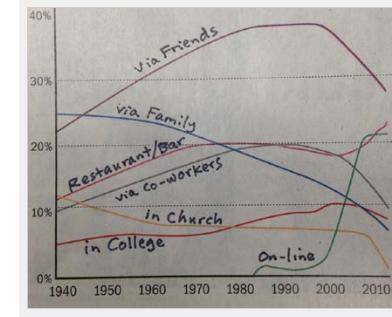
June 11: Germany 1-1 Norway; China 1-0 Netherlands; Thailand 3-2 Ivory Coast; Canada 0-0 New Zealand

June 12: Australia 2-0 Nigeria; Switzerland 10-1 Ecuador; USA 0-0 Sweden; Japan 2-1 Cameroon

USA's scoreless draw against Sweden, coming after a shaky win over Australia, is troubling, even though the US sits at the top of Group D and is likely to emerge as the group's top team (though not advancing to the knockout round is still a possibility). Here are the [group standings](#).

2015/06/10 (Wednesday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Love in the age of like: This is the title of an insightful article by comedian Aziz Ansari (*Time* magazine, issue of June 15, 2015) that includes the chart shown at right reflecting the percentage of heterosexual couples who met in various ways in the period 1940-2010 (handwritten labels, replacing a box legend, are mine). There is a separate chart for same-sex couples over the period 1985-2005. Ansari's own parents had an arranged marriage. His father's parents essentially showed him three girls, and in a Goldilocks kind of way, he deemed the first one too tall, the second one too short, and the third one just the right height. They spoke for half an hour 35 years ago and decided that they could make it work.



A sidebar, written by Jo Piazza, presents the viewpoint that on-line dating is a boon for women, because it levels the playing field to some extent. Another sidebar, by Christian Rudder, points out that what you write about yourself in your on-line profile barely makes a difference in how many responses you get; "we estimate that your words have about one-twelfth the impact of your picture."

(2) Quote of the day: "As the U.S. and its allies hash out what could be a historic deal, they should worry less about a weapon Iran will never use and focus instead on the weapons it's already believed to be using." ~ Ian Bremmer, writing in *Time* magazine, issue of June 15, 2015, on the larger threat of cyber-terrorism, which is deniable and practically untraceable, compared with the use of nuclear weapons, which would be suicidal

(3) Iranian music: Azadeh (vocals) and Amir Safarian (guitar & arrangement) cover "[Shokufeh Mi-Raghsad](#)" ("The Blossom Dances"), a song by Parviz Vakili (music) and Ataollah Khorram (lyrics). The same duo perform "[Dey Balal](#)," a Bakhtiari folk song. Search for the duo's other music on YouTube under Hooniak Band.

(4) Plane lands on busy highway (or, does it?): Special effects, with a touch of humor, passed by some Facebook posters as a [real event](#).

(5) Putting the 70 million military and civilian deaths during World War II in graphic perspective: Interactive

versions of some of the charts are available on-line. [[18-minute video](#)]

(6) Two impressive victories in friendly matches for the US men's national soccer team: They beat Netherlands 4-3 in Amsterdam on June 5 and edged past World-Cup champion Germany 2-1 today in Cologne.

(7) Final thought for the day: "An idea isn't responsible for the people who believe in it." ~ Don Marquis

2015/06/09 (Tuesday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Legoland Hotel in Orlando, Florida: Opened in May 2015, the 152-room, 5-story hotel is made up of over 2 million Lego bricks. Guests choose from rooms with pirate, adventure, kingdom, or Lego friends themes.



(2) Quote of the day: "Israel and the Saudis fiercely oppose the deal, but the U.S. should care more than Germany, France and the U.K. have helped broker it. Over time, European allies will have a much larger impact on U.S. security and prosperity than Israel or Saudi Arabia will." ~ Ian Bremmer, writing in *Time* magazine (June 15, 2015), on nuclear negotiations with Iran

(3) June gloom replaced with something pleasant: Much welcome rain, ranging from one-half to one inch in our area, since this morning.

(4) Experience prevails over depth of talent in game 3 of the NBA finals series, giving Cleveland Cavaliers a 2-1 lead over Golden State Warriors after winning 96-91 tonight.

(5) Life is precious in the womb but not outside of it: The latest headlines have Jeb Bush saying in 1995 that unwed mothers should be publicly shamed. Not only shaming such mothers is inconsistent with the conservatives' claimed sanctity of life and stance against abortion, it is also misogynistic to single out mothers who are raising their children, without mentioning fathers who bolted after having an equal part in creating them.

(6) Fun fact of the day: More than one-third (36.5%, to be exact) of North American Internet traffic during peak evening hours is taken up by Netflix [Source: *Time* magazine, issue of June 15, 2015.]

(7) Beware of scam charities: Articles and news stories from multiple sources are advising care in donating money to charities. Unless you know and trust a charity through past interactions or see that it has good ratings on charity tracking organizations, such as [Charity Watch](#), you should not donate money. It is very easy to set up a charity: there is a 3-page IRS form to fill out and very little else. Once you set up a charity, you can hire a telemarketing firm and promise it a good chunk of the funds raised. You then kick back and collect a 6-digit salary that you assign to yourself as the charity's director. There will be no monitoring of your work to see if you actually spend a dime on the promised charitable activities. All you need to do is to create sob-stories to increase the donations. Charities are perhaps the most unregulated organizations around. And once you get on the sucker list of having donated money to one of these shady organizations, you will receive an endless barrage of donation requests, along with increasingly disconsolate sob-stories, from the same outfit and other charities.

(8) Final thought for the day: "My recipe for love is one cup of me, one cup of you, ..." ~ Unsolicited text message I received today (I have censored the rest)

2015/06/08 (Monday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) NASA reconsiders moon missions: According to *ASEE Prism* magazine, it may be necessary to resume manned missions to the moon in order to experiment with and refine the technologies needed to produce fuel and life-sustaining materials from ice. These technologies will be key elements in the success of a Mars expedition.

(2) The 2015 ACM Turing Award winner: This year's Alan M. Turing Award, dubbed the Nobel Prize of computing, and its \$1M cash prize have gone to Michael Stonebraker, Adjunct Professor at MIT (formerly at UC Berkeley), "for fundamental contributions to the concept and practices underlying modern database systems." Stonebraker's academic research contributions to relational databases, and their implementation through start-up companies that he founded, have influenced virtually all important database systems in use today.

(3) Korean team claims \$2M top prize in DARPA's [robotics challenge](#): The robots were graded on their ability to complete 8 tasks, including driving a vehicle, opening a door, operating a portable drill, turning a valve, and climbing stairs, all in the space of an hour. These tasks are representative of what is needed in a search-and-rescue environment, among others. The robots were operated remotely via wireless links, purposely degraded with noise to simulate a crisis situation. A team of UCSB and JPL scientists placed a robot named "RoboSimian" among the 25 finalists.

(4) Americans don't fully utilize their vacation days, which are fewer than those in many other countries to begin with, because: 40%, fear of heavy workload upon return; 35%, nobody else can do the work; 33%, can't afford to go on a vacation; 28%, want to show dedication; 22%, don't want to be seen as replaceable. [Source: *Time* magazine, issue of June 1, 2015]

(5) China's reef-reclamation project: There is widespread activity by China in transforming underwater reefs that rise to near the surface in South China Sea into islands for commercial and military use. [New images](#) show the scope of the project.

(6) Singing class for women, held at a private home in Iran. [\[6-minute video\]](#)

(7) Women's soccer World Cup after 3 days: Eight matches of the total 52 have been played thus far. On the opening day, Saturday 6/6, Canada beat China 1-0 and Netherlands beat New Zealand 1-0 in Group-A matches. On Sunday 6/7, Norway beat Thailand 4-0 and top-ranked Germany thrashed the newcomer Ivory Coast 10-0 in Group-B matches. Today, in Group-C matches, Cameroon beat Ecuador 6-0 and Japan prevailed over Switzerland 1-0. Today's Group-D matches resulted in Sweden drawing Nigeria 3-3 and the second-ranked USA beating the speedy Australia 3-1. The top 2 teams in each of the six groups, plus four of the third-place teams, will advance to the knockout round, so with today's win, the US team is in a good position to advance. The Sweden-Nigeria draw benefits the US. [\[USA-Australia highlights\]](#)

2015/06/07 (Sunday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) The tallest hotel in the world to tower over the tiny Swiss Alps village of Vals.



(2) Joke of the day: My teacher pointed to me with a ruler and said: "At the end of this ruler is an idiot!" I got detention after asking: "Which end?"

(3) Modern Persian music: Shahrzad Sepanlou sings ["Chizaay-e Koochik"](#) ("Little Things").

(4) Songs from Mazhar Khaleghi (Xaleqi), Kurdish music maestro: The song ["Ey Doost"](#) ("Hey, Friend") is dedicated to everyone, especially my Kurdish friends.

This [3-hour sound recording](#) contains a broad selection of Khaleghi's music.

(5) Something new I learned today: Eggcorn. "A word or phrase that sounds like and is mistakenly used in a seemingly logical or plausible way for another word or phrase." [Merriam-Webster dictionary] [\[Some examples\]](#)

(6) DAESH selfie post leads to destruction of a key building 22 hours later: The extremist group's social media strategy for attracting recruits [backfired](#) when the US Air Force identified the location of a command center from a selfie post.

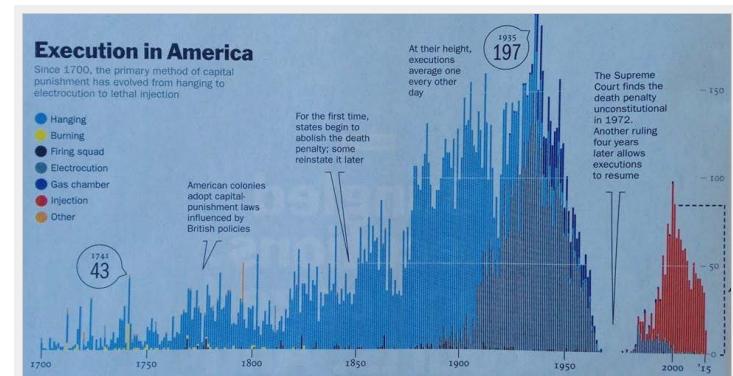
(7) Iranian women are dumb: I chose this attention grabbing title based on jokes some Iranian men circulate in cyberspace (the equivalents of blonde jokes in English). Yet two of the world's top scientists at present are women of Iranian origins: Dr. Maryam Mirzakhani, Professor of Mathematics at Stanford University and the first ever female Fields Medalist, and Dr. Pardis Sabeti, Professor of Organismic and Evolutionary Biology at Harvard University, *Time* magazine honoree as a leading figure in the fight against Ebola and subject of a recent in-depth profile on CNN.

(8) Andrea Bocelli at the Hollywood Bowl: In this highly enjoyable outdoor concert, Bocelli sang the usual mix of classical arias ([sample duet](#)) and popular songs (sample Italian pop song), including a couple of love songs from Elvis ("Love Me Tender").

2015/06/06 (Saturday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) A history of death penalty in America,

1700-2015: Method of execution has shifted from hanging, through electrocution, to the currently prevalent lethal injection. While the number of executions shows a downward trend in recent years, the public still supports the death penalty roughly 2 to 1. [Source: *Time* magazine, issue of June 8, 2015]



(2) Quote of the day: "That's going to be a pretty long confessional." ~ Republican presidential candidate Marco Rubio, when asked to comment on Raul Castro's

pronouncement that he may consider becoming a Catholic again because of Pope Francis's progressive positions

(3) Texas universities are looking to work around concealed carry law: This news headline in *First Bell*, an educational newsletter citing *Los Angeles Times* as the source of its story, reminded me of the Persian saying, "A crazy person can throw a rock in the well that 100 sane ones cannot take out." Now in Texas, they have to

"work around" the new law that allows students and faculty to bear arms on campus.

(4) Women's World Cup 2015 begins today: The soccer tournament will be played in Canada, from June 6 to July 5, 2015. Given that the top two teams from each group, plus four third-place teams chosen in a rather complicated scheme, will advance to the 16-team knockout round, the US most likely will advance from Group D. Fox Sports plans an extensive coverage of the tournament, including broadcasting all 52 games. The US team will play Australia on Monday, June 8 (7:30 PM ET on FS1), Sweden on Friday, June 12 (8 PM ET on Fox), and Nigeria on Tuesday, June 16 (8 PM ET on Fox). Here is the rest of the schedule: Round of 16, June 20-23; Quarterfinals, June 26-27; Semifinals, June 30 & July 1; Finals, July 4-5.

(5) She misses being able to jog without a headscarf: This is how the Norwegian ambassador to Iran feels about wearing the hijab. She is urged in [this post](#) to join Iranian women's protest against mandatory hijab laws.

(6) Another foreign envoy follows Iran's mandatory hijab laws: Although the **kind of hijab** worn by this member of the Foreign Relations Committee of the European Parliament can get Iranian women in trouble. So, perhaps, she is making a statement here.

(7) The pipeline responsible for the Refugio Beach oil spill near Santa Barbara was **badly corroded**.

(8) Final thought for the day: "Study nature, love nature, stay close to nature. It will never fail you." ~ Frank Lloyd Wright

2015/06/04 (Thursday): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) CE/CS/EE capstone project day: Today, UCSB's College of Engineering held its annual senior capstone project day, during which teams of students present outcomes of year-long projects in computer engineering, computer science, and electrical engineering in formal presentations (with hardware/software demos) and a lunch-hour poster session. This [2-minute video](#) contains a quick scan of all the projects that were set up for the 12:00-1:00 poster session. The accompanying photo shows a few of the posters set up in UCSB's Engineering Science Building courtyard.



(2) The NBA finals series began today: There are lots of interesting tidbits about this series. The Golden State Warriors are going into the finals for the first time in 40 years, and they have Stephen Curry, the reigning NBA MVP and the game's best shooter, on their team. The Cleveland Cavaliers have LeBron James, a leader, 4-time MVP, and 2-time NBA champion. The opposing MVPs are from the same town and were even born in the same hospital, four years apart. The teams were pretty evenly matched through regulation. Cleveland led 51-48 at halftime. The game was tied 73-73 at the end of the third quarter, 96-96 with 76 seconds left, and 98-98 with 32 seconds remaining. Neither team scored in the final 32 seconds, sending the game into overtime. Golden State ended up winning this first game 108-100, after Cleveland fell apart in overtime, scoring only 2 points.

(3) The first self-driving truck approved for highway use: Licensed in Nevada, the truck is based on a standard vehicle, outfitted with a network of radars, cameras, and computers. A fully qualified and licensed truck driver is still required to be in the cab at all times. Perhaps jackknifing and other trucking mishaps will become things of the past. [Source: *E&T* magazine, issue of June 2015]

(4) Pervasive displays: Walls, building facades, and virtually all other visible surfaces may soon turn into digital displays to carry messages and images of all kinds, according to speakers at the 2014 International Symposium on Pervasive Displays (the next event in the series will be held June 10-12 in Saarbrücken, Germany). We may even have floating mid-air displays positioned in strategic positions by drones. Other areas of expansion for display technologies include head-up displays for cars and gesture-controlled public displays that enable simple viewer interactions. [From: *IEEE Computing Edge* magazine, issue of May 2015]

(5) Secrets of longevity, according to five men and women aged 107-117: Will it work better if one tries all five recommendations? [From: *Time* magazine, issue of June 8, 2015]

Drinking lots of coffee; Staying away from men; Eating raw eggs; Sunbathing; Eating sushi.

(6) Extinction may become a thing of the past: Storing DNA for endangered species may allow us to restore them via de-extinction. This process can even go back for thousands of years (though not millions, a la Jurassic Park). Geneticists hope that simple changes to the Asian elephant's DNA could result in a surrogate mother giving birth to a baby mammoth. [Info from: *E&T* magazine, issue of June 2015]

2015/06/03 (Wednesday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Cartoon of the day: Humor about drone delivery systems.

[Source: *E&T* magazine, issue of June 2015]

(2) Quote of the day: "I think when tragedy occurs, it presents a choice. You can give in to the void, the emptiness that fills your heart, your lungs, constricts your ability to think or even breathe. Or you can try to find meaning. These past thirty days, I have spent many of my moments lost in that void. And I know that many future moments will be consumed by the vast emptiness as well. ... But when I can, I want to choose life and meaning." ~ Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg, announcing the end of her 30-day mourning period for her husband Dave Goldberg [on Facebook](#)



(3) Texas law allows concealed weapons on college campuses: Under a [bill just passed](#) by the Texas state legislature, students and faculty could be allowed to carry concealed weapons into classrooms, dorms, and other campus areas. Now drunken brawls in frat parties can turn into gunfights and already rampant campus sexual assaults can become even more dangerous.

(4) Joke of the day: Policeman to weeping little boy who seems lost: "Don't worry, I will take you home to your parents. What's your address?" Little boy: "jimmy@gmail.com"

(5) The workings of a [sewing machine](#) wonderfully explained.

(6) Reminds me of 1984, in which history was often rewritten to remove undesirable events or facts: In an address delivered on the occasion of the 26th anniversary of Ayatollah Khomeini's passing, [Hashemi Rafsanjani](#) characterized him as flexible and anti-violence.

(7) Final thought for the day: "It made me feel bad, and then it made me feel angry, and then it made me laugh." ~ Actress Maggie Gyllenhaal (37), on being told that she was too old to play the love interest of a 55-year-old man

2015/06/02 (Tuesday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) The shortest paper (2 sentences) ever published in a serious math journal.

(2) A minor battle victory in Iranian women's war on repression and discrimination: Women can now attend volleyball and basketball matches. However, such per-sport "permissions," which accompany "bylaws" postulating a number of conditions and restrictions, begs the question of why they even need permissions from the National Security Council for such a basic right.

(3) Gevorkian Academy dancers [perform](#) to music by Bijan Mortazavi.

(4) Comedian John Oliver's take on the [FIFA indictments](#). Of course this was before Sepp Blatter announced his resignation.

(5) Peaceful coexistence: A bit more than 7 years prior to Iran's Islamic Revolution, women with and without the hijab coexisted peacefully, with neither group forcing its way of life on the other. [[Photo](#)]

(6) Amazing talent in [painting a portrait](#).

(7) John Nash, the recently deceased brilliant mathematician, of "A Beautiful Mind" fame, wrote a PhD dissertation that was only 26 pages long and cited a mere 2 references: A book by John von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern, and one of his own papers.

(8) Automatic image classification: Smart cameras of the future will organize or tag your photos using various automatically detected categories such as food, architecture, outdoors, and the like. [From: *IEEE Computing Edge* magazine, issue of May 2015.]

**COUNTEREXAMPLE TO EULER'S CONJECTURE
ON SUMS OF LIKE POWERS**

BY L. J. LANDER AND T. R. PARKIN

Communicated by J. D. Swift, June 27, 1966

A direct search on the CDC 6600 yielded

$$27^5 + 84^5 + 110^5 + 133^5 = 144^5$$

as the smallest instance in which four fifth powers sum to a fifth power. This is a counterexample to a conjecture by Euler [1] that at least n n th powers are required to sum to an n th power, $n > 2$.

REFERENCE

1. L. E. Dickson, *History of the theory of numbers*, Vol. 2, Chelsea, New York, 1952, p. 648.

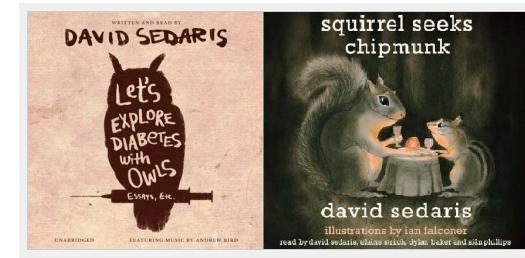
2015/06/01 (Monday): Very brief reviews of two audiobooks by David Sedaris.

Sedaris, David, *Let's Explore Diabetes with Owls: Essays, Etc.*, unabridged audiobook on 6 CDs, read by the author, Hachette Audio, 2013 (featuring music by Andrew Bird).

In this audiobook, which I listened to a few months ago, Sedaris reads his by-now-familiar humorous essays, which are mostly autobiographical, with embellishments for comic effect.

This collection, written in the same trademark style known as "observational comedy," consists of surreal travel experiences, involving encounters with kindly French dentists, Australian kookaburras, Beijing squat toilets, and a wilderness Costco in North Carolina.

Sedaris, David, *Squirrel Seeks Chipmunk*, audiobook on 3 CDs, read by the author, Elaine Stritch, Dylan Baker,



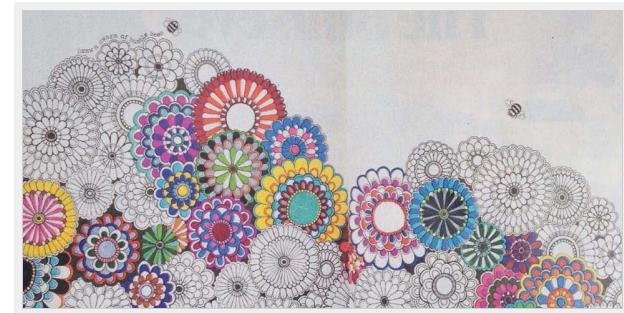
and Sian Phillips, Hachette Audio, 2010 (features original music and a PDF file of illustrations).

A poem on the back of the CD case states the scope and intent of this book. Here are the first couple of verses: "What if animals were more like us; If mice kept pets and toads could cuss; If dogs had wives and chipmunks dated; Sheep sat still and meditated."

The fables told in this book are different from the author's familiar, self-deprecating, autobiographical humor, but they impress upon us the same points about the insanity of everyday life and the suffering of those who don't quite fit the social norms. One of the stories, for example, is about a turkey who enthusiastically participates in a secret-Santa drawing, only to find out later that he will be killed and eaten for Thanksgiving. The events and conversations in this and other fables touch upon self-image, political correctness, battle of the sexes, and other concerns of modern humans.

2015/05/31 (Sunday): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) According to *Entertainment Weekly*, double-issue of May 29 and June 5, 2015, seven of the top 20 Amazon bestselling books are coloring books for adults, billed as stress-relief books.



(2) Shahrzad Sepanlou's speech and performance at the memorial ceremony for her father Mohammad-Ali Sepanlou, held on May 30, 2015, in UCLA's Dodd Hall.

[[10-minute video](#)]

(3) Mysterious wave of [antelope deaths](#), wiping out half of an endangered variety, is being investigated.

(4) Beware of inappropriate gifts for your significant other that might put you in [the doghouse](#).

(5) Documentary on Abbas Yamini Sharif: As part of the UCLA Bilingual Lecture Series on Iran, the 75-minute documentary film "Children's Song Writer: Life and Work of Abbas Yamini Sharif" [1919-1989] (in Persian, with English subtitles), was screened at 4:00 PM today on the UCLA campus. The screening was followed by a panel discussion on Children's literature. The panel consisted of Dr. Nayereh Tohidi (moderator), Mahdokht Sanati (writer and Member of the Board of Children's Book Council), Mehrdad Haghghi (journalist and publisher of children's periodical, *Touca Magazine*), and Hooman Yamini Sharif (the film's producer and son of its subject). According to the biographical info presented in the introduction and in the film itself, Yamini Sharif had a difficult childhood, which included physical abuse at home and at school. When his father remarried, he did not get along with his step-mother, leading to his father taking him outside and abandoning him on the street at age 11. He found his way to his uncle's and spent years there, essentially as a servant. Later he met the poet Farrokhi Yazdi, who was going through a difficult time (due to his anti-regime political views and work), provided him with shelter, and was influenced by his work.

At age 13, Yamini Sharif was exposed to Arabic and English children's literature and was impressed by their joyful nature, in stark contrast to his own life and experience as a child. Later in life, he studied early childhood education at Columbia University, published several books of prose and poetry for children, founded an experimental school (spending his entire fortune on it), and was in charge of *Kayhan for Children* until 1980, a year after Iran's Islamic Revolution. Yamini Sharif's writings and poems were used extensively in grade-school textbooks and as lyrics to children's music in the pre-Islamic-revolution Iran.

[Abbas Yamini Sharif Foundation's [Facebook page](#)] [[UCLA's film screening announcement](#)]

[Producer's [introduction](#) (at a different venue)] [[A short clip](#) from the documentary film]

2015/05/30 (Saturday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Sexual equality isn't a modern invention: Our prehistoric forebears were more enlightened than we are. Anthropologists at University College London have discovered that hunter-gatherers, far from being more macho or male-dominated, were in fact [egalitarian in gender roles](#), with inequality taking hold only after the emergence of agriculture, when people could start to accumulate resources.



(2) Quote of the day: "There is only one corner of the universe you can be certain of improving, and that's your own self." ~ Aldous Huxley

(3) Salvador Dali on "[What's My Line?](#)" game show: Dali's answers to questions from the blindfolded panel trying to guess his profession are hilarious, and on several occasions, the host has to step in.

(4) The eye of Africa: The circular 50-km-wide [Richat Structure](#) in Africa's otherwise featureless Sahara Desert is a sight to behold. It is believed not to have been created by a meteor impact but by gradual erosion. Why it is circular remains a mystery.

(5) Former President Clinton unleashes his [mastery of facts](#) on Fox News' Chris Wallace.

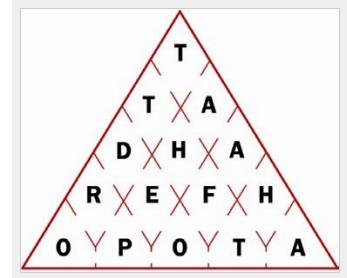
(6) Iranian **women and girls**, before a bunch of joyless men decided that they should hide their hairs, smiles, songs, and dances.

(7) **LA Times article** about the rise of cohabitation in Iran: The youthful population and the heavy economic burden of traditional marriages have led young couples to choose to live together, while sharing the costs of housing and food. These "white marriages" (the term used by Iranian authorities to describe the practice) are particularly attractive to young, professional women, who want to avoid the difficulty of divorce for women under Islamic laws.

(8) Final thought for the day: "The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country." ~ Edward Bernays, public relations guru and author of *Propaganda* (Ig Publishing, 2004)

2015/05/27 (Wednesday): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Triangle word puzzle: Start anywhere and move from cell to cell through the doorways, without using any letter twice, until you have traced the 15-letter hidden word or phrase.



(2) Light installation honors Isla Vista victims of 5/23/2014: UCSB professors Kim Yasuda and Marcos Novak have adorned the Pardall tunnel on the UCSB campus with **blue LED lights** to bring the campus and the surrounding community together on the first anniversary of the tragic event.

(3) Santa Barbara's 5/19/2015 oil spill, **in pictures**: From contaminated beaches to oil-covered wildlife.

(4) FIFA officials arrested on US corruption charges: A years-long **FBI investigation** has led to the indictment of 12 officials of the world soccer body. Two current FIFA vice-presidents and two regional presidents were among those charged. Seven of the defendants have been arrested by authorities in Switzerland, where FIFA leaders have gathered for their annual meeting.

(5) Another top-10 honor for UCSB: The Leiden ranking of 750 major universities has placed UCSB 7th in the world based on **impact of research publications**, as reflected in the Thomson-Reuters Web of Science bibliographic database.

(6) Ten types of book-to-film adaptations, according to **Newsweek magazine**: Here is the list, with examples.

Biblical (e.g., "The Ten Commandments," "The Passion of the Christ," "Noah")
Shakespeare ("Romeo and Juliet," "The Tempest," "10 Things I Hate About You")
Taken from the curriculum ("To Kill a Mockingbird," "The Giver," "Fahrenheit 451")
Sold too well not to turn into film ("Harry Potter," "Twilight," "The Da Vinci Code")
Too cinematic not to turn into film ("Jaws," "Jurassic Park," "Planet of the Apes")
Romantic literature ("The Godfather," "Schindler's List," "Apocalypse Now")
Thrillers ("Clear and Present Danger," "The Bourne Identity," "Goldfinger")
Children's and comic books ("Alice in Wonderland," "Batman," "The Avengers")
Stephen King (over 50 of his books have been turned into major motion pictures)

2015/05/26 (Tuesday): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) A sample of chalk paintings at Santa Barbara's 2015 street-painting festival (I Madonnari), held over the Memorial Day weekend, May 23-25.



(2) GM may have to plead guilty in its settlement with the US government: General Motors may be forced to **plead guilty** as part of a settlement with the Department of Justice, which is nearing a decision on whether to seek criminal charges against the automaker for causing at least 104 deaths in its delayed recall of 2.6 million cars for ignition switch defects. An immediate impact of a guilty plea would be the automaker's need for waivers from the Department of Labor to handle employee pension and retirement savings plans.

(3) Quote of the day: "The old believe everything, the middle-aged suspect everything, the young know everything." ~ Oscar Wilde

(4) If you loved the book, forgive the movie version: This is the thesis of a **Newsweek article**. The author, Ryan Bort, maintains that even a terrible movie version boosts book sales and sparks discussion of the work.

(5) Final thought for the day: "I would rather be remembered by a song than by a victory." ~ Alexander Smith

2015/05/25 (Monday): Here are four items of potential interest.

- (1) On this US Memorial Day, we honor the memory of those who fell to protect our freedom: "Patriotism is supporting your country all the time, and your government when it deserves it." ~ Mark Twain
- (2) Quote of the day: "I recognize a part of the level of my activity is motivated by desire to not focus too much on what's happened. But even if you told me right now that everything I do is not going to make a change, it wouldn't stop me." ~ Richard Martinez, father of one of the six Isla Vista mass murder victims of May 23, 2014, who has become a **devoted activist** against gun violence and school shootings

(3) Remembering the IV victims of last year: On Saturday, May 23, UCSB's College of Engineering held a memorial for the three slain engineering students (George Chen, Cheng-Yuan James Hong, and Weihan David Wang) on that awful 5/23 Friday night, exactly one year ago, when 6 students were killed and a dozen were injured. Families of the students were present and David's mom is shown in the photo delivering an emotional speech. It is very difficult to imagine the pain felt by families who lost their children in a senseless act of violence; they were delighted to see so much support from the campus. Several students also shared stories about their academic and personal relationships with George, James, and David, who apparently always worked and played together.



Even though I had had no close contact with the three students, I spoke a few words about how the campus climate has changed in the wake of the tragedy, how I had never before witnessed the level of positivity and love that filled the Harder Stadium memorial held last year, as the campus and its surrounding community came together to comfort the families and to express concern about gun violence, and how for a couple of months after the tragedy, I suspended my regular 2-mile walk between home and office, on a path that goes through Isla Vista's murder sites, owing to a combination of fear and the freshness of emotional wounds. At the end of the formal ceremony, the families, students, staff, and faculty mingled over pizza and refreshments.

(4) The 5th Parhami Family Reunion: This photo shows 3/4 of the 104 attendees (97 family members and 7 guests) at our fifth annual get-together, held yesterday (Sunday, May 24) in Santa Monica, CA. The event's theme was getting to know the 24 granddaughters of Khatoon/Sorahi and Mikaeel Parhami (half of the 48 third-generation Parhamis). One daughter from each family branch introduced herself and her sisters, as a slide show I had prepared ran in the background.



2015/05/22 (Friday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "The thing I love most about Isla Vista is that everyone here is as scared shitless about the future as I am. Behind the rigorous school work and infamous party scenes are young people just trying to be successful in a world that seems much bigger than they ever imagined." ~ Kiyah Nelson, one of the students commenting on Isla Vista, in the May 21, 2015, issue of UCSB's student newspaper, *Daily Nexus*

(2) Debate on the status of social sciences at Iranian universities: **This televised debate**, broadcast over state-controlled Iranian TV, is surprisingly open, with one of the sides harshly criticizing the Iranian regime for rejecting Western advances in the social sciences and trying to force Islamic versions of these fields, without much reflection on the societal impacts of such hasty and ill-planned decisions. It emerges during the discussion that under the Islamic regime, trust among Iranian people has sunk to an all-time low. Ironically, university professors enjoy the highest level of trust, despite the regime's efforts to marginalize them via various accusations, threats, and, in many cases, firings. One disturbing aspect of these well-deserved criticisms is blaming the current dire situation on former President Ahmadinejad and his policies. This blaming of our forebearers is a staple of Iranian politics and social discourse. Ahmadinejad blamed Khatami every chance he got and now under Rouhani, all the "bowls and jugs" (a Persian expression) are being broken on Ahmadinejad's head, forgetting that Rouhani himself and several members of his cabinet have been intimately involved at the highest level of government for decades. And this is ignoring the Supreme Leader's frequent dissing of universities and professors in general, and in social sciences, in particular. I lived and worked in Iran for 7 years after the Islamic Revolution and can attest to the fact that firing of university professors or forcing them into retirement wasn't an Ahmadinejad invention.

(3) On manhood and manliness: In the Persian language, "manhood" ("mardi") and "manliness" ("mardaanegui") have come to represent courage, valor, and generosity. These patriarchal notions are so deep-

rooted that I have seen even women use the words to describe other women who have acted in bold, benevolent, or selfless ways. On occasion, I stepped forward and asked these women to use the gender-neutral terms "humane" and "humanity" instead, but to no avail.

(4) Iranian exiles favor US talks with Iran: In what the *Washington Post* characterizes as unexpected, a majority of Iranian-Americans and other exiles from Iran want to see the talks between US and Iran succeed and economic sanctions lifted. This reaction is "unexpected" only to those not informed about political developments and deep nationalistic sentiments in Iran. They think, somewhat simplistically, that people driven from their homeland would want to get even and feel vindicated by seeing it destroyed. **The article** mentions that religious minorities, particularly Jews, are more suspicious of the Iranian regime's motives in these talks.

(5) "The Very Best of Diana Krall": **Sixteen tracks**, including "The Look of Love," "I've Got You under My Skin," "Only the Lonely," "Fly Me to the Moon," and "Narrow Daylight." And for those who prefer to see Krall in person, here is a **110-minute video** of her concert in Rio.

(6) The observation deck at NYC's 1 World Trade Center: Occupying floors 100-102 and standing 1250 feet above street level, One World Observatory will open to the public on May 29, 2015. The fastest elevator system in the Western Hemisphere will provide the **60-second ride** to the top.

(7) Final thought for the day: "Every story I create, creates me. I write to create myself." ~ Octavia E. Butler

2015/05/21 (Thursday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Student victims remembered on the first anniversary of the Isla Vista mass shooting: UCSB is holding a number of on- and off-campus events in commemoration of the six students who perished and others who were injured during the mass shooting of May 23, 2014.



The College of Engineering, which lost 3 students studying computer science/engineering in that awful event (George Chen, Cheng-Yuan James Hong, and Weihan David Wang), has set up a memorial where students and staff can reflect, talk, and write messages addressed to their families and the campus community.

(2) UCSB West Campus beaches closing as the oil nears our area: Here is a *Los Angeles Times* pictorial composed of 41 **aerial and other photos** of the Santa Barbara area oil spill. The clean-up effort appears hopelessly low-tech to me. After saying that clean-up will take a few days and then a few weeks, now they are talking about a time-scale of months for the area's recovery. Santa Barbara had a much more serious spill (the third worst in history, after the 2010 Deepwater Horizon and 1989 Exxon Valdez spills) in 1969. Let's hope that, like the 1969 spill, this one leads to positive developments in terms of environmental regulations and societal awareness.

(3) Texas biker gangs declare war on the cops: Grenades and threat of car bombs for high-ranking law enforcement officials and their families; what's going on in this country?

(4) **I Madonnari:** Santa Barbara's Italian street-painting festival will be held this Memorial Day weekend, May 23-25. I will be occupied with the 5th annual Parhami Family Reunion on Sunday 5/24, but will definitely pay a visit to this highly enjoyable event on Saturday or Monday. Comment or message me if interested in joining.

(5) Deep research budget cuts in social-behavior and economic sciences: The latest National Science Foundation budget, **passed narrowly** by the US Congress on party-line vote, reduces funding for NSF programs in these areas by 55%. A presidential veto is a distinct possibility. As a rule, a veto threat works if a bill contains parts that the Republicans are passionate about, so that the possibility of no funding in those areas will lead them to compromise. Unfortunately, however, the Republican Congress won't lose any sleep if research in other areas also comes to a halt due to a lack of funding.

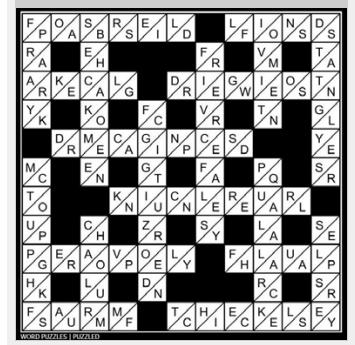
(6) A simple word puzzle: The following four words can all be completed using the same three-letter sequence. What is the sequence? H _ _ _ O; S H _ _ ; C _ _ A R; _ _ I P S E.

(7) On genetically modified foods: I know this is a controversial topic, but *Nesweek* magazine's **cover story** for its issue of May 29, 2015, provides ample arguments in support of GMO foods doing more good than harm.

2015/05/20 (Wednesday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Doublecross word puzzle: Delete one of the two letters in each square to turn this grid into a crossword puzzle.

(2) David Letterman's final show: I'll be watching "The Late Show with David Letterman" tonight to see the end of an era (and perhaps his last "Top Ten" list), even though I have not been a fan or regular watcher of the late-night program. Many celebrities are singing Letterman's praises, as he ends his talk show after 33 years, 11 years on NBC and 22 years on CBS. Jimmy Kimmel,



who watched Letterman as a schoolboy has said: "First period started at 7:35 a.m., but Dave was more important than sleep."

(3) "Excuses" PSA to help stop sexual violence: Well-known actresses and actors ask that we **stop using excuses** for sexual violence against women.

(4) Violence against women continues: A Turkish **talent-show singer was shot** in the head by her ex-boyfriend for daring to sing in public. We hear horrible news of this kind virtually every day. WHO is fully aware of the situation, and has a **fact sheet** (issued in November 2014) that ends with some recommended actions. Unfortunately, however, the actions are mostly "evidence gathering" in nature. We need bolder steps.

(5) Update on the Santa Barbara coastal oil spill: **The spill** may have been 5 times worse than initially reported (105,000, rather than 21,000 gallons) and it may take several weeks to clean up, rather than 2-3 days cited initially. This has become an established pattern for giving bad news to people: first reassure them that the problem isn't that serious and then break the real bad news.

(6) Musical Impressions: Jimmy Fallon and Jamie Foxx **take turns impersonating** Mick Jagger, Barry Gibb, John Legend, Bruce Springsteen, and Jennifer Hudson.

(7) Earth's water **fell on it in frozen lumps** 4.5B years ago: Since life as we know it could not exist without water, it is perhaps correct to say that life on earth came from space.

(8) [I hesitate to give Facebook etiquette lessons, but we all need them from time to time. I was prompted to post this advice by the large accumulation of friend requests on my FB account, to which I have not replied.] Dear madam/sir: If you come with a fake name, have no info about your background and interests on your page, and do not send a private message to explain why our friendship on Facebook is a good idea, please don't be surprised if you don't get a response.

2015/05/19 (Tuesday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Multiple cancer fundraising groups **accused of fraud**: These "charities" spent at most 3% of millions of dollars they raised on cancer causes and patients. The managers of these organizations, all related to each other by family ties and friendships, drew 6-figure salaries and led luxury lifestyles, including going on exotic vacations, from the funds raised.

(2) Arming our enemies in Afghanistan: The Taliban are **arming themselves** with M-16s and other American weapons which they buy from the black market, corrupt Afghan security forces, or the neighboring Iran.

(3) The North Korean dictator's "**Pleasure Squad**": Following in the footsteps of his father, Kim Jong-un has assembled a squad of young women, tasked with entertaining him, as a unit of the Korean People's Army.

(4) Bill Cosby finally addresses the **rape allegations** against him in an interview: But his answers are far from direct or satisfactory. He dodges the questions for the most part, and in no way denies any of the charges.

(5) Engineering school **computers hacked at Penn State**: According to university officials, Chinese hackers have been illegally accessing the school's computers for more than two years. This revelation may be a sign that the Chinese are using universities as a backdoor for gaining access to US commercial and defense secrets.

(6) **Fatal gunfight** between rival motorcycle gangs: Hundreds of bikers from 5 rival gangs fought with a variety of weapons outside a restaurant in Waco, Texas, leaving 9 dead, 18 injured, and 170 in custody.

(7) Oil spill on Santa Barbara beaches: About **21,000 gallons of oil leaked** from an on-shore pipeline on Refugio State Beach, 11 miles north of Santa Barbara Airport, where the leaked oil flowed into the ocean. UCSB is monitoring the situation and will send staff and students e-mail updates as conditions change. The US Coast Guard of the Los Angeles area is also providing info via a **Twitter feed**. At this time, there is no danger to our area and no foul smell, perhaps due to the direction of wind and ocean currents, but these may change. Clean-up is supposed to take 2 day, per official estimates, but many sources believe the estimate to be optimistic.

2015/05/17 (Sunday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Some wonderful Kurdish music to begin this beautiful Sunday. [**6-minute video**]

(2) Dancing in the air: Suspended by nearly invisible cables, these dancers/gymnasts perform resolutely and gracefully in this **8-minute routine**.

(3) Colbie Caillat's "Try": An **anthem for women** against societal expectations and beauty stereotypes.

(4) Visualizing how you would age: 20-something engaged man and woman are **aged by up to 70 years**. See their reactions, as they are made to look 50ish, 70ish, and 90ish by make-up artists.

(5) The Houston Rockets' amazing comeback: After trailing 1-3 in their 7-game series against the Los Angeles

Clippers, the Rockets came back to win three games in a row and the series. They will head to Oakland to start the Western Conference championship series against the Golden State Warriors on Tuesday May 19, 2015. The Rockets are the only NBA team to have come back twice from a 1-3 series deficit, the previous one having happened in 1995, when they claimed the NBA championship.

(6) Taking on the science deniers: Who better to do this than Bill Nye, nicknamed "The Science Guy"! Interviewed by [Newsweek magazine](#), Nye discusses a variety of topics, including his Kickstarter campaign for Planetary Society's solar sailing project, the importance of space missions, getting kids and more women interested in STEM fields, and the need to pay attention to political candidates and their stances on science. He ends by reminding everyone of US Constitution's Article 1, Section 8: "Congress shall promote the progress of science and the useful arts."

(7) Measles vaccine mystery may have been solved: Since five decades ago, it has been observed that measles vaccination also reduces death rates from other infectious diseases. Various theories were advanced over the years, including one that considers the relationship as correlation not causation, that is, those who vaccinate their kids are more likely to have better health care and nutrition in general. However, the significant reduction in death rates (up to 80% in some developing countries) was too great to be dismissed in this way. The latest research results [published in the journal Science](#) may hold the ultimate explanation. The measles virus effectively erases the immune system, making humans vulnerable to infectious diseases (even those they have already contracted) for 2-3 years.

(8) Final thought for the day: "I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy." ~ Rabindranath Tagore

2015/05/16 (Saturday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Muslim cartoonists are making fun of DAESH: This example cartoon is from a [Newsweek on-line article](#) posted on 5/14/2015. This is the only one of the cartoons in the article that contains some humor. The others are grim sociopolitical statements, rather than cartoons, as we know them in the West.



(2) In remembrance of the just-departed blues legend B. B. King [1925-2015]: "[The Thrill Is Gone](#)" performed live at Montreux. And in this [3-minute video clip](#), President Obama jams with King and other blues/rock legends, performing "Sweet Home Chicago."

(3) [This post is for computer science and engineering geeks only. All others should read at their own risk!] P = NP implies P = 0 or N = 1.

(4) Quote of the day: "From time immemorial, governments have ensured their survival by citing 'people's interests' as justification for silencing their critics." ~ Iranian writer/poet/songwriter Yaghma Golrouee, in the first of his two letters to President Rouhani, expressing disappointment that Rouhani's promised lifting of restrictions in literature and the arts have not materialized [Golrouee's official [Web site](#)]

(5) A US higher-education failure story: One of the biggest education news stories in this decade barely got a mention in the news media, yet it may define higher education in the US for years, if not decades. A private, for-profit entity, Corinthian Colleges, enrolled some 16,000 students before being shut down by the feds for educational and financial fraud. Meanwhile, former students of the institution are left with the burden of **education loans** that they have to repay, without the benefit of a college degree. Discussions are underway about ways to assist these students. Options include forgiving their debts (a significant cost to taxpayers) and allowing them to transfer to other for-profit colleges (some such "approved" colleges are themselves under investigation for fraud and, thus, may end up leaving students stranded down the road). Institutions such as Corinthian take advantage of the easy availability of educational loans to line their pockets, while leaving the taxpayers with the burden of cleaning up the mess.

(6) Seventh anniversary of [seven Bahai leaders](#) in Iran's prisons: They are nominally charged with spying and acting against national security, but their faith, and refusal to disavow it, are at the root of their convictions.

(7) Successful operation by US Army's Delta Force in Syria: [Pentagon sources indicate](#) that a senior DAESH commander was killed, his wife was captured, and a young Yezidi woman was set free.

2015/05/14 (Thursday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Cartoon of the day: Touka Neyestani's take on a promise by Tehran's mayor to convert the notorious Evin Prison into a city park.

(2) Quote of the day: "Emojis are fun, yes, but when your boss says he needs a report by noon, a thumbs-down and a screaming-face emoji is not an appropriate response." ~ Ellen Degeneres, impressing upon college



graduates, class of 2015, that they need to communicate in words

(3) On being a professor: An insightful *New York Times* [opinion piece](#) about how the role of a professor has changed from being a mentor and moral authority to an assessor, who is expected to dole out "A"s.

(4) Muslim women in a Dubai mall [object to two shoppers' clothing](#): These women are brainwashed into believing that their forced clothing is bliss, rather than infringement on their freedom. In Iran, too, such women make the job of decency police easy by acting as unpaid enforcers of backward and misogynistic laws.

(5) You can't take the music out of people's souls: This little Iranian schoolgirl knows full well about the restrictions on her clothing (which she observes, perhaps reluctantly) and on girls' singing (which she most definitely [does not observe](#)).

(6) A nice rendition of "[Bamboleo](#)": Simon Diaz's composition, performed by Shirin & Thomas on piano and Kerstin & Herman on percussion.

(7) Wonderful ragtime version of Johannes Brahms' "[Hungarian Dance No. 5](#)" (YouTube video post includes downloadable PDF file of the score for those interested).

(8) What a talent! This pianist performs [ragtime music](#) from Super Mario Brothers video games by reading the sheet music given to him, despite never having played the video games or even heard the tune before.

2015/05/13 (Wednesday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) Mildred Dresselhaus, the Queen of Carbon Science: The May 2015 issue of *IEEE Spectrum* magazine devotes its cover story to the MIT Professor of Physics and Electrical Engineering, with a long list of honors, who is particularly known for her contributions to our understanding of graphite, graphite intercalation compounds, Fullerenes, carbon nanotubes, and low-dimensional thermoelectrics.



(2) Quote of the day: "Nothing in this world is harder than speaking the truth, nothing easier than flattery." ~ Fyodor Dostoyevsky

(3) "Frozen" characters dance to Michael Jackson's "[Thriller](#)": And here are "Frozen" kids [doing the same dance](#).

(4) Blondie music: Directory with [links to MP3 files](#), which includes a subdirectory for the 2002 "Greatest Hits" album.

(5) 3D glass drawing: Pencil drawing that creates the illusion of a glass filled with water (it appears very real only near the end of [the video](#)).

(6) Iranian woman's exhibit at the Guggenheim: Tehran-based Monir Farmanfarmaian, 91, is the first Iranian artist with a solo exhibition (entitled "[Mirrored Marvels](#)" and running through June 3, 2015) at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City.

(7) Amtrak train derailment in Philadelphia: Seven passengers were killed and dozens were injured, some seriously, when an Amtrak train derailed today, while traveling at 106 mph, more than twice the speed limit at the particular stretch of track. These kinds of accidents are very unfortunate, not only for the losses and injuries, but also because they set back the cause of rail transport, one of the most efficient means of transportation in terms of fuel efficiency, infrastructure maintenance, traffic congestion, and air pollution. A train traveling at twice the speed limit is a travesty in this age of electronic technology, when simple sensors and regulators are available for monitoring everything.

(8) Hackers attack Starbucks phone apps: Those with Starbucks apps on their phones should read this cautionary story on [CNN-Money](#), in view of many instances of hackers breaking into Starbucks accounts and draining bank, credit-card, or PayPal accounts that are linked to the app for automatic reloading purposes. Starbucks claims that the intrusions were due to weak user passwords, but almost all companies whose computers are hacked do not come clean right away.

(9) Final thought for the day: "The second half of a man's life is made up of nothing but the habits he has accumulated during the first half." ~ Fyodor Dostoyevsky

2015/05/12 (Tuesday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Cartoon of the day: The 28th Tehran International Book Fair (Cartoonist: Mana Neyestani).

(2) A successful Iranian singer in exile: Tara Tiba left Iran after an album she recorded was not given the necessary permits for distribution. She

went to Australia and studied jazz, because she felt its improvisational style is a good match to classical Persian music. Her songs now combine the two musical traditions in a delightful way. This [BBC Persian video](#) contains interview segments and samples of her work in exile.



(3) Nepal hit by another strong quake: Distraught Nepalese were shocked by, and previously weakened buildings collapsed from, a 7.3-magnitude quake two weeks after the devastating 7.8 tremor. The latest reports indicate at least 70 new deaths and hundreds of injuries. Aftershocks are still continuing.

(4) Two UCSB students hospitalized with gunshot wounds: An out-of-towner and a Goleta resident (gang members, who themselves suffered injuries in the altercation that occurred last night around 7:15 PM on the 6500 block of Sabado Tarde Road in Isla Vista) are being treated at the Goleta Valley Cottage Hospital, along with the two victims. The suspects will be booked on multiple charges upon release from the hospital. Coming just 12 days before the one-year anniversary of the 2014 Isla Vista mass shooting, [this new incident](#) has caused great concern among people in our area and on the UCSB campus.

(5) Iranian authorities must be held accountable by the Western media: The arrest of Narges Mohammadi brings under question both the claim by Iranian authorities that there are no political prisoners in Iran and the lip service paid to the high status of women under Islamic law. Coming on the heels of the closure of *Zanan-e Emrooz*, the only Iranian magazine devoted to women's issues, [the new arrest](#) on trumped up charges of endangering national security and the ridiculous charge of being one of the founders of a group whose goal is the gradual elimination of the death penalty (a goal that is viewed as anti-Islamic), directly contradicts statements by President Rouhani and FM Javad Zarif.

(6) The growth of anti-intellectualism in the US: It seems that what the Islamic Revolution brought to Iran overnight has been happening here in the US at a slow, but steady pace. America's sociopolitical fabric has been infused with anti-elites, anti-reason, and anti-science foundations. According to the late US Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, symptoms include the triumph of video culture over print culture and shaky grasps of geography, history, and science, despite rising levels of formal education. This [Psychology Today article](#) draws from a number of sources on the subject.

(7) Cyberbullies from the Islamic Republic: On her [Stealthy Freedom Facebook page](#), Masih Alinejad posted the following (in both Persian and English): "The Iranian government hire[s] people to mock and insult both the women and their supporters on this [F]acebook page. They are cowards, hiding behind false identities, sure in the knowledge they will never be brought to book for their malice and lies. They are not clever enough to realise that with every slur, every abusive word, all they do is make us more determined to see justice done for the women of Iran—women who remain more beautiful and more brave than the scum who prop up such a corrupt regime could ever hope to be."

One commenter, using the fake name Bruna Moreira, along with very sexy profile and cover photos, criticized Alinejad for "selling her homeland" and collected 150+ likes within minutes, all from individuals with similarly fakes IDs and profiles. The same comment is repeated verbatim by a number of other fake users, all having non-Iranian names but writing fluently in Persian! It is very interesting that a government that claims a divine mission and near-unanimous popular support finds itself so scared of and powerless against a mere Facebook page that it has to unleash dozens of cyberbullies to mud-sling with baseless accusations.

2015/05/10 (Sunday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Happy Mothers' Day to all wonderful mothers in the world, including my own, and to all mothers-to-be and mothers who left us too soon. While every day should be Mothers' Day, there is no harm in extra-special recognition on this particular day.

(2) Do you really think that telling your mom "Happy Mothers' Day" makes up for [all you did](#) as a baby?

(3) Quote of the day: "There is a way to do it better—find it." ~ Thomas Edison



(4) A small step toward establishing US-Iran diplomatic relations: The "Iranian Interests Section" in Washington and the Swiss Embassy's "US Interests Section" in Tehran will be getting [new, expanded digs](#) as part of an agreement in the ongoing negotiations between the two countries.

(5) A Gallery as Big as a Town: This is the title of a Tehran municipality project that has replaced commercial and political messages on billboards with [works of art](#) by foreign and Iranian artists.

(6) DNA printing enters the commercial realm: Some companies are now 3D-printing and selling DNA. The new development has excited scientists, who have many uses for such tailored **strings of genetic material** in research studies to find new medical treatments and engineering new crops.

(7) A half dozen jokes, told from a retired person's perspective. [Thanks to Farrokh Elmieh.]

-I'm not saying we should kill all the stupid people; let's just remove all the warning labels and the problem will work itself out.

-You can tell a lot about a woman's mood just by her hands. If they are holding a gun, she's probably pissed.

-You know that tingly feeling you get when you really like someone you've just met? That's common sense leaving your body.

-I don't make plans for the day, because then the word "premeditated" gets thrown around in the courtroom.

-I call the bathroom "the jim" instead of "the john"; I feel so much better saying I went to the Jim this morning.

-Dear paranoid people who check behind shower curtains for murderers. If you find one, what's your plan?

2015/05/09 (Saturday): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Walking tour of the Campbell Ranch: This morning, I went on a 2.5-mile walking tour of the UCSB West Campus area, spanning the faculty housing complex where I live, UCSB Children's Center, former Devereux School Campus, the Devereux Slough, Coal Oil Point, Cliff House, remnants of a beach house, the Red Barn and its surrounding horse stables, beginning and ending at the Isla Vista School. We had some very knowledgeable tour guides who explained the history of the area where I live.

The Campbell Ranch was the West Coast home to Colin P. Campbell, a British military officer, and his family from its purchase in 1919 to the time his heirs sold it to Devereux Foundation in the mid-1940s.

I took quite a few photos and was planning to share them as parts of this post, but discovering an on-line article from 2012, with detailed explanations and wonderful photos, I decided to share a [link to the article](#) instead.

The Ranch's main building, the Campbell House, designed by architect Mary Osborne Craig (who also designed other important structures in the Santa Barbara area), is now part of the Devereux property purchased by UCSB a few years ago. The house looks fine from the outside, but has not been maintained and remains closed to the public. Among the structures that remain (wholly or in part) are a historic barn (with adjacent horse stables and equestrian fields that are still in use), a partial bridge across the mouth of the Devereux Slough (the area is habitat to a wide assortment of bird species), a beach house where the Campbells partied (only a chimney and some graffiti-covered walls remain), and the gate to a bluff-top cemetery with a stone cross.

Other than the guides, we were accompanied on this tour by the 102-year-old Bob Snow, who walked the entire route with us and supplied colorful commentary and memories from his life on the ranch as the son of the Campbells' resident chauffeur.

(2) In the UK, **conservatives gain seats** to win a 51% majority: It seems that conservatives are gaining ground, which does not bode well for the upcoming US elections.

(3) Part of the Himalayas is now 1 meter lower: The devastating Nepal quake literally moved mountains, causing part of the Himalayas range to **sink by about one meter**. This is temporary, though, as the drop will be balanced by the normal uplift due to tectonic activity. So, if you want to climb Mt. Everest, do it soon to save one meter of climbing.

(4) Joke of the day: This joke is about the dire consequence of a man deciding to smile at everyone, as is often advised on Facebook and other social-media posts. He began by smiling at a young woman, who chided him for being a dirty old man. A young man told him that he didn't play these games. An old woman shamed him by asking if he didn't have a mother. And so on. So, he gave up on smiling and will try using profanities next.

(5) Extremists to President Rouhani's government: If you let **women into sports stadiums**, we'll cause an "earthquake" (we will deal with you harshly).

(6) Mr. Haloo's final poem before starting his jail term at Evin: **The poem** enumerates a number of sociopolitical ills, concluding at the end of each stanza that the solution to the ill is arresting Mr. Haloo (and poets in general).

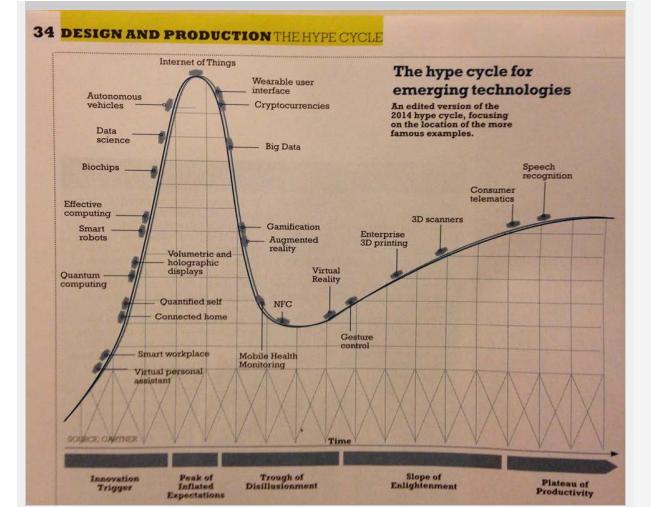
2015/05/07 (Thursday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) The hype cycle for emerging technologies: This roller-coaster-type curve shows how emerging technologies reach a peak of inflated expectations after the initial innovation, sink due to disillusionment, reach a phase of steady but slow engineering advances, and finally settle on a plateau of productivity. Internet of Things is currently at the peak and ready to begin its plunge, quantum computing is just beginning its climb,

and 3D printing is nearing the productivity plateau.

[Image credit: E&T magazine, issue of May 2015]

(2) Quote of the day: "Simplicity is always the key. Get in there. Sing the song. Get out. I'm not big on a hundred takes and a thousand overdubs. My kind of singing isn't meant to be perfect. It's meant to reflect the imperfections of a human being like me." ~ Willie Nelson, on musical recording



(3) The race to tame **quantum computing**: Developing this new technology is starting to look like the Manhattan Project for the 21st Century in that the country to get there first is likely to dominate the world in the ongoing cyberwar.

(4) Energy scavenging to enter the commercial realm: Nikola Labs will be rolling out a Kickstarter fundraising campaign in June to build and market an iPhone case that provides energy to the device by converting radio frequencies into power. Despite the title of [this article](#), the case does not charge the iPhone battery but rather causes it to be drained less quickly.

(5) All 51 volumes of Harvard Classics available for free: When chosen in 1909, these classics were thought of as constituting a "portable university," a 5-foot shelf of books that could provide a good substitute for a liberal education. You may disagree with some of the selections, but as a freely available collection, they serve a great purpose. [This article](#) has various links that lead you to e-book versions or scans of the original classics.

(6) Smoking kills: A very clever anti-smoking [public-service announcement](#).

(7) Cyber-to-physical infrastructure attacks: In [an article](#), cleverly entitled "From Russia with Malware," Newsweek magazine reveals several near-misses when unknown hackers almost broke down the US electrical, water, and fuel distribution systems. Kremlin has an army of sophisticated hackers at its service and it isn't shy about deploying them. Chinese hackers are only slightly less capable of inflicting damage to the US infrastructure and critical industrial sites.

(8) Final thought for the day: "Leaving an unkind word unsaid is an act of kindness." ~ Anonymous

2015/05/06 (Wednesday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) Gun accidents kill/injure 10,000 kids per year: It is estimated that 3000 children die and more than 7000 are injured in the US as a result of gun "accidents" each year. I have seen 6 Facebook posts about such accidents over the past few days alone. If a disease killed as many kids, parents would be up in arms, demanding that the problem be dealt with promptly. Why not the same sensitivity to gun deaths?



(2) Amazingly simple and efficient **agricultural technology**: How lettuce and other vegis are grown super-efficiently in terms of space and water use.

(3) Quote of the day: "It would not be beyond the realms of possibility that somewhere outside of our own universe lies another, different universe and, in that universe, Zayn is still in One Direction." ~ Stephen Hawking

(4) A different kind of wedding crashers: Maroon 5 [crashes weddings](#), making some lucky couples very happy.

(5) The word "the" is terrible: This is one of the musings of US Senator Lindsey Graham, who has declared **everything that starts with "al"** in the Middle East bad, apparently oblivious to the fact that "al" means "the." Come to think of it, he might have a point. Even here in the US, we had/have Al Capone (definitely a bad guy) and Al Pacino (who has played bad guys). And no algebra and algorithms in schools from now on!

(6) Joke of the day: A trader had set up shop on a sidewalk selling apricots for \$2 a pound and apricot pits for \$4 a pound. A man asked the trader why the pits were more expensive, to which he replied that they improve brain health and mental sharpness. Convinced, the man bought a pound of apricot pits and started cracking and eating them. After a few minutes, the man thought to himself that he should have bought apricots, because then he could have eaten the fruit as well as the pits, while also paying less. Returning to the seller, the man

explained his thinking. The trader's response: "I told you they improve mental sharpness! And how quickly they worked!"

(7) Views from the Matterhorn: Christian Mulhauser climbed Switzerland's notorious mountain three times in late 2012 to make this beautiful [4-minute film](#). He stayed some nights at an altitude of 8860 feet, at a temperature of 10 degrees Fahrenheit, to capture spectacular views of the sky where there is no light contamination.

(8) Let's hope Hillary Clinton offers believable explanations for seeming financial improprieties: Writing in *Time* magazine, issue of May 11, 2015, Joe Klein (a staunch Democrat) indicates his extreme unease with the way the Clinton Global Initiative charity has been accepting money from questionable sources (most are reputable donors, but they become murky, given the context, including their dealings with the State Department during Ms. Clinton's tenure there), while enriching themselves with six-figure speaking fees. He concludes that it would be a shame if Clinton were elected US President as the lesser of two evils.

(9) Final thought for the day: "Cold tea and cold rice are bearable, but cold looks and cold words are not." ~ Japanese proverb

2015/05/05 (Tuesday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Teachers' Day: May 5 is the US national day to remember and honor teachers. Prompted by several former students and others from Iran, who sent me congratulatory messages on May 2 (teachers' day in Iran) and a few more who sent messages today, I am sharing this post now. Some of us have been lucky to have had great teachers, who not only taught us about various subjects but also instilled in us self-confidence and a sense of social responsibility. For me, the four best teachers were my father, Salem Parhami, Professor Robert Short of Oregon State University, and Professors Gerald Estrin and Algirdas Avizienis of UCLA (all but the last one now deceased). I am sad to say that none of my teachers in Iran stand out among this elite group (some were good in classroom techniques, but none of them truly cared about students or pushed them to take charge or to become better people or conscientious scientists/engineers). All of us have also had less worthy teachers, who wasted our time or did not put any value or trust in us as human beings. However, just as there are no bad books, because one learns valuable lessons from any book, there are also no bad teachers. Happy Teachers' Day to all hardworking and conscientious teachers around the world, and sincere thanks to my students (in-class or via my books and other published works) who were kind enough to send me notes of appreciation over the past few days.



(2) Iranian human-rights activist arrested and charged with [national security crimes](#): Narges Mohammadi has been in and out of prison in recent years and was recently released for health reasons. This is yet another proof of Javad Zarif's claim that there are no political prisoners in Iran!

(3) Quote of the day: "Smartphone, smartphone, on a stick! Who has the fairest profile pic?" ~ From "Snow White and the Seven Apps"

(4) Forty questions to refocus your mind: I found most of these [photo-illustrated questions](#) quite useful. My top five selections are as follows.

*What can you do today that you were not capable of a year ago?

*What word best describes the way you've spent the last month of your life?

*What have you done that you are truly proud of?

*What's the number one change you need to make in your life in the next twelve months?

*What issues do you continually refuse to confront?

(5) Western music performed Chinese style: Mesmerizing [instrumental cover](#) of "See You Again."

(6) Karma, or as we say in Persian: "The well-digger is at the bottom of the ditch." [[22-second video](#)]

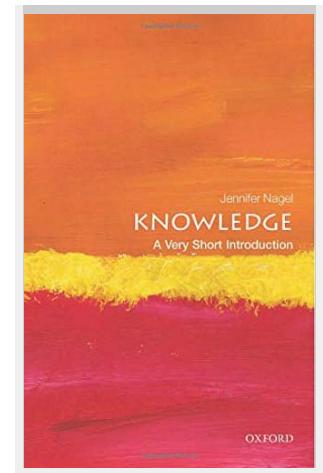
(7) Nepalese engineering students to inspect buildings: They will assess quake damage to either allow the building to be used or else decide on the needed corrective actions. Here's [the story](#) from *Los Angeles Times*.

(8) You'd think that countries would be criticized for NOT sending aid to Nepal: Israel is likely the only country criticized for sending a contingent of doctors and search-and-rescue specialists to help in the disaster areas. The [reason cited for the criticism](#): Israel is using propaganda to deflect attention from the crisis in Gaza.

2015/05/04 (Monday): Nagel, Jennifer, *Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, 2014.

This is the fourth book in Oxford's extensive "Very Short Introduction" series that I have read recently, the other 3 being on microeconomics, geopolitics, and genes. Like other books in the series, this 133-page pocket-size book is packed with information and is presented in an accessible and engaging form.

The subject matter of this book is epistemology, the philosophical investigation of



what we can know. In other words, the book deals with questions such as what we know, how we know that we know something, and how we know that someone else knows something. These are all surprisingly difficult philosophical questions. The book's 8 chapters are entitled "Introduction," "Scepticism" (I will use American spellings from now on), "Rationalism and Empiricism," "The Analysis of Knowledge," "Internalism and Externalism," "Testimony," "Shifting Standards?" and "Knowing about Knowing." The book's main body is followed by 9 pages of references and 4 pages of further readings.

Let me begin by asking whether there is a real difference between knowledge and opinion/belief? Most of us think that there is, but formulating exactly how they are different is no easy task. Classically, knowledge has been defined in terms of belief, with certain conditions attached. The truth of the belief and its justifiability are two such conditions that lead to knowledge being considered wise judgment.

Like all philosophical notions, the definition of knowledge as justified true belief doesn't fare well upon closer scrutiny. Here is an example due to Bertrand Russell. A man looking at a broken clock that happens to show the correct time has justified true belief about time, but not knowledge of time. Here is a second story. You go to a bakery just before closing time and see 3 loaves in a display case. Can you claim that your statement "thank goodness they still have the 3 loaves that I need" is based on knowledge, if one of the loaves turns out to be a real-looking display prop, but the baker subsequently finds another loaf in an out-of-sight bin? A third example is seeing a mirage, thinking that there is water ahead, and then actually discovering water ahead in an out-of-view pond. Many more examples of this kind were presented beginning in 1963 by Edmund Gettier, so that such stories became known as Gettier cases.

There are different views of justifiability in various schools of philosophy. Internalists, for example, require that one have first-person access to some justification, whereas externalists accept one's standing in the "right relation" to the truth. In the latter case, you have knowledge of the theory of evolution if evidence-based knowledge of researchers was conveyed to you by a teacher. There are additional complications. Suppose that a teacher who has no first-person evidence for the theory of evolution, or perhaps even does not personally believe in it, teaches students about evolution because it is part of the curriculum. Does the teacher impart knowledge to the students? Can we then say that the students know the theory?

There is also intuitive vs. demonstrative knowledge. In the former, the brain makes a direct connection between two ideas or facts; in the latter, a chain of connecting ideas is needed to grasp the agreement or disagreement of a pair of ideas. In this context, knowledge is the perception of agreement or disagreement.

Skeptics require an extremely high standard of justification for knowledge. This view is hardly helpful, because it leads to us knowing nearly nothing. For example, any sensory-based belief can be dismissed by asking: "Are you sure that your sensations are real, as opposed to being signals fed to your brain that has been placed in a vat?" A possible response is: If you understand what vats are, you can't be a brain in a vat. But of course the skeptics have found a way around this counter-argument. Perhaps you are a brain in a vat only since yesterday or since an hour ago, so you do know what a vat is because you lived a normal life earlier. Skeptics believe that one can suspend judgment about any truth by asking questions and trying to balance the two sides indefinitely and that doing so will bring peace of mind.

Another approach to thinking about knowledge is to say that knowledge is a fundamental (atomic) concept that cannot be defined in terms of other concepts. Supporting this view is the fact that an educated person has a vocabulary of about 20,000 words, of which fewer than 100 have precise translations in every language: "knowledge" is one of them; "think" is another one. Those who take this view propose that it is belief that should be defined in terms of knowledge, and not the other way around.

Experimental philosophy poses a question about whether something constitutes knowledge and then polls a group of people to decide the outcome. Here is an example question: Bob says that he knows Jane is driving an American car, based on prior knowledge that she owns a Buick. However, he does not know that Jane's Buick was totaled a few days ago and she replaced it with a Pontiac, another American car. Bob believes that Jane drives an American car, his belief is true, and he is justified in holding that belief. Yet most of the people polled said that he does not possess knowledge in this case.

IMHO, it is fruitless to try to come up with precise definitions of imprecise concepts using a tool (natural language) that is also imprecise. There is no escape from the fuzziness of certain concepts expressed in natural

language. Consider, for example, the conditions under which my statement "It is hot today" constitutes knowledge. According to the classical theory, it is knowledge if it is true that it's hot, I believe that it's hot, and I'm justified in believing that it's hot. Yet if all of these conditions hold, someone else may disagree with the statement. Contextualism attempts to remove such objections by postulating that knowing is context-dependent ("hot" in the African Sahara is different from "hot" in Alaska) and requires a higher standard if a lot is at stake. Some would say, however that contextualism is merely skepticism in disguise.

In the course of trying to define knowledge and relate it to other concepts, many interesting ideas are presented by the author. One such idea is that before the modern era of philosophy began in the 1600s, absurd "theories" passed as philosophy. A notable example is the claim that there cannot possibly be more than 7 planets, or heavenly bodies other than the stars, given that there are only 7 holes in an animal's head (eyes, ears, nostrils, and mouth).

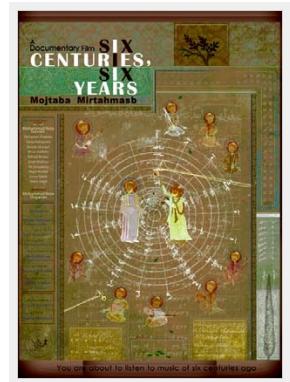
A second interesting idea pertains to mindreading, which is often viewed as nonscientific hype. Yet we do read minds (track the mental states of other people) hundreds of times per day. Mindreading is the attribution of the underlying mental states: wanting, fearing, thinking, knowing, hoping, and the like. Like face recognition, mindreading has its own specialized brain area.

Finally, here's a third interesting idea. When concepts become nested, as in "Davis thinks that Lee knows that Smith doesn't want Jones to find out ... , " we quickly lose track; most adults manage only 5 levels before they break down; with practice, one may be able to get to 9 levels, but no more. This is akin to the tracking of moving objects on a screen. Most people reach their limit at 5 objects, with heavy video-gamers doing a tad better.

2015/05/03 (Sunday): Here are four items of potential interest.

(1) "Six Centuries, Six Years": This is the title of a documentary film ("Shesh Gharn o Shesh Saal," in Persian, with English subtitles) by Mojtaba Mirtahmasb screened this afternoon as part of UCLA's Lecture Series on Iran. The film screening was to be followed by a discussion with the director, but he could not obtain his US visa in time to participate.

This wonderful and enjoyable film portrays the efforts of a group of Iranian master musicians, under the direction of Mohammad-reza Darvishi and with participation of Homayoun Shajarian and his esteemed father, Mohammad-reza Shajarian, who spent 6 years to locate, restore, and record the music of Abd al-Qadir Maraghi (a name evolved from "Maragheh-ee," meaning "from Maragheh," in Persian), who lived 6 centuries ago. The project, culminating in a 3-CD music album (**"Shogh Nameh"**) and [this documentary film](#), is a major contribution to the history of music in Iran.



What we now know as traditional or classical Persian music actually dates back only to the Qajar era. The style of music composed by Maraghi more or less disappeared from Iran, when Maraghi's sons fled Iran during the Teymoorian's rule and resettled in the Ottoman Empire. There, they had a major influence of the musical traditions of the Ottomans and, later, Turkey. Maraghi's music (which actually may not be his alone, but rather the work of a group of musicians who composed and collected music from various regions) used poems by Hafez, Rumi, and a few other poets in a rather unique way: Words were in the service of the music, and not the other way around, so that it is often difficult to make out the lyrics (in contrast to more recent Persian music in which enunciation is much clearer).

[Here are the documentary's [Facebook page](#), [trailer](#), and [1-minute sample](#) (from the final mixing phase of the project, showing Mohammad-reza Shajarian praise the music discovery and restoration work, as well as his son's perseverance in performing the extremely challenging vocals).]

(2) Quote of the day: "I realized that it was necessary, once in the course of my life, to demolish everything completely and start again right from the foundations if I wanted to establish anything at all in the sciences that was stable and likely to last." ~ Rene Descartes

(3) On non-viable presidential candidates: Much has been made of the declared candidacy of Senator Bernie Sanders for US president. Let me begin by stating unequivocally that I have no doubts about the sincerity and integrity of Senator Sanders. I enjoy reading his well-researched and data-backed observations about the US economy, the widening rich-poor gap, and the rising influence of money in politics. Now to the gist of my message: His candidacy will end up hurting progressive causes, much like Ralph Nader's costing Gore the presidency (I have read multiple articles that claim to debunk the "myth" of Nader affecting the outcome of the 2000 elections, but found their arguments very weak in every case). Admitting that Sanders himself has no chance of being elected, some of his supporters point to the positive effects he may have on shaping the policies of the Democratic front-runner. But this is a double-edged sword: Yes, leaning a bit to the left will attract some of the left-leaning Democrats, but it will likely alienate a larger number of the undecided voters at the center. The final outcome is of course dependent on the eventual candidates. The damage from Sanders will be less or

nonexistent if an extreme right-wing Republican emerges from the primaries, which is rather unlikely. All in all, I am extremely worried about another GWB occupying the White House because of the idealism of a progressive, but non-viable, candidate.

(4) What your Facebook likes reveal about your personality: A lot it seems. In [research just published](#) in *Proceedings of National Academy of Sciences*, Stanford and Cambridge researchers used a scientifically accepted personality test to determine whether your friends or an algorithm using data on FB likes can gauge your personality better. The conclusion was that taking advantage of FB likes, which are some of the most basic fingerprints we leave on the Internet, the computer can always outperform humans.

2015/05/01 (Friday): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Persian poetry with English translations: In this blog entry, I provide some information about on-line resources for Persian poetry with English translations. The combination is rather rare.

There are numerous sites where one can find the works of Persian poets in Persian; [ganjoor.net](#), my favorite, is both comprehensive and keyword-searchable. There are also sites specifically devoted to Hafez and Mowlavi/Rumi, among others.

I have also found many sources for translated poems, without the original Persian versions. In fact, in many cases, particularly with the works of Mowlavi/Rumi, it is extremely difficult to relate the purported translations to the original poems. I suspect (and others have pointed this out as well) that in many cases, English verses attributed to Rumi aren't actual translations of his poems, but verses written by others in his style or following his philosophy. Hence, my interest in combined Persian/English sources, where the authenticity of translations is readily verifiable by a Persian-speaker.

The gold standard of translated Persian poems is Edward FitzGerald's translation of Khayyam's Rubaiyat. Various PDF and on-line versions are available, the legality of which I don't know (unfortunately, most are without the Persian originals); the Gutenberg Project's site offers a free and legal [English-only version](#).

Here are some bilingual sources as starters. I will expand this list over time, as I chance upon more information. Please let me know if you want to contribute new links.

Hafez "Divan" (Turn the book's pages)

Hafez on Love: Ghazals and rubaiyat

Khayyam: a few quatrains, with multiple translations

Mowlavi/Rumi: Zara Houshmand's translations

Mowlavi/Rumi: Persian versions transliterated

Nezami: "Layli & Majnun" and other works

Various: Modern Persian poetry

Various: Mostly contemporary poems

Various: "Persian Poetry in English" on FB



(2) May Day: We white-collar workers seldom come in close contact with the so-called blue-collar workforce. We see them around and appreciate their indispensable contributions to our society, but are prone to be unaware of their daily struggles, which are fundamentally the same as our own: worrying about health, family budget, kids, elder parents, insurance, and old-age security. There is one fundamental difference, though: they have to face these issues with far fewer resources and often with less support. All of our conveniences, the house we live in, the infrastructure we use, the food we eat, and so on, would not exist without them. Happy International Workers' Day to all hardworking citizens of the world!

(3) Javad Zarif's interview with Charlie Rose: In [this interview](#), Zarif repeated the blatant lie that the Islamic Republic does not imprison any reporters or political dissidents. According to Zarif, those who are imprisoned are law-breakers hiding behind journalism or political activism. Throughout the interview, Zarif deflected all serious questions with a smile, followed by talking about unrelated issues. He is either out of the loop and doesn't know what is going on in his country or worse, does know and pretends that all people who are imprisoned in Iran are criminals. Someday, he will have to answer to the people of Iran about all the lies and half-truths he has told during such interviews.

(4) German police **neutralizes terrorist attack** ahead of a May Day bicycle race: One of the two suspects, seen surveying the popular race's route, has Salafist militant ties. He had tried to buy chemicals used in explosives under a false name.

(5) A ride through the ages: Three beautiful and fun-loving women **lip-sync and dance** inside a car to popular songs from different eras.

(6) Modern Persian music: "Eshgh" ("Love") is the title of a [new music video](#) by the Iranian diva Googoosh.

2015/04/30 (Thursday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) A Persian poem by Ali Heidari: Selected verses from this beautiful poem , entitled "Beh Khod Ay" ("Come to Your Senses"), are being circulated in e-mails and social-media

posts, with attribution to Mowlavi/Rumi.

(2) Modern Persian music: The song "**Bahaar-e Delneshin**" ("Pleasant Spring") performed by the Paris-Orient Philharmonic Orchestra (Bahar), under the direction of Arash Fouladvand. The performance was part of a 2013 Voice of Peace Concert in Paris. [Arash Fouladvand's [Facebook page](#)]

(3) Nostalgic Iranian **TV ad from the early 1970s**: The black-and-white ad is for 45 RPM phonograph records of "Tavalodet Mobaarak" (the Persian birthday song) that had just been released at the time.

(4) Radio Hamrah (in persian): [Live audio streaming](#)

(5) Directory of [John Denver music](#), with links to MP3 files.

(6) Batteries to power homes: Tesla has just rolled out batteries with enough storage capacity to power a home. When linked with solar cells or wind turbines, **home batteries** can eliminate or sharply reduce our electric bills.

Like the electric cars by the same name, the batteries are quite expensive at present, but with competition and technology advances, prices are sure to fall in the coming years. These batteries will do to the utilities business what the Internet did to cable TV and phone industries. Customers will be able to draw cheaper power from the grid at non-peak times, storing it for peak-time use, and their consumption will also be reduced if they use solar cells that are becoming cheaper and more efficient.

(7) Final thought for the day: "What do we live for, if not to make life less difficult for each other." ~ George Eliot

2015/04/29 (Wednesday): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Brief book review: Krols, Birgit, *Accidental Inventions: The Chance Discoveries that Changed Our Lives*, Insight Editions, 2009.

This is a "light" read, a la children's books, with one-paragraph descriptions accompanying 2-3 pages of pictures. So, one might consider it as a respite from more serious reading. Because the descriptions of inventions are independent of each other, one can pick up this coffee-table book, read a few randomly chosen pages, and still get some interesting/useful information out of it.

It is well-known that many inventions have come about accidentally, when the "inventor" was looking for something else or looking for nothing at all. Mark Twain opined that, "Accident is the name of the greatest of all inventors." Isaac Asimov put it this way: "The most exciting phrase to hear in science, the one that heralds new discoveries, is not 'Eureka!' but 'That's funny!'"

Today, we use "serendipity" to describe finding something unexpected and useful, when looking for something completely different. In the words of Dutch researcher Pek Van Andel, "[Serendipity is] trying to find a needle in a haystack and tumbling out with a beautiful country girl."

Some of the accidental inventions described in this book are quite amusing, while other accounts seem a bit unlikely. Let me provide a representative list of widely used inventions and how they came about.

Bubble Wrap: Attempts to develop a new type of wallpaper that was easy to hang and clean.

Frisbee: Shallow pie tins thrown about by employees of the world-famous Frisbie Baking Company in Connecticut.

Matchsticks: British chemist John Walker's use of a stick to stir a new explosive mixture and then trying to remove the hardened material on the sticks by scraping them over the floor.

Microwave Oven: Sticky mess from chocolate in a Raytheon employee's pocket, when he walked past a radar unit.

Post-it Notes: A 3M scientist's experimentation for creating a strong



تو آنی، خود نو جان جهان
گرنهانی و عیانی ...
تو همانی تو همانی ...
که همه عمر به دنال خودت، نعره زنانی و زنانی
و زنانی و زنانی ...
که تو آن نقطه مشقی و تو اسراز نهانی ...
له چنان که تو گویی، نه چنین که تو خوانی ...
همه چای تو نه یک جا، همه پایی تو ...
نه یک با همانه که گفتند و شنیدی و تو دانی ...
همه ای، با همه ای، بی همه ای، همه‌ای تو
نه سماون، نه زمینه ...
تو شود با غ پنهانی ...
ملکوتی ...
تو به خود آنده از فلسفه چون و چرا بی ...
به تو سوگند ...
گر این راز، شنبده و ترسیدی و بدار شدی ...
در همه افلاک خدایی ...
نه کفرخانه، نه چون آب در اندام سیوی ...
خود اویی ...
خود اویی ...
به خود آ ...
تا به در خانه متروکه هر عابد و زاهد ...
به گذاری نشیپی ...
و به چیز روشن و شعشهه برتو خود، هیچ نیشی ...
و گل وصل نجینی ...
به خود آی ...
حقیقت نه به زنگ است و نه بر ...
نه به های ایست و نه هر ...
نه به این ایست و نه او ...
نه به جام و نه سیو ...
گر به این نقطه رسیدی ...
به تو آهسته و سیسته و در پرده گوییم ...
ناکس جز من و تو شنود این راز گهرباره ...
آن چه گفتند و سروندان

glue, gone wrong.

Potato Chips: A chef's overreaction to constant patron complaints about his potato slices being too chunky.

Safety Glass: Careless employee forgetting to wash a glass flask after filling it with nitrocellulose, followed by the boss accidentally dropping the flask and noting that while the glass shattered, its pieces stayed together.

Silly Putty: James Wright's search for synthetic car-tire rubber.

Tea Bags: Fancy sheer packaging used by tea trader Thomas Sullivan instead of the then common tin cans, leading to some of his customers not removing the paper before using the tea inside.

(2) Quote of the day: "I wish my stove came with a 'Save As' button like Word has. That way I could experiment with my cooking and not fear ruining my dinner." ~ Jarod Kintz

(3) Magnificent old bridges around the world. [[Pictorial](#)]

(4) Humanoid robot is a hit: At the Global Sources Mobile Electronics Show, Han, a lifelike humanoid robot with conversational skills and facial expressions, **attracted much attention**.

(5) Conflict between modernity and tradition: *New York Times'* Man in Tehran reports on the dilemma faced by **modern, independent women**. [Look for other videos in the series "Our Man in Tehran."]

(6) An Australian newspaper's take on mandatory hijab: In the cartoon accompanying [this story](#), President Rouhani is telling the translator standing next to him, "We appreciate such deference to our cultural sensitivities. Please congratulate her husband." This caption is quite insightful. From the viewpoint of Islamic clerics, a woman who does something admirable or is virtuous must have a good husband.

2015/04/28 (Tuesday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Donating to Nepal victims: Please be wary of phone calls and e-mail messages asking for Nepal earthquake donations; most are likely scams. PRI has named **vetted charities** that are already on the ground, doing relief work. Please choose either a charity you know and trust, or one of these:

AmeriCares; CARE; Catholic Relief Services; Direct Relief; Global Giving; International Relief Teams; Operation USA; Save the Children; Seva Foundation; World Help; UNICEF; Oxfam.

(2) Justice ridiculed: Attorneys for Boston Matathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev are trying to paint him as a "good guy" who was influenced and manipulated by his older brother, ignoring his cool demeanor during the placement of a bomb behind a young boy (captured on a security camera) and evidence of links to al Qaeda found on his laptop. In another courtroom, James Holmes, being tried for the July 2012 mass shooting that killed 12 and injured 70 (some very seriously) in a Colorado theater, is trying to avoid punishment by pleading "not guilty by reason of insanity," in the face of evidence of extensive and meticulous months-long planning before his murderous rampage.

(3) Iran bans a women's magazine: **Iranian authorities have shut down** the *Zanan-e Emrooz (Modern Women)* magazine, citing its coverage of the growing cohabitation trend in Iran. Other sources also cite the magazine's advocacy for women's right to attend sporting events as a reason. I have read accounts of the magazine's coverage of cohabitation, which is by and large balanced, listing reasons for the trend, advantages cited by proponents, and disadvantages from the viewpoint of women's rights.

(4) Violence against women: A group of Afghan artists and activists **reenact the beating of Farkhondeh** by an angry mob, incited by a cleric, to commemorate the 40th day of her passing.

(5) How our brains' built-in biases make it difficult to learn or unlearn stuff: An experiment with a bike having a **handlebar that works backward** reveals fascinating details about knowledge and understanding.

(6) Shipwrecks visible at the bottom of Lake Michigan: After the ice sheets covering the lake melted, the lake's water was so clear that **multiple shipwrecks** became visible from the water's surface in one area. Lake Michigan is believed to be home to some 1500 shipwrecks, with the tally for all five Great Lakes estimated at 6000.

(7) Iran's Mr. Big Mouth: This **face of Iran's hardliners** is always on the front lines of Friday prayers and "Death to America" chants.

(8) Lecture by Shuji Nakamura: Tonight, the Nobel Laureate and UCSB faculty member presented a public lecture under the auspices of UCSB's Arts & Lectures Program. In [this lecture](#), Nakamura provided a review of his pioneering work that earned him a share of the 2014 Nobel Prize in physics, from growing high-quality gallium nitride crystals in 1991 to demonstrating the feasibility of blue light-emitting diodes beginning in 1994. The elusive blue light, when combined with a yellow phosphor, enabled the generation of white light and set in motion the currently ongoing revolution in efficient, robust, portable, and battery-operable light sources for our homes, office buildings, commercial spaces, and so on.

2015/04/27 (Monday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) A remarkable law turns 50: This year is the 50th anniversary of a 1965 paper published by Gordon Moore, a young electronics engineer who later went on to co-found Intel. In that remarkable paper, Moore observed the trend of integrated electronic circuit density doubling

every year and stipulated on the attendant exponential growth of functionality and decrease in per-transistor cost.

After adjusting the density-doubling interval to 18 months a few years later, this exponential growth trend became known as "Moore's Law" and took on a life of its own. In an interview published in *IEEE Spectrum* magazine, issue of April 2015, Moore is apprehensive about calling an empirical observation and projection "a law."

The exponentially growing density, represented by a straight, rising line on a semilogarithmic scale is better known than this diagram, which also incorporates cost-effectiveness.

An Intel IC, announced in 1961, contained a whopping 4 transistors. The sweet spot (the point beyond which the per-transistor cost starts increasing due to declining yield) rose to about 14 in 1962, 50-60 in 1965, and about 1000 in 1970. Stated in simple terms, yield can deteriorate because if each integrated transistor has a 50% chance of functioning correctly, say, 2 transistors will have a 25% chance of both being functional, 4 transistors a 1-in-16 or 6% chance, and so on.

(2) Quote of the day: "Invention, in my opinion, arises directly from idleness, possibly also from laziness—to save oneself trouble." ~ Agatha Christie

(3) A nice rendition of an [old Afghan song](#), which I remember from my youth.

(4) Playing the keyboard with tennis balls. Amazing talent! [[3-minute video](#)]

(5) The origins of piggy bank: Children's banks, usually shaped like a pig, have their roots in the 15th century, when people used pots made of orange clay ("pygg" in Middle English). So, "pygg" referred to the material, not the shape of the bank.

(6) Baltimore is burning: Turning demonstrations into arson and looting has nothing to do with social grievances. No legitimate grievance justifies destroying buildings where people work, pray, learn, and live. Baltimore looters did what they had come to do, and they were just waiting for an opportunity or an excuse. Such actions set back race relations for years, if not decades; they certainly do not help any worthy cause.

(7) Update on the Nepal quake: The human toll stands at over 4000 dead and 7000 injured. Many affected areas are beyond easy reach of emergency crews. Additionally, numerous [landmarks and historic sites](#) are in ruins. Charities have organized to help out as much as they can. Please donate.

(8) Final thought for the day: "Be present. Make love. Make tea. Avoid small talk. Embrace conversation. Buy a plant, water it. Make your bed. Make someone else's bed. Have a smart mouth, and quick wit. Run. Make art. Create. Swim in the ocean. Swim in the rain. Take chances. Ask questions. Make mistakes. Learn. Know your worth. Love fiercely. Forgive quickly. Let go of what doesn't make you happy. Grow." ~ Paulo Coelho

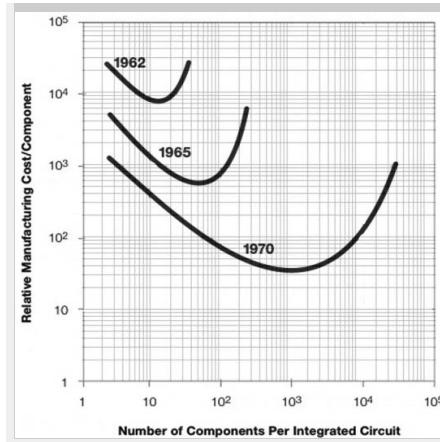
2015/04/26 (Sunday): Kerman, Piper, *Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Women's Prison*, Spiegel & Grau, 2011 (paperback edition 2012).

[Also, unabridged audiobook on 10 CDs, read by Cassandra Campbell, Tantor Audio, 2012.]

I approached this book with excitement and great anticipation, given that it had been chosen for the 2015 "UCSB Reads" program, which would allow our campus and its surrounding community (Goleta and Santa Barbara public libraries had also signed on) to share a common reading experience and to participate in related public discussions. In fact, I attended two such panel discussions conducted by UCSB faculty members from diverse fields (3/12 at the Santa Barbara Public Library and 4/2 at the Goleta Public Library), as well as the April 15 [lecture by the author](#) at UCSB's Campbell Hall.

As topics for public discussion, problems with US prisons (and those of the broader justice system) are truly worthy choices. As a result of reading this book and participating in discussion forums, I learned a great deal about why viewing prisons as punitive institutions, rather than rehabilitative ones that prepare inmates for returning to their communities as productive members, is akin to building a revolving door between prisons and the poor neighborhoods that supply nearly all of the prison population.

The fact that the US has by far the world's largest prison population (a quarter of inmates for 5% of the world's population) is in itself an indicator that something is fundamentally wrong with our system. A key aspect of the problem is an engrained bias toward incarcerating minorities for crimes that typically do not lead to jail terms for middle- and upper-class perpetrators. Your race and social class have a lot to do with whether you are arrested/charged, how your case makes its way through the justice system, the kinds of plea deals you are



offered, the sentence you receive, and the time you end up serving.

Despite the positive influences cited above, the book itself is both a boring read and an unrealistic depiction of life in prison. The writing style is chatty and repetitive, at times appearing to skirt difficult and messy issues. A federal minimum-security prison is by no means representative of the US prisons. And the author, a young woman from a privileged background, educated at an elite institution, and having a loving and supportive family, isn't a typical inmate (not even a typical middle-class inmate).

Here is a very brief summary of what happened to Kerman. She was seduced by an older female lover (who financed her bohemian lifestyle, entailing beach clubs and spa treatments) into carrying drug money across international borders. Kerman's transgressions were not immediately discovered, but they eventually caught up with her when the former lover was arrested and (the author suspects) ratted on her collaborators. The former lover, who ended up serving a longer sentence than Kerman, is now working on her own book, to be published shortly. During her year-long confinement, Kerman developed friendships with several inmates as well as rapport with some prison staff, and she quickly adapted to the requirements for a conflict-free life in jail. Her fiancee and other family members were very supportive and visited her regularly, bringing her books and other permitted goodies. She realizes that such degree of support from outside, and acceptance and cooperation from inside, isn't at all typical.

As an educated, well-off, blonde inmate, who read books, helped others with their studies and homework assignments, and could think about and analyze her predicaments, Kerman carried an enormous advantage over a typical female inmate, not to mention over male inmates who live in far harsher environments.

During her lecture at UCSB, entitled "The Real Story Behind *Orange Is the New Black*," Kerman showed a short video clip of the first episode of the TV series by the same title as her book, indicating that the scene shown is pretty much the only one that used dialog directly from the book. The creators of the TV series, who have Kerman's support and collaboration, have taken liberties with character development and story lines. The author apparently has no qualms about these liberties, perhaps thinking that they have made the TV series richer and more impactful.

Kerman indicated at her UCSB lecture that the most important place in a prison is the visiting room and the most important time is mail call, implying that social support from family and friends is indispensable if inmates are to emerge from prison with a reasonable chance of not going back. Unfortunately, most prisoners get hardly any visitors, and visiting rooms in women's prisons are particularly underutilized. This fact, which I learned from one of the panel discussions in which a prison volunteer addressed the panel, does not reflect well on men. Mental health care is an important service in prisons, given that many inmates suffer from various mental ailments before or after incarceration. According to Kerman, following the closure of nearly all state institutions of mental health care in the Reagan era, prisons became dumping grounds for the mentally ill. At present, the biggest providers of mental health care in the US are prison systems, implying that we are doing things backwards. Instead of taking care of the mentally ill so that they do not end up in prison, we may be tempting them to commit crimes in order to benefit from the needed care.

To summarize, I was not much impressed with the book itself but think that its selection as a community reading project did serve to raise awareness about the sad state of our prisons and the justice system that fills them to the brink. Through the discussions surrounding Kerman's book, I became aware of the urgency of reforms in our prison and justice systems. I believe that my time on this book and related discussions was well-spent and look forward to an opportunity to read more about the topic in due course.

2015/04/25 (Saturday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) For the Kurdish women fighting ISIS, it's not just a matter of eliminating a brutal enemy; it's also a struggle for removing male domination from their lives.



(2) Pakistani human rights activist assassinated: **Sabeen Mahmud** was leaving a restaurant in Karachi when two gunmen on a motorcycle shot her.

(3) How playing a musical instrument **enhances brain function**, including both processing and memory.

(4) More on UCLA's Iranian Culture Show: **Video clips** of most performances of this program, staged by UCLA's Iranian Student Group on Friday-Saturday April 17-18, 2015, are now available on YouTube.

(5) The death toll for Nepal's magnitude-7.8 earthquake will likely reach 1000s: There had been significant seismic activity in the region for several days, indicating that the tectonic plates were moving along the fault lines. A major quake had been expected for some time, given that smaller shakers in recent years had not fully released the pent-up pressure between the plates. In fact, it is feared that stronger tremors may be on the way. An earthquake-caused avalanche on Mt. Everest injured at least 30.

(6) It seems like each new political and economic problem encountered pushes Iran's Islamic regime and its cronies toward putting new restrictions on women. The latest of these is a group of "concerned citizens"

("delvaapasaan") in Qazvin demanding that women's beauty salons **refrain from body-hair removal**.

(7) Women's World Cup 2015: The soccer tournament will be played in Canada, from June 6 to July 5, 2015. Given that the top two teams from each of the 6 groups of 4 teams, plus four third-place teams chosen in a rather complicated scheme, will advance to the 16-team knockout round, the US most likely will advance from Group D (USA, Australia, Sweden, Nigeria). Fox Sports plans an extensive coverage of the tournament, including broadcasting all 52 games.

(8) No selfies with women for Iranian soccer stars: The Decency Committee of Iran's soccer federation has reportedly told players and coaches to refrain from taking selfies with female fans (at international events), or they will face disciplinary action.

2015/04/24 (Friday): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Pace of technological progress: Fast-moving industries, such as computing and electronic communication, driven by the notorious Moore's Law that predicts exponential growth of microchip density and performance, feel the drag of slower-moving ones, such as food production, travel, lighting, and energy, with efficiency growth rates that are lower by an order of magnitude or more. [Image credit: *IEEE Spectrum* magazine.]



(2) Unusual movie theaters around the world: Watching movies on beds, in boats/cars, or in exquisitely decorated venues. [**Photo gallery**]

(3) ASU's Global **Freshman Academy**: The out-of-control rising cost of college education is bringing about experimental programs to offer students lower-cost options. In partnership with edX, Arizona State University will soon allow its freshmen to take their first-year college courses on-line anywhere in the world, paying \$200 per credit if and when they pass the courses. The total cost for this on-line option will be half of ASU's in-state tuition and 20% of its out-of-state tuition.

(4) Quote of the day: "Elizabeth Warren's journey from janitor's daughter to Harvard professor to public watchdog to U.S. Senator has been driven by an unflagging determination to level the playing field for hardworking American families like the one she grew up with in Oklahoma. She fights so hard for others to share in the American Dream because she lived it herself." ~ Hillary Clinton, praising the Massachusetts Senator in *Time* magazine's Top 100 issue

(5) Comedian John Oliver is among the *Time* 100: I was surprised to see the Iranian FM Javad Zarif and Iranian-born scientist Pardis Sabeti honored as members of *Time* magazine's 100 most influential people in the world. Pakistani education activist Malala Yousafzai appears for the third time in a row as the youngest member of the group. Then I noticed the name of comedian John Oliver and, before reading why he was honored, I thought to myself that there are certainly more deserving people in the world. Then, I saw that Oliver's narrative is written by Elizabeth Bierman, President of the Society of Women Engineers, and it all became clear. After Oliver mentioned SWE as a worthy recipient of scholarship money on **his show**, the Society raised more funds than it would normally have done in several years. This is an important lesson to celebrities who are inclined to get involved in social causes. They have enormous power in bringing attention to charities and other non-profit organizations that are starving for lack of visibility and high-power celebrity support. Way to go, John Oliver!

(6) The Hubble Space Telescope **turns 25**: And in these 25 years, it has helped us learn more about our amazing universe than thought possible by even the most optimistic space scientists.

2015/04/23 (Thursday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) US gun deaths are 40 times the number of gun deaths in the other 7 countries listed in this image combined.

(2) Logical reasoning puzzle: Cheryl is known to have her birthday on one of the following ten days: 5/15, 5/16, 5/19, 6/17, 6/18, 7/14, 7/16, 8/14, 8/15, 8/17. Cheryl reveals her birthday month to Albert and the day to Bernard. Albert then announces that while he does not know Cheryl's birthday, he knows that Bernard doesn't know it either. Bernard says that while true that he didn't know Cheryl's birthday at first, he does know it now. Finally, Albert says that he too knows Cheryl's birthday now. So, when is Cheryl's birthday?

(3) Energy scavenging: Consumer devices will run longer, and may even become totally free of pesky batteries, by drawing energy from the environment. Harvesting power from their surroundings, be it from light, electromagnetic emissions, or vibrations, will allow small electronic devices to become self-sufficient and maintenance-free, which is good news for remote sensors and Internet-of-Things nodes located in hard-to-access points. These methods are particularly

LAST YEAR, HANDGUNS KILLED
48 PEOPLE IN JAPAN.
8 IN GREAT BRITAIN.
34 IN SWITZERLAND.
52 IN CANADA.
58 IN ISRAEL.
21 IN SWEDEN.
42 IN WEST GERMANY.
10,728 IN THE UNITED STATES.

GOD BLESS AMERICA.



useful for biometric and assistive devices in human bodies, because they may eliminate the need for surgeries to check on and replace batteries.

(4) Quote of the day: "Life is horizontal movement from cradle to grave. Living is vertical movement from crudeness to refinement [or earth to heavens]. Our mission in life isn't to live a life devoid of trouble but one filled with purpose." ~ Translated into English from an unsourced Persian message sent to me by a dear friend

(5) The difference between "few" and "a few": I am posting this English language tip, because I have observed that among my Iranian friends, the distinction is often lost.

"Few"/"little" means "not many/much"—it is negative in connotation. Usage example: "I am sad because I have few friends (or little money)."

"A few"/"a little" means "some"—it is positive in connotation. Usage example: "I just moved here, but I am happy because I have a few friends."

(6) It's hard to believe that YouTube is only 10 years old: The first ever YouTube video (a 19-second clip of founder Jawed Karim, standing around at the zoo) and many other early posts of 2005 were lame by today's standards. Those early posters likely had no idea what a revolutionary platform they were helping launch. Here is a very small sample of [early YouTube videos](#) on its 10th birthday.

(7) Final thought for the day: "Stu(dying), stu(died): Coincidence? I think not." ~ Anonymous

2015/04/22 (Wednesday): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Happy Earth Day: [Time-lapse video](#) showing our precious Earth from space.

(2) High-tech companies exhibit environmental sensitivity: (a) Amazon's new headquarters in downtown Seattle features glass bio-domes, surrounded by three 38-story office towers. (b) Apple's 4-story circular mega-building in Cupertino will house 12,000 employees, while using green technologies. (c) Facebook has hired architect Frank Gehry to design a Menlo Park building that features a 9-acre green roof, a half-mile walking loop, and over 400 trees. (d) Google plans to develop parts of its Mountain View campus into 4 futuristic hubs under sweeping glass canopies, adding bike paths and retail space for better integration with the surrounding community. [Info from: *Time* magazine, issue of April 20, 2015.]

(3) Quote of the day: "Nothing crushes a dictator more than rising expectations." ~ Ramin Ahmadi, on the positive effects of public joy in Iran upon the announcement of a nuclear deal, which includes the expectation of improvement in people's daily lives due to lifting of economic sanctions (quoted in a *Time* magazine article by Joe Klein, issue of April 20, 2015)

(4) Magical iPad: Wonderful [magic tricks](#) by Simon Pierro on the "Ellen" show.

(5) Human Kaleidoscope: Introductory video used at a summit of TEDx organizers. [[2-minute video](#)]

(6) Plagiarism, grade inflation, and other problems ailing Australian universities: This [45-minute documentary](#) reviews corrupt practices in institutions of higher learning, caused directly or indirectly by a decline in government funding and lack of sufficient oversight. It is perhaps too long a film for those without direct involvement in university education, so here is a summary of points made and my take on how the Australian experience relates to those of other countries. Certainly inadequate funding and shrinking national oversight bodies (such as the US Department of Education, which the Republicans would eliminate altogether if they had a chance) are not unique to Australia. Universities have turned into businesses in many countries and the term "education industry" is now used without raising eyebrows. Universities worldwide are increasingly turning to foreign students who pay higher tuition and, like any other business, are under pressure to deliver

something for the fees they charge. Imagine going to a bakery, paying for a loaf of bread, but only getting the loaf if the baker deems you worthy of receiving it. That bakery will go out of business in no time. Universities, too, feel compelled to deliver something in return for the tuition they charge. The documentary makes the point that no single university can afford to change these corrupt practices, because it would lose its business to competing institutions. In fact, no single country can do this, given that education has become an international business and countries are competing for the cash brought in by foreign students. When students pay high prices for their education, they too cannot afford to fail, thus creating a market for illegitimate side businesses that help students cheat or otherwise beat the system. In certain fields, such as nursing, admitting and passing underqualified students entail serious public-safety consequences. There are only two ways out of this mess: free college education for qualified students and less reliance on degrees (and more on knowledge and skills) in employment. There is virtually zero chance of changes along this line, given the cost to states or countries of both the education itself and of the oversight mechanisms needed for fair admission and skill assessment. Today's governments are averse to treating higher education as an investment that pays off in the long run, instead of an expense.

2015/04/21 (Tuesday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

- (1) Let the 2016 US presidential race begin!
- (2) Attack of the freshman Senators: It will be interesting to see if Republican pundits will focus on the inexperience of freshman Senators Rubio, Paul, and Cruz, the way they did for Obama.
- (3) Hila Sedighi's take on [being a woman in Iran](#), from the forced drab, colorless clothing to societal expectations of timidity and obedience. As usual, a beautifully written and touching piece (in Persian).
- (4) List of top 10 censored countries, according to Committee to Protect Journalists (beginning with the worst): Eritrea, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, Azerbaijan, Vietnam, Iran, China, Myanmar, Cuba.
- (5) Jokes for nerds and intellectuals: [This page](#) includes 20 such jokes, of which #1 and #11 are my favorite. Joke #1. Einstein, Newton, and Pascal are playing a rousing game of hide and seek. Einstein begins to count to ten. Pascal runs and hides. Newton draws a one meter by one meter square in the ground in front of Einstein, then stands in the middle of it. Einstein reaches ten, uncovers his eyes, and exclaims "Newton! I found you! You're it!" Newton replies "You didn't find me. You found a Newton over a square meter. You found Pascal!" Joke #11. A logician's wife has a baby. The doctor hands the baby to him. His wife asks if it's a boy or girl. The logician replies "Yes."
- (6) Mr. Haloo returns to prison: I am sad to learn from this post by the Iranian humorous poet Mohammad Reza Ali-Payam that he has [reported to the Evin Prison](#) for serving a 15-month sentence. The silliness of being imprisoned for composing poems aside, the new sentence is said to be for the same collection of poems cited in his previous conviction and jail sentence. When he complained about this double-jeopardy, he was told that the previous punishment was for a complaint presented by the Revolutionary Guards Corps, while the new charges were brought by the security Police. As he heads to prison, Ali-Payam wonders about how many more times he should serve prison terms for the same poems, given the large number of potential litigants.
- (7) Riding a killer wave. [[1-minute video](#)]
- (8) A few one-liners from the news I read today:
The Pope accepts the resignation of a US bishop who failed to report a priest's suspected child abuse
Saudi Arabia will cease air strikes in Yemen to pursue a peace initiative in the war-ravaged country
ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi reportedly out of action due to serious injury from an air strike
Former Egyptian president, Mohamed Morsi, and 12 others sentenced to 20-years prison terms
Genetically engineered mosquitoes to be released, in hopes of eventually replacing the disease carriers
A group of American businessmen, businesswomen, and investors visited Iran as tourists last week
The article "A Message from Iran" by Mohammad Javad Zarif is published in the *New York Times*



2015/04/20 (Monday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

- (1) *Vogue* article about Masih Alinejad: The exiled Iranian reporter's life story and her "My Stealthy Freedom" [Facebook page](#) are featured in [this story](#).
- (2) Modern Persian music: A beautifully rendered version of Mohammad Nouri's "[To Bemaan](#)" at a concert held in his honor.
- (3) Robotic security guards: Already [deployed by Microsoft](#) in Silicon Valley, 5-foot-tall robots with cameras, scanners, and various types of sensors are helping patrol the streets and other public areas.
- (4) Azerbaijani music: A trio of musicians performs the folk song "[Lachin](#)" from Azerbaijan.
- (5) Beautiful cactus flowers. [[4-minute time-lapse video](#)]

(6) Hazards of reporting on [bird infestation](#).

(7) Unusual vacations: According to *Geico Now* magazine, new types of vacation spots are appearing in California. **Autocamps** are motels that replace standard rooms with vintage Airstream travel trailers, outfitted with luxury amenities, patios, barbecues, and cruiser bicycles. The Santa Barbara Autocamp is already up and running, with three more sites planned for San Francisco, Ventura Beach, and Los Angeles.

(8) Of interest to job seekers in the technology sector: *Forbes* provides a list of the companies with employment search site [Indeed.com's](#) greatest number of **postings for tech jobs** in the US paying \$60,000 or more per year. Lockheed Martin tops the list with nearly 2,000 job openings posted, including openings for positions such as "Instructional Systems Designer, Aeronautical Engineer, and Network Data Communications Analyst." Also of note, CSC ranked 24th with 605 jobs posted, CACI International ranked 19th with 703 jobs, Raytheon ranked 17th with 779 jobs, Booz Allen Hamilton ranked 13th with 826 jobs, Hewlett Packard ranked 11th with 849 jobs, Leidos ranked ninth with 895 jobs, General Dynamics ranked sixth with 1,154 jobs, Northrop Grumman ranked fourth with 1,571 jobs, and IBM ranked third with 1,169 jobs.

2015/04/19 (Sunday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) The 100 most influential people for 2015: *Time* magazine's list of top 100 is presented in 5 categories (April 27 / May 4 issue), each with its own cover image. The choice of people to write about these



personalities is interesting and, in some cases, hilarious. For example, Martha Stewart writes about Kim Kardashian, Rand Paul introduces the Koch Brothers, Antonin Scalia sings the praises of Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Barack Obama writes about Narendra Modi, and Robin Wright introduces Mohammad Javad Zarif.

(2) UCLA's Iranian Culture Show 2015: Months of effort by the Iranian Student Group (ISG) and generous support from multiple sponsors and guest performers went into staging the enjoyable Culture show I watched at UCLA's Freud Theater last night. The program included traditional, folk, and modern dance routines, a 4-act comedy skit, a brief fashion show, poetry reading with background music, several musical performances (including by guest artists **Sibarg Ensemble** and **KamyR**), and introductory and between-acts comedy by Peter the Persian.

(3) Round-the-clock armed guards for a rhino: With just 1 male and 4 females left worldwide, northern white rhinos are on the [brink of extinction](#).

(4) Smiles and fun are contagious: Let's [try to spread them](#).

(5) In case you are wondering about "Star Wars: Episode VII": Here is [how kids reacted](#) to a trailer for the film, to be released around Christmas 2015.

(6) The Australian Foreign Minister [visits Iran](#): In response to criticisms about her wearing a headscarf in Iran, she claimed that she often wears hats and scarves in her normal life. That she wasn't forthright in her answer became clear when tons of photos of her with no headwear appeared on social media.

(7) Afro-Iranians: The [minority group](#) that is unknown, not just worldwide but also to most Iranians.

(8) Final thought for the day: "The secret of life in just six words: Before middle age, 'do not fear'; after middle age, 'do not regret'." ~ Anonymous

2015/04/17 (Friday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) A just-released Israeli postage stamp that honors Cyrus the Great and his declaration (the Cyrus Cylinder).



(2) Religions and babies: Hans Rosling's eye-opening [13-minute TED talk](#) about population growth patterns and the myth that religions have a big impact on birth rates. His use of visual aids, both high-tech and low-tech (props), is legendary.

(3) Iranian female singer has been summoned to court: Mahdieh Mohammadkhani of the **Mah Ensemble**, and her male collaborator Majid Derakhshani, have been summoned to court on a complaint filed by Tehran's security police. She will likely be charged with violating the law that bans solo singing by women.

(4) First American musician to give a concert in Iran since 1979: **Bob Belden** played tunes by Miles Davis, Herbie Hancock, and himself at Tehran's Vahdat Concert Hall, to the audience's delight.

(5) Ayatollah Khamenei's speech coinciding with the Persian New Year: Speaking in Mashhad, Iran's Supreme Leader painted a gloomy picture of the traditionally joyous Norooz, claiming that Norooz has changed into an

Islamic tradition that brings people to shrines of imams and their children, as well as other holy sites. "[Norooz] has become an opportunity and a tool for a heartfelt relationship between the people and the Origin of Glory and Dignity—that is to say, Allah the Exalted." At one point, Khamenei repeated the crowd's chant of "Death to America." [Source: The official site of Ayatollah Khamenei.]

(6) All 7 children of an anti-vaccination mom **come down with whooping cough**: There are mistakes for which we pay and there are other, more serious, mistakes that hurt our loved ones.

(7) Delicious and beautifully presented **rose-shaped pastry**.

(8) Afghanistan's first female fighter pilot: I read a report from the German News Agency's Persian service that praised Niloofar Rahmani, a 23-year-old Afghan woman, for becoming the first air force pilot since the fall of the Taliban in 2001. So far, so good! But then the point of the article was spoiled by referring to her as the world's prettiest pilot. IMHO, her physical appearance has no relevance to the story.

2015/04/16 (Thursday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) A wonderful example of how data visualization improves understanding: Watch Hans Rosling, a master of data visualization, display life expectancy changes in 200 countries over 200 years. [[5-minute video](#)]

(2) How not to be ignorant about the world: Eye-opening and humorous **19-minute TED talk** by Hans Rosling and Ola Rosling. What makes us ignorant is a combination of personal bias, media bias, and outdated facts.

(3) Women's attendance at sporting events: Iranian women have been banned for many years from attending sports stadiums to cheer their favorite sports clubs or national teams. Now, facing a threat of sanctions from international volleyball bodies, Iranian authorities are reportedly working on "bylaws for attendance of women in stadiums for volleyball matches." There is a need for just one law, a constitutional amendment saying "Women = Men." A piecemeal approach, on a per-sport basis and only for watching, not participating, adds insult to injury.

(4) A message to space: A daughter's **message of love** to her astronaut dad is laid out by Hyundai's tire tracks on a dry lake bed in Nevada (the sign, covering an area 1.5 times NYC's Central Park, set a world record).

(5) Nagging moms breathe a collective sigh of relief: This **Good Housekeeping story** maintains that girls with nagging moms grow up to be more successful.

(6) Two Canadian Broadcasting Company **execs axed**: They were accused of condoning the behavior of former radio host Jian Ghomeshi, who is awaiting his court date for at least seven counts of sexual assault.

(7) Creedence Clearwater Revival Greatest Hits album on YouTube. [[110-minute audio file](#)]

(8) The mass-murdering on-line pharmacy: Anyone who uses an on-line pharmacy should read this alarming **Newsweek story** about an on-line operation that sold drugs to people with fake names, waived the requirement for a prescription, and broke dozens of other laws and regulations, thus endangering and ultimately taking many lives. "[The New England Compounding Center] was making millions of dollars by cutting corners, fabricating records and ignoring laws designed to keep contaminated drugs off the market. NECC perpetrated what may be one of the most murderous corporate crimes in U.S. history by pumping out deadly medicines that infected more than 800 people with fungal meningitis in 2012, 64 of whom died."

2015/04/15 (Wednesday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Dynamic pricing: This photo suggests that passengers pay vastly different amounts for similar seats on the same flight. Dynamic pricing algorithms allow vendors to adjust prices every fraction of a second, based on demand and petabytes worth of other data, to maximize profit. This is why you see an item's price has changed compared with the day before when you finally decide to buy it. [Info from: *Communications of the ACM*, issue of April 2015.]



(2) Young girl shows off **her skills** with a soccer ball.

(3) Conversation with Masih Alinejad at UCLA: I had posted a summary of the discussion with the exiled Iranian reporter during the 4/12 meeting at UCLA. Here is a much more **detailed report** (in Persian).

(4) An older film of Asghar Farhadi: Before making "A Separation," the Academy Award winning director had made "**About Elly**," a 2009 drama about a woman's disappearance and how each member of her well-to-do circle of friends deals with it. The film, characterized as a thoughtful drama, will be released on DVD soon.

(5) Kurdish music, with lyrics and beautiful natural scenery. [[5-minute video](#)]

(6) A rare positive video message about Iran. [[3-minute video](#)]

(7) Enchanting duet: "Phantom of the Opera" is Andrew Lloyd Webber's greatest musical and "All I Ask of You," performed here by **Josh Groban and Kelly Clarkson**, is one of its two best songs.

(8) Piper Kerman's lecture tonight: As the final stage of the "UCSB Reads" program for 2015, the author of *Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Women's Prison* (the best-selling memoir chosen for community reading and discussion), gave a **talk at UCSB's Campbell Hall**. Arriving at the venue 20 minutes before the scheduled

start time of the free lecture, I was disappointed to find out that there were no seats left. Fortunately, the talk was being simulcast in a nearby large classroom (also completely filled by 8:00 PM), where I was able to watch. I will merge my notes from tonight's talk, entitled "The Real Story Behind Orange Is the New Black," with my review of the book, which will be forthcoming in a few days.

2015/04/13 (Monday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

- (1) White House video: President Obama **makes a point** about how some members of the US Congress believe the claims of Iran's Supreme Leader about what's in the nuclear agreement framework over what the US Secretary of State says it contains.
- (2) Iran beat the US in the finals to win the 2015 **Freestyle Wrestling World Cup**, held in Los Angeles.
- (3) Human aversion to standing out in a crowd: How the **desire for conformity** causes people to select the longer line when they are asked to identify the shorter one.
- (4) Wonderful coordination in **juggling 5 beach balls**, using hands and feet.
- (5) A multiple-award-winning stop-motion animated short film: Kirsten Lepore's "**Bottle**" tells the story of a long-distance relationship that literally dissolves at the end.
- (6) A directory of Bruce Springsteen songs. (**Index and links**)
- (7) Islamic feminists seek a modern interpretation of Islam: They face an uphill battle, as their efforts are **opposed by certain Islamic groups** that deem ideas, such as those reflected in the documentary "Honor Diaries," offensive.
- (8) Campaign against **child marriages**: Each year 14 million underage girls are forced into marriage.
- (9) Final thought for the day: "Think for yourselves and let others enjoy the privilege to do so, too." ~ Voltaire

2015/04/12 (Sunday): Q & A at UCLA, with the title "Compulsory Veiling (Hijab) and Stealthy Freedom in Iran: A Conversation with Masih Alinejad": This afternoon, I attended what was advertised as a lecture (in Persian) by the exiled reporter who has been active in exposing the plight of families of political dissidents and demonstrators killed in the aftermath of the 2009 presidential elections in Iran and, more recently, founded the Facebook page "**My Stealthy Freedom**" to give voice to Iranian women who are against



mandatory hijab laws. Alinejad and organizers decided to conduct the session as a conversation rather than a formal talk. The session began by the screening of a short video based on the aforementioned FB page. For the next hour or so, Professor Nayereh Tohidi (of Cal State Northridge) questioned Alinejad about her life and work. She was born to a religious family in a small town and considered the short walk from her home to school her zone of freedom (she was required to be veiled at both ends). She considers her most important body of work to be the investigation and exposure of the death of dissidents and demonstrators after the 2009 elections (the Islamic government refers to the event as "Sedition" and denies that anyone died as a result of government actions). Her other contributions include several books, including "Tahasson" ("Taking Refuge") and "Taaj-e Khaar" ("Crown of Thorns"), as well a series of phone interviews with the regime officials that show them to be unresponsive and out of touch.

Alinejad stated that her primary focus as a reporter is to give voice to Iranian women within Iran, allowing them to vent and to talk about their life stories, dreams, and challenges. Whereas her stealthy-freedom effort has come to represent feminisms and anti-women Islamic laws, those aspects are secondary from her viewpoint. Ironically, Alinejad has been attacked by both the Iranian regime officials, who nicknamed her "the ugly duckling," and by various opposition groups, which consider her focus on hijab trivial compared with other injustices to women and men (some groups believe that the focus should be on regime change, rather than on specific injustices).

The interview segment was followed by a lively discussion, with audience participation. Most discussants and questioners praised Alinejad for her relentless passion, and courage in the face of shameless personal attacks on her. The 700K+ likes on her stealthy-freedom Facebook page reflects this broad support. In response to a couple of comments criticizing lukewarm support for her efforts by Iranian men, Alinejad pointed to the presence of a large number of men in the audience and said that she preferred to focus on the positive participation of men on her page and elsewhere.

One man accused Alinejad of being ungrateful to the country and Islamic regime that bred her and allowed her to become a successful reporter (she was 2 years old when the Islamic Revolution occurred) and that hijab is the law of the land in Iran that must be observed like traffic laws. Alinejad responded at length, pointing to the difference between laws enacted to make everyone safe and those that belittle and degrade women. She did mention that she has no problem with hijab per se, only with mandatory laws and with the special police that enforces them on the streets. As a result of these pressures, Iranian women lead dual lives, which affect their

self-confidence and sense of well-being. I must add that Alinejad became a successful reporter on the international scene *despite* the Islamic regime, not because of it.

This **2-minute video** allows you to hear Alinejad speak passionately about her activities and aspirations. [Video credit: "Striving for Human Rights in Iran" Facebook page.]

I found this program, part of UCLA's **Bilingual Lecture Series on Iran**, under the leadership of Professor Nayereh Tohidi, enlightening and look forward to participating in future programs of this kind.

2015/04/10 (Friday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Tornadoes damage homes, cars, and the Internet: All homes in one Illinois small town were destroyed or severely damaged. **[Pictorial]**

(2) One more step toward exascale computing: The US Department of Energy has announced a \$200M investment for building the **Aurora supercomputer** with a peak performance of 180 Petaflops (1 Petaflops constitutes the capacity to perform a million billion, or 10^{15} , floating-point operations per second), to be deployed at Argonne National Lab. After deployment of Aurora, the US will be a factor of about 5 away from exascale computing, that is, a machine with peak performance of a billion billion, or 10^{18} , floating-point operations per second.

(3) Don't fall into the racism trap: Speaking from experience of his own life in Kuwait and visits to other Arab countries, an Iranian man cautions against turning the sexual abuse of two Iranian youths in Saudi Arabia into an anti-Arab crusade. **[Photo bearing Persian text]**

(4) The Japanese invent a forever bubble-wrap: **This silicone toy** mimics the sensation of popping bubble-wrap for infinite number of times.

(5) Duet on an instrument made of water glasses. **[3-minute video]**

(6) Yet another refresher MOOC for me: I am now taking an advanced course on algorithm design and analysis from **Stanford/Coursera** to refresh my knowledge in the field. Over the past few days, I listened to three weeks' worth of video lectures to catch up with the pace of the course that began in late March. The course is quite enjoyable and the instructor (Tim Roughgarden) does a great job of explaining complicated concepts.

(7) Amy Schumer's **hilarious rant** on Ellen: She talks about her body and body image.

(8) Final thought for the day: "Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage." ~ Anais Nin

2015/04/09 (Thursday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes, including you." ~ Anne Lamott, in a list of 14 things she has learned as of her 61st birthday

(2) Famous books that were almost published by their working titles, given in parenthesis. [From *Time* magazine, issue of April 13, 2015.]

Catch 22 (Catch 11)

Harry Potter: Goblet of Fire (Three Campions)

Harry Potter: Sorcerer's Stone (School of Magic)

Jaws (What's That Noshin' on My Laig?)

Of Mice and Men (Something that Happened)

The Great Gatsby (Trimalchio in West Egg)

To Kill a Mockingbird (Atticus)

[There are interesting stories behind how the last-minute changes came about. For example, "Catch 11" was thought to be too close to "Ocean's 11," which came out at about the same time.]

(3) Morphing art: A sequence of art pieces, each one gradually transforming to the next. This **5-minute video** is the 8th in a series of art-morphing videos on YouTube.

(4) Great job, Islamic leaders of Iran! As you try to deal with your own country's shortages by having the US-European sanctions lifted, you have brought water, fuel, and medical supplies shortages to Yemen via your Houthi proxies. **[Newsweek story]**

(5) In 4 years, life expectancy in Syria has dropped by 24 years: Gains in life expectancy occur in small steps over decades. Since 2010, the civil war in Syria has undone centuries' worth of gains in this metric of public-health progress, reducing the life expectancy from 79.5 years to 55.7 years. [Source: *Newsweek* on-line]

(6) More on widespread cheating in the Chinese system of higher education: Competition for admission into prestigious Chinese universities is intense. Peking University, for example, admits only 0.28% of Beijing's 70,500 high school graduates, with the admission ratio dropping even further to 0.02% (that's 2 out of every 10,000 applicants) for those applying from other provinces. Intense competition for the coveted positions makes cheating nearly inevitable, and the effects spill into the competition for admission into US institutions. Some 31% of foreign students in the US are Chinese, constituting the largest group by far. The College Board has acknowledged, and is dealing with, widespread fraud in its SAT and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) exams, that US institutions use as part of their admission criteria. There are also fake transcripts and ghost-written letters of recommendation. For all their talk about the decadent West, many Chinese officials send

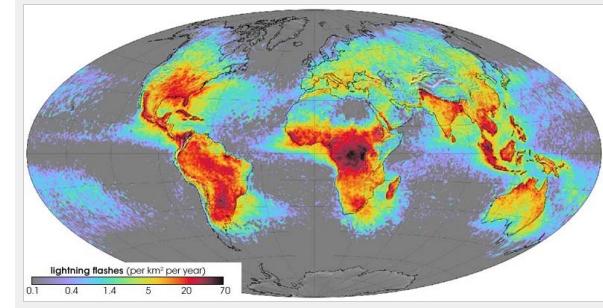
their children to study in the US and they pay substantial fees to a growing number of test-prep companies to improve their chances of admission. And here's the kicker: The improvement isn't always a result of learning and practicing, but is often achieved through illegal means. Examples include paying bribes to get the answers, coaching the candidates to cheat by electronic means, or even sending test-takers to attend exams in a different time zone and to transmit the test questions for use by later test-takers. [Adapted from a *Time* magazine feature, issue of April 13, 2015.]

(7) Women's rights among Orthodox Jews: I have written often about unfair laws in Iran and a number of other Muslim countries that treat women as second-class citizens. However, mistreatment of women isn't unique to Islamic laws. This [Newsweek article](#) (posted on April 8, 2015) states: "Even with a civil divorce decree in hand, a woman is not divorced in the Orthodox Jewish world until her husband gives her a *get*. Until then, she is an *agunah*, a 'chained' woman." Interestingly, there are 'divorce facilitators' who would kidnap a man, using teams of 'tough guys,' and torture him until he signs the document that formally dissolves a marriage under Jewish law.

2015/04/08 (Wednesday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Lightning strikes aren't uniform across the Earth:

This NASA map shows the distribution.



(2) Quote of the day: "In war—whether a shooting war or a culture war makes no difference on this point—only some of the battles are carefully planned." ~ David von Drehle, writing in *Time* magazine, issue of April 13, 2015, on how a showdown over religion and gay rights is changing the culture war

(3) A wonderful jazzy take (featuring Dave Koz) on the Wham classic "[Careless Whisper](#)."

(4) Science biopics: I just watched "The Theory of Everything" and "The Imitation Game" on successive nights. I liked both films, but thought that the first one was more interesting cinematically and the second one more accurate scientifically. It is delightful that science and scientists have become the focus of public attention once again and the box-office performance of films like these will no doubt help propel similar projects. One unsatisfying aspect of popularized stories about scientists and scientific breakthroughs is the way in which the discovery of an equation or a new scientific theory is treated in the same way as a fight or chase scene in an action film, with tension building up continuously towards a successful resolution. The reality is much less exciting, so, I guess, this is the price paid for getting and maintaining the public's attention.

(5) Isis and ISIS: I have seen multiple posts about the unfortunate coincidence of the names "Isis," the wise ancient [Egyptian goddess](#) of health and marriage, and "ISIS," the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. I am personally going back to using "Daesh" for the group of extremist thugs that abuses women and detests the womanhood celebrated in Isis.

(6) "Dilbert" job interview: Pointy-haired boss to job applicant: "No need to talk. Now we use an app to make hiring decisions. The app checked your online footprint and says you're a serial mansplainer with an unsuccessful dating history. I assume that means you have awesome technical skills." Job applicant: "Full stack!"

(7) Word puzzle: Place at least one letter on each side of the following letter pairs to form common, uncapitalized English words (plurals are not allowed). Your score is determined by the total number of letters you add, the fewer the better. See if you can go lower than my score of 28.

_QU__; _UU__; _UV__; _VU__; _FU__; _UO__; _WU__; _ZU__; _UJ__; _UW__

(8) Final thought for the day: This must be the first time in human history when both religious and gay rights are under relentless attack simultaneously!

2015/04/06 (Monday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Massacre of students in Kenya: It seems that the news of nuclear negotiation with Iran might have overshadowed the unfortunate [massacre of 148](#) at a Kenyan university. One of the gunmen has been identified as Abdirahim Abdullani, a law graduate and son of a local official. Abdullahi had been reported missing by his father, with an indication that he might have traveled to Somalia.

(2) March madness ends in April: After soundly defeating Michigan State, Duke came from behind to beat Wisconsin (semifinals victor over Kentucky) 68-63 to become the 2015 NCAA basketball champion.

(3) Quote of the day: "Julie Andrews to release second memoir. Sadly, it will not start at the very beginning, despite being a very good place to start." ~ *Entertainment Weekly's "The Bullseye"* [Issue of April 3, 2015]

(4) Hauntingly beautiful music from "The Theory of Everything": Johann Johannsson's "[Forces of Attraction](#)."

(5) Neat test of eyesight: [This hybrid image](#) looks like Albert Einstein to people with normal eyesight and like Marilyn Monroe otherwise.

(6) Math puzzle: Consider two destinations at equal travel distance from your home. You want to use a rowboat to travel to each destination and get back to your home. One destination is on the other side of a lake and the other is accessible via a river that flows at a constant speed. If your rowing speed is the same on the lake and on the river, will the round trip take more or less time on the river than on the lake?

[This analogy may help: Suppose a city is 120 miles away from us. We drive to that city at the constant speed of 60 mph and return at the constant speed of 40 mph. What is our average speed during the trip? (*Hint:* The answer isn't 50 mph.)]

(7) Money talks: There have been a lot of complaints that movie casts do not reflect the racial diversity of our country. This will no doubt change in the near future. There are two financial forces at work. First, while only 37% of the US population consists of minorities, they buy 46% of the tickets. Second, the foreign revenues of movies with 10% or fewer minority cast members has been in sharp decline since 2011, whereas foreign sales for films that include 41% or more nonwhites among their casts has risen by a factor of 2. [Info from: *Entertainment Weekly*, issue of April 3, 2015.]

2015/04/04 (Saturday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "I'm a nurse, obliged to provide top-notch care and comfort—even to individuals with freaking swastikas tattooed on their flesh. If I can take care of Nazi sympathizers, they can serve pizza to gay people." ~ Isabel Holland

(2) Concept airplane for 2030: With 3 decks holding 800 passengers, the super-quiet hydrogen-engine-powered concept plane, dubbed "Progress Eagle," will be built from light-weight material and will be equipped with solar cells to provide part of its needed power. [[4-minute video](#)]

(3) Conservatives attack the nuclear deal with Iran: I knew that attacks will come (actually "continue" is a better word). Here is one point made by several critics: The Obama administration says that Iran's nuclear program will be severely curtailed, while Iranian officials are claiming that the agreement allows a continuation of enrichment activities. Well, these are two different wordings of the same article in the agreement, with each side trying to put the most positive spin (for its own internal consumption) on what the agreement says; that is, reducing the number of centrifuges by 2/3 is "severe curtailment" by any yardstick, and allowing 1/3 of them to remain implies continuation of enrichment activities. The US focuses on the 2/3 reduction, while Iran emphasizes the 1/3 remaining in operation. I won't be surprised if these two wordings were part of the agreement between Iran and the negotiating Western countries, so as to allow both sides to claim victory.

(4) Photos with hidden elements: Each of [these amazing photos](#) hides something in plain sight. You see the hidden elements as soon as someone points them out to you, but they are difficult to spot otherwise. Finding the hidden elements is fun, but it's also sobering to think that in life, we often miss key elements in any given personal or social situation.

(5) Simple puzzle: You are given a cube of cheese and asked to cut it into 27 equal pieces. What is the minimum number of cuts needed?

(6) Malala to speak in Santa Barbara: The [June 15, 2015, talk](#) at Arlington Theater is part of UCSB's Arts & Lectures program. I recently finished listening to the audiobook version of Yousafzai's book, *I Am Malala*, and will post a review of it soon.

(7) Free [lecture by Nobel Laureate](#): Shuji Nakamura, co-winner of the 2014 Nobel Prize in physics, will talk about "Invention of Blue LED, Laser and Solid State Lighting" on Tue. April 28, 2015, in UCSB's Campbell Hall.

(8) Final thought for the day: "Better a witty fool than a foolish wit." ~ William Shakespeare

2015/04/03 (Friday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) On aging: It's easy for a gorgeous and highly successful person to say that we should embrace getting older! Seriously, though, Meryl Streep is right. What good will it do if we don't embrace the positives of aging and dwell only on the negatives? Persian poet Naziri Neishabouri took this positive attitude when he wrote:

At this old age, we're livelier than a thousand young ones

A hundred springs are envious of our autumns

(2) Quote of the day: "Big day ... Back to work soon on final deal." ~ US Secretary of State John Kerry, tweeting on the [outline agreement](#) reached between Iran and P5+1 countries, in Lausanne, Switzerland

(3) Announcement of the nuclear agreement in Lausanne: The choice of a woman (EU Foreign Policy Chief Federica Mogherini) to speak on behalf of the P5+1 countries in [this news conference](#) may be coincidental, given her position, but broadcasting this video on Iranian TV will be torturous to the women-hating hardliners. Iranian FM Javad Zarif is visibly uncomfortable to stand next to her.

(4) President Obama's announcement of the [nuclear deal with Iran](#): In what is perhaps one of his most important speeches to date, President Obama outlines why a nuclear deal with Iran is better than the other two available options. In his words: "The issues at stake here are bigger than politics."



(5) Presidential candidate names: Jeb Bush is a hard-core Democrat and he'd hate it if you asked him whether he is running for President. This particular Jeb Bush, a 34-year-old special-events coordinator in Georgia, is one of the unlucky people sharing a name with a presidential candidate. This did not happen with Barack Obama or Mitt Romney, but there are multiple people in the US named "Ted Cruz," who may or may not welcome the attention. [Info from: [Newsweek on-line](#)]

(6) Looting and lynching in Tikrit after the Iraqi army takeover: Shi'ite militiamen **have been seen looting** shops/homes, torching buildings, and taking revenge on ISIS prisoners by stabbing them or slitting their throats.

(7) Book discussion: Last night I attended a discussion at the Goleta Public Library about the "UCSB Reads" book selection for 2015, *Orange Is the New Black*. I am still reading the book, alongside a couple of other partially read books, and will review it in the near future. The panel members were a professor of women's studies, who presented a feminist viewpoint, a counseling and school psychology professor, who focused on the issues of re-entry into society after serving time, and a writing instructor who has been assigning Piper Kerman's book to her students. Many interesting ideas were presented, but the following fact, offered by a prison activist and volunteer, and confirmed by a panel member, stuck in my mind: Where family/conjugal visits are allowed in prison, men receive far more visitors than women. This reflects poorly on men.

2015/04/01 (Wednesday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Ideal beauty for the British: A two-month-long study asked participants to describe ideal features in a face and then used UK police's composite-drawing software to put together a composite of perfect female and male faces. The same survey identified Natalie Portman and David Gandy as the most attractive female and male celebrities. [[Full story](#)]

(2) Quote of the day: "Hatred is the coward's revenge for being intimidated." ~ George Bernard Shaw

(3) Friendly soccer match: Sweden defeated Iran 3-1. The first goal appeared to be offside. Iran's goal came on a penalty kick. [[Match highlights](#)]

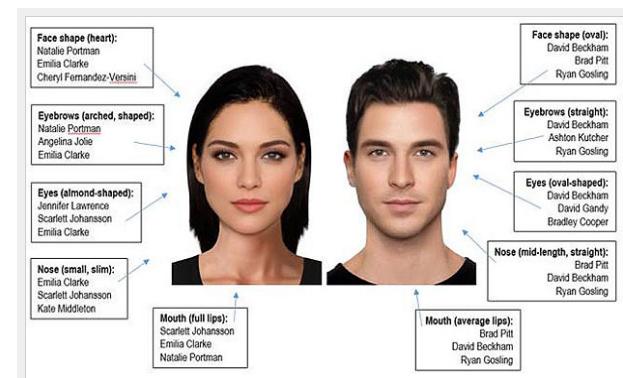
(4) Something to be thankful for: Lucky me! The shampoo I use has "clinically proven technology" (according to a prominently displayed statement on the bottle). Does anyone know where results of clinical trials for shampoos are published?

(5) Ted Cruz and his wife **to sign up for Obamacare**: This sounds like an April fool's joke, but it's real. The couple, currently covered under Heidi Cruz's Goldman Sachs plan, will have to get insurance from an exchange, now that she has decided to take a leave to help her husband's presidential campaign, a primary focus of which is to repeal "every word" of the Affordable Care Act.

(6) Soothing piano music: Bebo Valdes and Chucho Valdes play "[Tres Palabras](#)" on two pianos.

(7) Five countries are responsible for most of the world's executions: China 1000+; Iran 289+; Saudi Arabia 90+; Iraq 61+; USA 35. [Data from: Amnesty International]

(8) A cringe-worthy remark: Just when you think you have heard the most abhorrent statement about rape, comes an even more lunatic one. While discussing a sexual assault bill, Connecticut lawmaker Mike Bocchino (citing his party affiliation would be redundant) **has said on record** that: "At the end of the day, there are no witnesses [to rape]—at least if there are, it's a really great party." There will be apologies, no doubt, and everyone will go back to his/her own business. However, I suggest that someone should go dig up this guy's college party photos.



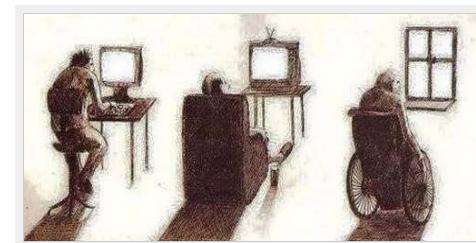
2015/03/30 (Monday): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Generational pastimes.

(2) Quote of the day: "A leader takes people where they want to go. A great leader takes people where they don't necessarily want to go but ought to be." ~ Activist Rosalynn Carter

(3) Word puzzle: What do the following seven words have in common, besides all starting with a capital letter and all having at least two repeating letters?

Assess; Banana; Dresser; Grammar; Potato; Revive; Uneven.



(4) Arabs are **uniting against ISIS and Iran**: The expansion of ISIS-held territory from Iraq and Syria into Libya, along with Iran's regional adventurism, from Syria and Lebanon to support for Houthi rebels in Yemen, has alarmed Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and other Arab powers (as well as Pakistan), pushing them toward military

cooperation. This isn't necessarily good news, given that both Saudi Arabia and Pakistan are known to have supported terrorists and extremist groups.

(5) Dueling biographies of Steve Jobs: Walter Isaacson's 2011 authorized biography of the tech whiz, simply called *Steve Jobs*, was quite successful, garnering good reviews and selling 3M copies. Now comes a competing account by Brent Schlender and Rick Tetzeli (*Becoming Steve Jobs: The Evolution of a Reckless Upstart Into a Visionary Leader*) that focuses on Jobs' transformation between 1985, when he was ousted from Apple, and 1997, when he returned to lead Apple to its iconic status. Jobs' friends and former co-workers are more enthusiastic about the new book, because, according to Tim Cook, Apple's new CEO, Isaacson's book depicts Jobs as "a greedy, selfish egomaniac." [Source: *Time* magazine, issue of April 6, 2015.]

(6) Final thought for the day: "He who knows how to be poor knows everything." ~ Jules Michelet

2015/03/29 (Sunday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) So long, spring break: My brief break is over and UCSB's spring quarter classes will begin in full force tomorrow. The first week of the quarter will be quite hectic, given intensive academic advising and organizational workload, not to mention the administration of our twice-a-year PhD screening exam. I will settle into my usual routine by mid-April and will start the countdown to summer!

(2) Quote of the day: "The car doesn't know if I'm a man or a woman, and it doesn't care." ~ Professional race-car driver Julia Landauer

(3) Salary reduction for improper hijab: A group of 36 members of parliament in Iran have introduced [a bill](#) that includes several provisions, including greater restrictions and stiffer penalties on satellite dishes, police fines for lack of improper hijab in public places, and salary reduction of up to 30% for government employees whose hijabs are deemed to be deficient (it is explicated that such monetary penalties will not prevent separate criminal charges). In regards to how women are viewed, there is no fundamental difference between the Iranian regime, ISIS, the Taliban, and the Saudi regime (which, instead of teaching men early on that women are not objects to be taken at the slightest opportunity, bans women's driving on account that if they have a car breakdown while driving alone, they will be raped on the roadside).

(4) The Ebola outbreak turns one: There are signs of hope on this first anniversary of the big scare. Outside the small region composed of Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea, with ~25,000 cases and more than 10,000 deaths, the total number of detected cases has been 35. This limited scope indicates success in containing the spread of the epidemic, after a rather slow initial response. Two of the three heavily affected countries show sharp reduction in the weekly number of new cases, with Guinea being the only hot spot as of March 2015. [Source: *Time* magazine, issue of April 6, 2015.]

(5) Our world's future rests on water resources: It is estimated that by 2030, 40% of the world's water needs won't be met, if current trends continue. [Source: *Time* magazine, issue of April 6, 2015.]

(6) Boston VA Hospital's brain bank: Brains and brain samples donated to the bank are facilitating research that will benefit as many as 0.5M US veterans of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars who have been diagnosed with PTSD. [Source: *Time* magazine, issue of April 6, 2015.]

(7) The other 'Titanic': When a German U-boat sank the luxury ocean liner **Lusitania** on May 7, 1915, more than 3 years after Titanic's demise, 1198 lives were lost. Among the ship's passengers were 42 who had received a dream upgrade to the doomed ship, when the British Admiralty commandeered their original vessel, Cameronia, headed for Liverpool out of New York harbor. [Source: *Time* magazine, issue of April 6, 2015.]

2015/03/28 (Saturday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Iranian women are breaking every stereotype: Would you have guessed that this Iranian woman (Atousa Pourkashian) is a chess grandmaster and winner of the 2010 Women's Asian Chess Championship?

(2) Geeky version of the Passover story: Technion mechanical engineering and architecture/town-planning students get ready for Passover by telling its story via an elaborate [Rube Goldberg contraption](#).

(3) Couple playing one guitar: This is yet another one of those skillful musical exercises that leaves the viewer speechless. [[3-minute video](#)]

(4) Poet Yaghma Golrouee's ode to Iranian women: He recites/sings his poem "Rahaee" ("Emancipation") in this [3-minute musical tribute](#).

(5) Best surprises ever: Returning members of the US military [surprise their kids](#) in class and elsewhere.

(6) On why women aren't allowed to drive in Saudi Arabia: [This discussion](#) is hilarious. Listen to all of it, but here are some highlights. The cleric defending the Saudi driving ban on women says that if a woman drives alone and her car breaks down, she will be raped on the roadside. The hostess counters that women drive alone in the West without any problems. He replies that Western women don't care if they are raped, but being raped in a big deal in Saudi Arabia. The hostess asks about the possibility of male drivers raping their female passengers. He proposes this solution: Hire foreign women to drive Saudi women. Good grief!



(7) Protection from sniper fire: Residents of a neighborhood in Aleppo, Syria, have used 3 upended buses to **protect themselves** from the Assad regime's snipers.

(8) Sweden's feminist foreign minister challenges Saudi Arabia: Margot Wallstrom's denouncement of the Kingdom's dismal record in the area of women's rights (and human rights more generally) has caused an outrage in the Arab world, with several countries, as well as The Organization of Islamic Cooperation, accusing Sweden of failing to respect the world's "rich and varied ethical standards." If only politicians in other Western countries were brave enough to follow suit.

2015/03/27 (Friday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Chinese students go to great lengths in cheating: It is not unusual to body-search students at Chinese universities to confiscate cheating devices that include modified cell phones, pens with built-in communication gear, and even erasers with tiny electronics and display units. This photo shows a camera-equipped pair of glasses and a coin that acts as a receiver.



(2) Ellen/Target honor and reward the **best kindergarten teacher ever**: Sonya Romero, teaching at Lew Wallace Elementary in Albuquerque, NM, does everything she can for her kids, going as far as adopting two of them.

(3) Nine-year-old boy simultaneously **solves two Rubik's cubes** on a talent show, using 1 hand and 2 feet.

(4) Engineer-in-the-making: Extraordinary **problem-solving skills**.

(5) Gymnast/ballerina performs to "**Dance of Leaves**" (composed and played by Fariborz Lachini).

(6) Taliban leaders' luxurious lives: "[Qatar] provides its Taliban guests and their families with every comfort: luxury SUVs, free medical care and air-conditioned homes the size of small castles. 'Their bathrooms are bigger than our living rooms,' says an Afghan who has done plumbing jobs for Taliban households in Doha. 'The service they get is like a five-star hotel,' says a Kabul-based Afghan intelligence officer who specializes in tracking Taliban activities in Doha. ... According to an Afghan diplomat in Qatar, the Taliban there practically have room service: 'Every morning a delivery van drives right up to each one's residence to fill orders for fresh meat, vegetables, fruit and whatever else they might need.' [From: [Newsweek on-line post](#) of March 24, 2015.]

(7) Can a dying language be saved? This **New Yorker article** begins by listing the names of a few individuals, each of whom is the last known speaker of some language. There are other languages whose situation isn't as dire; they may have hundreds or a few thousand speakers. Are such languages destined to die? Should anyone care? In other words, are they worth saving?

(8) A rape victim **shares her temporary distrust** of all men: "Rape feels like a stain I could never wash off, or a cigarette burn permanently etched on my skin. When I stand next to a man, I feel smaller and more powerless as I'm observing the size of his hands, or the width between his shoulder blades. ... I know I will learn to love men again, but, more importantly, I will learn to trust men without being overly cautious or naive. I believe recognizing that, alone, is the first step in the healing process, and it's a step I'm ready to take."

2015/03/26 (Thursday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Iran beats Chile 2-0 in friendly soccer match: This was Chile's next-to-last warmup game before it hosts Copa America in June. [[Match highlights](#)]

(2) German plane's crash in the Alps was deliberate: **Newsweek reports** that the 28-year-old co-pilot, Andreas Guenter Lubitz, pressed the descent button when the pilot was locked out of the cockpit and was trying desperately to re-enter it.

(3) Some killings/deaths are all over the news, others are ignored: Between 2001 and 2012, 6410 women were murdered in the US by an intimate partner using a gun—more than the total number of US troops killed during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars combined. [Source: Women Against Gun Violence]

(4) Archaeological sensation: *Time* magazine's term used in its issue of March 30, 2015, to describe a 250-year-old pretzel discovered in Germany.

(5) Joke of the day: Book 1 to Book 2: "You look so much thinner since you had your appendix removed."

(6) Persian music: Young singer and band do a great job covering the old song "**Gol Oomad, Bahar Oomad**" ("Flowers and Spring Have Arrived").

(7) Ultimate engineering efficiency in **making shish-kebobs**.

(8) Good news on carbon emissions: In the global energy sector's 2014 stats, carbon emissions showed no change, marking the first time in 40 years that emissions have stalled without a simultaneous economic slowdown. [Source: *Time* magazine, issue of March 30, 2015.]

2015/03/25 (Wednesday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Israelis have again **crossed red lines** in their spying operations within the US: According to *Newsweek*, this isn't the first time. They had been warned before and had agreed to curtail their spying on the US, but each

time, they went right back to their old ways. More leaks are to be expected in the near future, now that the spying feud is in the open.

(2) Classical music and rhythmic dance music **blended together**, with wonderful results.

(3) Modern Persian music: Live performance of "**Shohar-e Pooldar**" ("Rich Husband") by Rana Mansour.

(4) Tribute to Mahasti: This tribute to the late Iranian singer has been posted by several friends, but not being a fan of her, I had not paid much attention. Now I see that the **10-minute video**, featuring a medley of Mahasti's songs, performed by Leila Forouhar, Helen, Hengameh, and Sepideh, is quite well-done.

(5) Persian Festival in India: Hundreds of Indian artists work for two months to prepare a magnificent setting for a festival that celebrates Persian architecture, cuisine, music, and dance. This **10-minute video** is from 2012.

(6) Driving while texting: Nearly 1 in 5 drivers (18%) "cannot resist the urge" to send or read texts while on the road. [Source: *Time* magazine, issue of March 30, 2015.]

(7) Method of preparing rice can reduce its calories by half: A Sri Lankan researcher has discovered that adding coconut oil to boiling water before adding the rice, and then chilling the cooked rice for one hour before serving it, can cut down the quickly digestable starch content. **The article** leaves the all-important tah-dig question unanswered, though.

(8) Economic facts about Millennials: In October 2014, The Council of Economic Advisers published **a report** that outlines how Millennials (the largest and most diverse generation in the US population, composed of those born between 1980 and 2004) are different from the generations before (Generation X, 1965-1980; Baby Boomers, 1946-1964; Silent Generation, 1928-1945) and after (Homeland Generation, 2005-present). To me, the most unexpected facts among the 15 listed are #11 (they are staying with their early-career employers longer) and #14 (they are less likely to be homeowners).

2015/03/23 (Monday): Here are four items of potential interest.

(1) UCSB's Computer Engineering Program and its College of Engineering are ranked 12th among public universities' graduate schools in the US, according to **US News & World Report**.

(2) NCAA basketball **Sweet-16 teams chosen**: Three of the four regional top seeds (Duke, Kentucky, Wisconsin) made it into the Sweet 16. Villanova was eliminated by the 8th-seeded NC State in the East regionals. UCLA will face Gonzaga in the South regionals, after escaping with a 1-point victory over SMU in Round 1 and beating UAB convincingly in Round 2.

(3) German airline's Airbus crashes in the French Alps: At least 150 people are feared dead; there are no signs of survivors. Recovery efforts are complicated by the worsening weather conditions and the need for personnel to hike for several hours to get to the crash site.

(4) Final thought for the day: When your right to own guns clashes with my family's right to be safe from gun violence, we have to talk. You can't assume that your right takes precedence over my family's! [My reflection on multiple incidents of "accidental" gun death/injury in recent days.]

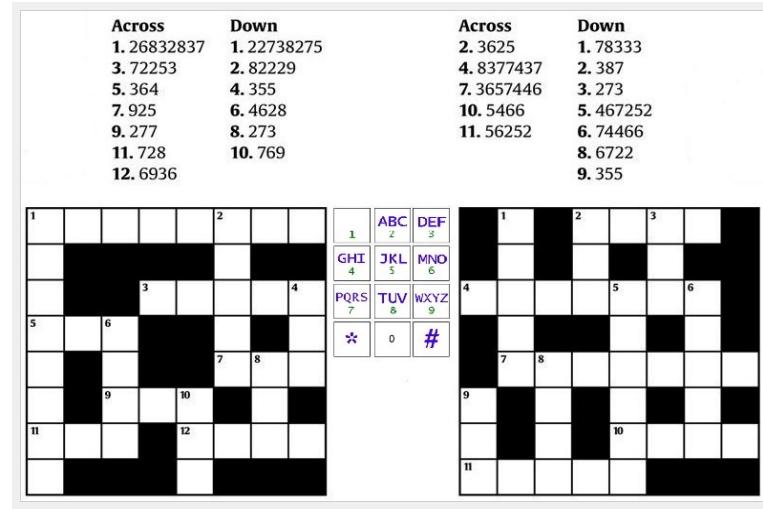
2015/03/21 (Saturday): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Two animals-themed TXTPERT puzzles from *USA Today*: Clue words are given using the telephone keypad numerical codes. For example, 234 represents a word that has its first letter is in {A, B, C}, second letter in {D, E, F}, and third letter in {G, H, I}. A possible word is "BEG," but there are often several possibilities.

(2) Iraqi forces reciprocate ISIS atrocities: Apologist Web sites refer to the tortured, beheaded, and mutilated prisoners as Zio-Wahhabis, as if exacting such cruelties can be justified (**graphic content**). [Perform a search for "Zio-Wahhabi ISIS Prisoners" if you want to see, and can stomach, even more graphic content.]

(3) The Titanic Museum in Branson, Missouri: Housed in a half-scale replica of the front half of the doomed oceanliner, the **two-story museum** contains replicas of the grand staircase, the dining hall, cabins of various types, and the bridge, along with 400 recovered artifacts. Each visitor is handed a ticket bearing the name of an actual Titanic passenger and s/he finds out at the end of the visit whether that person lived or died.

(4) Overweight TV anchor's on-air **response to a viewer** who called her fat. Priceless!



(5) Traveling north for 3 days: I had been looking forward to the LACMA's 3/22 Norooz event in Los Angeles. However, an opportunity arose to visit a close college buddy who has taken up temporary residence in the SF Bay Area with his family and who will be visited by a third college classmate for Norooz. So, I have decided to drive north after our family's Norooz gathering tonight to have a mini-reunion with these friends, whom I have not seen for many years.

2015/03/20 (Friday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) A Norooz message to Persian speakers around the world: For many years now, I have composed a cheerful traditional Persian poem celebrating the arrival of spring and renewal of nature, as well as the Iranian New Year festival. Here is the 2015 (1394) edition. An English translation follows.

Let's put winter to bed, spring is about to rise
The fields are all bejeweled, they seem like paradise
Brighter is our daytime, from the buoyant rays of sun

Moonshine makes our evening full of earnest fun
Gentle breeze and raindrops supply much needed lift
To greenery and flowers, they offer a precious gift
Prancing with delight, dancing too, you must
Follow the nightingale, sing with blissful lust
Lushness, fortune, and joy, are slated to arrive
If your heart's wide open, therein love will thrive

[Note 1: The initials of the half-verses spell the poem's title: "Pirooz Norooz" = "Winsome/Triumphant Norooz"]

[Note 2: Interested readers can find my Norooz poems from prior years on my [poetry page](#).]

[Note 3: This poem was also published in [Iranian.com](#) and was sent to the [#Nowruzgan](#) Facebook page.]

(2) Chance for better US-Iran relations may not come again soon: In his [2015 Norooz message](#), President Obama expressed hope that Iran will choose improved relations between the two countries over continued global isolation and hardships for the Iranian people.

(3) Stuart Parkin wins the Millennium Technology Prize: The million-euro prize, sponsored by the Technology Academy Finland foundation, went to the British scientist for his role in the design of a novel read/write head that enabled denser data recording on magnetic disks and thus a significant increase in storage capacity.

(4) Can you trust your fridge? This is the title of an article in *IEEE Spectrum* magazine, issue of March 2015, warning us about security flaws in the latest fad, the Internet of Things, which promises to connect all of our belongings and allow us to control them digitally and remotely. We may protect our laptops and smartphones with the latest security products, but if intruders get into our systems through our appliances, all bets are off.

(5) What a determined and resourceful old lady! [[1-minute video](#)]

(6) Classical Persian music: The Mah Banoo ensemble performs "[Ma Ra Bas](#)" ("It's Enough for Us").

(7) The ubiquitous camera: This is the title of a news report in *IEEE Spectrum* magazine, issue of March 2015, in which it is noted that cameras have changed from lifetime investments to throw-away items. Kodak has gone bankrupt and the most frequently used camera is made by a phone manufacturer. Meanwhile, photos have turned from treasured keepsakes to personal propaganda. The report ends thus: "So now when I walk about with my ever-ready camera, I'm not looking so much for pretty sunsets or tourist attractions. I'm thinking, how will this look on Facebook?"

(8) Today's solar eclipse, coinciding with a supermoon, [as seen from a plane](#) in Faroe Islands.

2015/03/19 (Thursday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) Optical illusion: The yellow and blue bars move in tandem, but the black bars make it appear that they jump forward at different times.

(2) Photos of snowflakes: Michael Peres, Photography Professor at Rochester Institute of Technology, has an impressive collection of snowflake photos [on Instagram](#) that show each one is truly unique.

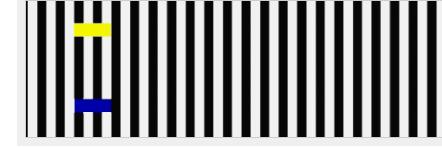
(3) Okay, we get it that 90-somethings can dance and have fun doing it: Now, could everyone please stop posting these videos and focus on young, agile, and highly skillful dancers in future posts? Thank you!

(4) On Friday 3/20, watch out for [three celestial events](#) coinciding: The spring equinox that also marks the beginning of the Persian New Year and the Norooz festival; Supermoon, that is, a full moon that appears particularly large because the moon is closest to Earth in its orbit; Solar eclipse, which will be more spectacular, given the larger than usual full-moon circle.

پیروز نوروز

پ	پُشتِ سَرِ اسْپِند و دَرِ روِ فَرَوْدِين
ي	يَكْسَرَه شَدَ دَشَت فَرَدوْس بَرِين
ر	رَوز نُورُوشْن زَ خُورَشِيدِ أَمِيد
و	وَزْ مَهِ تَابَان شَبَانَگَه چُون نِگَين
ز	زَنَدَه بَاغ وَ گَلْ زَ بَارَان وَ نَسِيم
ن	نَور آزادَى است اين جَشَن زَمِين
و	وَقْت دَسَت افْشَانَى وَ پَا كَوبَى است
ر	رازِ دِل بَلْبَل سَرَايِد پُر طَنِين
و	وَجَد وَ شَادَابِي وَ بَهْرَوْزِي رَسَد
ز	زَنَدَگَى با عِشَق چُون گَرَندَ قَرِين

بَهْرَوْز پَرَهَا مَى، نُورُوز ۱۳۹۴



(5) Quote of the day: "In Henry Petroski's magisterial account of the design of pencils, the names of individuals can be forgotten, but the 'World Pencil War' of the 1890s, ignited by German dominance and American fear of dependence on foreign pencils, cannot be." ~ G. Pascal Zachary, writing in *IEEE Spectrum* magazine, issue of March 2015, on engineering innovation being more a team effort than individual brilliance

(6) You have seen a lot of ice-bucket-challenge videos: Here are **the bloopers** you probably didn't see.

(7) Khamenei's official Web site lists his **most "popular" statements** for the Iranian year 1393: At #1 is this statement: "Our nation loves to fight the Zionists."

(8) How eating chicken meat affects human reproduction: This **Islamic regime ideologue** justifies the dearth of chicken meat (and its exorbitant price) in Iran's market by saying that the type of chicken raised with lots of antibiotics causes the male sexual organ to shrink to less than an inch. He goes on to attribute this to a conspiracy carried out by the British and the Jews to prevent Muslims from reproducing. What he fails to mention is why the highly capable Islamic regime cannot raise better chickens that have the opposite effect!

(9) A win-win proposition: According to **Bloomberg News**, Dominion Resources, the third largest US utility owner, is building a solar farm in Virginia on land leased from tobacco giant Philip Morris. I hope this welcome trend continues, as creating more clean energy and fewer harmful tobacco products will benefit everyone.

2015/03/18 (Wednesday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) The Persian haft-seen: This is the traditional table setting in preparation for the arrival of spring and the Norooz festival at the beginning of the Persian New Year. I take this opportunity to wish everyone a joyous spring and an auspicious Norooz.



(2) A cat's revenge. [[1-minute video](#)]

(3) English teacher wins \$1M: Nancie Atwell, winner of the **Global Teacher Prize**, will donate the full \$1M prize money to the Center for Teaching and Learning which she founded in 1990.

(4) Inverted priorities: One reason American homes are more cluttered than ever is that it is now cheaper to stuff your home with discretionary purchases. Whereas necessities, such as college tuition, medical care, rent, and groceries, have increased in price between 25% (groceries) and 55% (tuition) in the last 10 years, discretionary items such as toys and televisions have become cheaper by 65% or more. [Info from: *Time* magazine, issue of March 23, 2015.]

(5) Deadly attack on Tunisian museum: Nineteen people, including 17 tourists, are reportedly dead as a result of a **terrorist attack** on the National Museum in the capital of Tunisia. ISIS may have been behind the attack.

(6) Lost an engine? No problem, you've got 17 more! NASA is said to be experimenting with a small plane having 18 electric-motor-driven engines on its wings (I actually counted 20 engines on the image accompanying the [Time magazine article](#)).

(7) Joel Stein is truly ticked off by Time Warner Cable: In his *Time* magazine column, issue of March 23, 2015, he writes that he recently had all services disconnected (switching to phone-company Internet service and doing away with cable TV altogether), after a very unpleasant customer-service experience. "They transferred me eight different times, sometimes to departments I'd already spoken with, each time making me repeat my name, address and account number before telling me their department couldn't help me. This is when I thought of a brilliant Internet startup idea of letting me hire a person in India by the hour to talk to my cable company's customer-service representative in India."

(8) Final thought for the day: "For my part I know nothing with any certainty, but the sight of the stars makes me dream." ~ Vincent Van Gogh

2015/03/17 (Tuesday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) Chaharshanbeh Soori (a prelude to Norooz): Tonight, the eve of the Persian calendar year's final Wednesday, is when Iranians celebrate by jumping over bonfires, while chanting: "My yellow is yours, your red is mine." With this "purification rite," one wishes that the fire would take away sickness and other problems and in return provide warmth and redness (a yellow face conveys sickness, while redness of face is a sign of health).



(2) RIP, Internet Explorer: Microsoft has announced that the "**e**" **browser will be retired** in favor of a still unnamed one, to be included with Windows 10.

(3) Walking-on-water magic trick: In the past, friends have posted videos showing people who seem to walk on water in a pool, with multiple new posts appearing over the past couple of days. Here's [how it is done](#), courtesy of a masked magician, who has exposed other magic tricks in the past.

(4) Top 15 worst passwords of 2014 (many of these were also on the worst list for 2013, per SplashData's stats, reported in *IEEE Computer* magazine, issue of March 2015): 123456; password; 12345; 12345678; qwerty; 123456789; 1234; baseball; dragon; football; 1234567; monkey; letmein; abc123; 111111

(5) Fake Irish blessings, in honor of St. Patrick's Day:

May the wind style your hair in unexpected ways!

May the park be full of cool dogs and well-behaved children!

May you dance without embarrassment to yourself or others!

May the clouds overhead be dramatic but never threatening!

May you find a vivid escape from reality in every afternoon nap!

(6) The next Clinton presidency: *Time* magazine, issue of March 23, 2015, has a feature about the Clintons, bearing the title "The Clinton Way." For as long as I can remember, the Clintons have been under attack and investigation. One thing about Hilary Clinton that I can't say about any other potential Democratic candidate is this: If after all the attacks and investigations the most damaging information about her is that she used a private e-mail account, then she can't be that bad.

(7) Guilty as charged: Americans have more possessions than any society in history. US children make up about 3% of the global kid population, but American families buy 40% of the world's toys. Three quarters of families surveyed in one study had garages so full that there was no room for their cars inside. I have been trying to get rid of junk by donating or tossing them, but given that the process is time-intensive, I am using my garage to store the items until I can go through them carefully to see what to keep and what to lose.

(8) Tonight, I attended a concert by Jason Mraz: The event, held at Santa Barbara's beautiful Arlington Theater, featured Raining Jane, a girls' rock-folk band composed of UCLA graduates Mai Bloomfield, Becky Gebhardt, Chaska Potter, and Mona Tavakoli (who have been performing together since 1999). The band has co-written songs with Jason Mraz and has collaborated with him on his latest album, "Yes." The concert, filled with great music and lots of humor, was very enjoyable.

(9) Final thought for the day: "The quickest way for a mother to get her children's attention is to sit down and look comfortable." ~ Anonymous

2015/03/15 (Sunday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Ganymede contains more water than Earth:

The Hubble Space Telescope's surveillance has revealed a host of new information about the **Jupiter moon**, which is the biggest moon in the Solar System. Previously, Galileo spacecraft's observations had provided a hint of water on Ganymede, but the results were inconclusive.

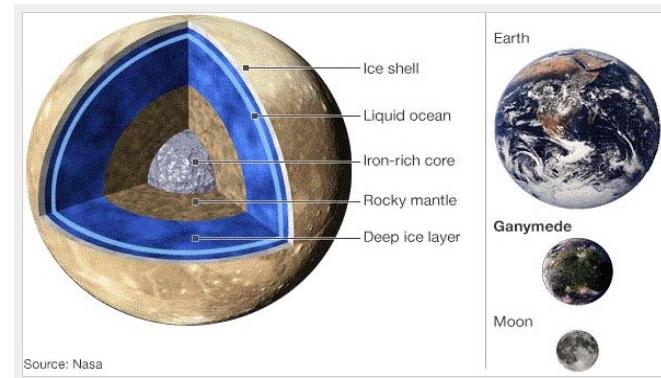
(2) Surveillance Barbie: Citing privacy concerns, children's advocates are trying to shut down "Hello Barbie," a **WiFi-connected doll** recently announced by Mattel, because it could be used to spy on kids and to exploit them commercially.

(3) Norooz message from Tajikistan: Iranian poetess Hila Sedighi has started a #Nowruzgan page on which everyone can post a positive Norooz message, in part to counter the constant stream of bad news emerging from the Middle East region. Here is the **message of Mojgan**, a Tajik woman. I will be posting my traditional Norooz poem for 2015 to that page soon.

(4) Modern Persian music: Rana sings "**Baroon**" ("Rain").

(5) Calm down about that **Republican letter to Iran**: It's not treason. "Such a display, while certainly an ostentatious act of political theater, is not unprecedented."

(6) Moonshots for the 21st Century: This was the theme of today's "Fareed Zakaria GPS" program on CNN, outlining a number of grand-challenge problems that will likely be solved in the current century. Subjects included 3D-printing of human organs (making it possible to print a human heart with better design, such as multiple redundant arteries where currently there is just one), manned trip to Mars (requiring a landing module 10-20 times heavier than the one used for the Mars Rover), creating a star on Earth (maintaining the highest temperature in the Solar System and providing an endless supply of clean energy), traveling at 5 times the speed of sound (making any point on Earth reachable in less than 4 hours), and full mapping of the human brain (unleashing the powers of our mind and allowing knowledge to be uploaded into the brain). A final note considered the question of whether the US will achieve these feats first, or other countries are poised to take the lead. Unfortunately, after decades of undisputed leadership in science and technology, the US position is deteriorating. US funding for research has barely kept pace with inflation, thus making it difficult to take on such big and bold projects.



(7) UCSB receptions for high-achieving freshman applicants: Yesterday and today, I attended receptions at the LAX Sheraton Gateway to represent the Computer Engineering Program in UCSB's efforts to attract some highly qualified freshman applicants to our campus. The receptions were well-attended on both days and entailed a general session in the main ballroom and breakout sessions for various colleges to answer major-specific questions on the part of the applicants.

2015/03/14 (Saturday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Pi Day 2015 is very special: March 14 is Pi Day, because 3/14 contains the first three digits of pi. This year, some time in the morning of 3/14, the date/time notation, the way it is written in the US, will contain 10 digits of pi: 3/14/15-9:26:53; in fact, if one includes fractions of second (milliseconds, microseconds, nanoseconds, and so on), one can include more digits of pi in the date/time notation.



(2) Distinguished lecture on Friday 3/13: Leslie Lamport (one of the pioneers of reliable distributed systems, now with Microsoft Research) asked the rhetorical question, "Who Builds a Skyscraper without Drawing Blueprints?" Blueprints for computer hardware and software are known as specifications, but many software designers delve into coding without bothering with formal specifications. Lamport proceeded to describe TLA+ (temporal logic of actions) as a successful system for describing the safety and liveness properties of complex distributed systems. For those who are interested, an earlier version of this talk is [available on YouTube](#).

(3) US dominates top-10 engineering schools: The top 5 schools are MIT, Stanford, Berkeley, Caltech, and Princeton, with UCLA placed 10th, in the list of best engineering schools, according to Times Higher Education World University Rankings. In positions 6-9 are Cambridge, Oxford, ETH Zurich, and Imperial College London. UCSB is placed 20th. Some of the surprises on the list are National University of Singapore at #13, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology at #21, and China's Tsinghua University at #24. [[The complete list](#)]

(4) University of Illinois to begin **engineering-based medical school**: Other universities with strong engineering programs, and either medical schools or access to nearby health networks, may follow suit, given the growing importance of technology in health monitoring and administration.

(5) A word puzzle, from *USA Today*: This puzzle involves stringing together 8 words, such that any 2 consecutive words form a common expression. Here is an example: Will Not Home Theater Ticket Agent Orange Blossom. Now, supply the intermediate six words in this chain: Skeet _____ Strap

(6) Ballet magic: Incredible skill in doing magic tricks while dancing. Magicians often hide things in their sleeves, but this woman **has no sleeves**, or much clothing for that matter.

(7) Water-skiers put on **dolphin-like moves** with water-jet footwear.

2015/03/13 (Friday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) World population distribution and trends: I heard an explanation similar to the one shown on this map on "Fareed Zakaria GPS." In rough numbers, there are 1B people in each of three continents (the Americas, Europe, Africa), with the remaining 4B of the world's 7B people being in Asia. However, given that the Asian part of Russia is sparsely populated and accounting for southwestern Asia, the circle does hold a majority of the world's population.



Alarmingly, it is projected that by the end of the current century, the circle shown above will have 6B people and Africa will undergo two population doublings to 4B, while Europe and the Americas will remain at around 1B each, owing to very low growth. Taking half of the Americas and half of Europe as constituting Western-style democracies, they will hold about 8% of the world's population by the end of this century, around half of the current fraction.

(2) Historical **1939 footage** of the Shah's marriage to his first wife, Queen Fouzieh (Fawzia Fuad).

(3) Roudkhan Castle in Iran's Guilan province, in [four photos](#).

(4) Medical 3D holograms: Physicians can now handle a **holographic model** of a human fetus or body part in real time to experiment and to see details than cannot be seen using existing technologies, without opening up the patient.

(5) UCSB Reads: This is the name of a program offered by our campus and local public libraries to have students, faculty, and staff, as well as Santa Barbara and Goleta community members, read a selected book and discuss their impressions in various gatherings, thus contributing to a sense of community. Last evening, I attended one such gathering at the beautiful Santa Barbara Public Library (downtown), in which three panel members discussed their takes on this year's selection, *Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Women's Prison*, by Piper Kerman. I attended the get-together, even though I have just begun reading the book. The panel

members included Auli Ek, a writing instructor at UCSB (who liked the book but thought it was a bit too self-centered), Dr. Charles Nicholson, a physician and a County Medical Director for Alcohol, Drug & Mental Health (who thought the author has done a great service by bringing these issues to front), and a UCSB Theater & Dance faculty member, Michael Morgan (who leads the Odyssey Project to engage youth from a juvenile detention facility).

(6) Modern Persian music: "[Wals-e Noroozi](#)" ("Norooz Waltz").

(7) My three-day trip south: After holding office hours and attending a lecture on campus this morning, I'll be heading to San Diego to visit an old friend and colleague who is in Carlsbad for the week. I will then head back to LAX Sheraton, where I will represent UC Santa Barbara's Computer Engineering Program at Saturday and Sunday receptions for high-achieving freshman applicants, whom we hope to recruit to UCSB.

2015/03/11 (Wednesday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) Norooz 2015 celebration at the White House: [Michelle Obama hosted](#) the event today, March 11.

(2) During a flight delay, Port City Sound barbershop quartet treated the passengers to its [beautiful music](#).

(3) More Yanni concert music: I had posted another piece of this same concert a while ago. Masterful violin and harp solos are featured prominently in [this one](#).

(4) The little [Kurdish drummer boy](#).

(5) On the meaning of consent: In case you encounter someone who doesn't understand the notion of "consent" in sexual relations, show them [this article](#) that explains it very clearly.

(6) Iran to limit women's access to birth control: [Two separate bills](#), one already passed by the parliament and awaiting approval by the Guardian Council and another one being discussed, seek to boost the country's declining birth rates by blocking access to birth control. If enacted, these laws will reverse decades of progress in the areas of family planning and reproductive health. The bills will also make women more prone to domestic violence, because some of their provisions discourage the police and judges from intervening in family disputes.

(7) Persian music: In [this video](#), with English translation of the lyrics, Nasrin sings "Jorm-e Zan Boodan" ("The Curse of Womanhood"). [An appropriate song for today, in view of the immediately preceding news item.]

(8) Humor: NASA before PowerPoint (1961). [[Photo](#)]

(9) Flowers that look like [human figurines or animals](#).

2015/03/10 (Tuesday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Ideas are like rabbits. You get a couple and learn how to handle them, and pretty soon you have a dozen." ~ John Steinbeck

(2) A heartwarming [video message](#) from Israelis to Iranians.

[P.S.: This video probably dates back to before Benjamin Netanyahu's recent address to a joint session of the US Congress, but it can be viewed as an apt response to that speech.]

(3) UAE chosen over Iran as host the 2019 Asian Cup tournament: The Asian Football Confederation's vote for United Arab Emirates was unanimous. UAE had previously hosted the games in 1996. Citing multiple warnings by FIFA, analysts attribute Iran's non-selection to the country's ban on women's attendance at soccer matches.

(4) Fully automated sushi restaurant chain in Japan: Is this the [future of dining](#)? I hope not!

(5) How to [prepare a pomegranate](#): I should go get some to try this out.

(6) The ugly civil war in American medicine: This is the title of a [fascinating article](#) in Newsweek on-line (posted on 3/10/2015) that outlines the intensifying fight between the American Board of Internal Medicine (advocating more tests to ensure that practicing physicians meet nationally recognized standards) and activist internists, cardiologists, anesthesiologists, and the like (who maintain that the busywork created for them by ABIM serves no purpose other than to fatten the board's coffers and line the pockets of administrators). Opponents of more testing pose the provocative question: Does ABIM think that American physicians are getting dumber?

(7) Why you should always ask for a window seat: A pictorial, featuring [27 amazing photos](#) taken from an airplane window. The first photo, showing Chicago's skyline reflected in Lake Michigan under a cloud cover, is truly special (assuming it's not doctored).

(8) Fifty most perfectly timed photos: [This collection of 50 photos](#) includes a bird snatching an ice cream cone (#5), a rainbow and a lightning bolt in the same frame (#12), a crane that appears to be lifting the Eiffel Tower (#16), and blending of a woman's outfit with the sand and surf (#31).

(9) Iran's Kermanshah province, in [four annotated photos](#).

2015/03/08 (Sunday): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) March 8 is International Women's Day: Celebrating its 104th year, women of the world are excited that members of this important half of humanity have achieved so much, despite narrow-minded, and at times brutal, opposition to their full engagement.



The struggle must continue, even if it takes another century to remove all the remnants of prejudice and sexism. I searched on-line for an image to accompany this post. There seems to be no official logo used by all pertinent groups and agencies. So, I picked the one you see here, because the prominence of hair in the image is particularly apt for Iranian women who are conducting a fierce battle against mandatory hijab laws.

(2) Quote of the day: "No one gossips about other people's secret virtues." ~ Bertrand Russell

(3) On the use of "X" to denote the unknown in mathematics: [Terry Moore reveals](#) how we came to use "X" to denote an unknown quantity or entity.

[Spoiler alert: It comes from the Arabic word "shei'e" ("thing"), used to denote an unknown quantity or entity. Spain was the entry point for the works of Arab/Persian mathematicians into Europe. Because the sound "sh" is nonexistent in Spanish, it was replaced with the sound "ck" borrowed from the Greek letter "chi," which was subsequently replaced with the letter "X" from Latin, the common scientific language of the time.]

(4) Uber for packages: At least one start-up company is trying to develop an app that matches drivers and bikers with packages that need to be delivered along their routes. The idea of same-day delivery using crowd-sourcing has been around for at least a couple of years. But now ubiquitous GPS-equipped smartphones make it quite practical.

(5) Photos taken about a century apart show how [glaciers are disappearing](#).

(6) Final thought for the day: "Keep your face to the sunshine and you cannot see a shadow." ~ Helen Keller

2015/03/07 (Saturday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Never say die: Having solved many of the technological challenges of our time, Silicon Valley big shots, like PayPal's Peter Thiel, Oracle's Larry Ellison, and Google's Sergey Brin, have set their sights on achieving immortality or at least longevity. The [quest for immortality](#) has a long history. Chinese emperor Qin Shi Huang poisoned himself to death by eating supposedly mortality-preventing mercury pills around 200 BCE. In 1492, Pope Innocent VIII died after getting blood transfusions from three healthy boys in an attempt to absorb their youth. Today, the quest for longevity isn't as ridiculous, because advanced monitoring and corrective technologies render the task feasible in theory. Growing or 3D-printing of organs is already a reality.



And some researchers are thinking of getting rid of our problematic bodies altogether and replacing them with robotic or holographic avatars. Exascale computing capability, to debut in a decade or so, will make the simulation of human brain at the level of individual nerve cells possible, perhaps removing the final barrier to human preservation. Then, it will be time to worry about ethical issues of longevity. Some ethicists argue that perhaps we should start paying more attention to the way the elderly are treated today before we extend lifespans further.

(2) "We honor those who walked so we could run": [President Obama's speech](#) in Alabama, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of a peaceful civil-rights march from Selma to Montgomery on March 7, 1965, which met with police violence.

(3) A [GIF image](#) with dizzying spiral motion.

(4) Magic-eye pictures and how they work: These are [pictures hiding something](#) that emerges when 3D vision kicks in. Here is [an explanation](#) of their history and how they work. Some people (me included) are unable to see the hidden message/pattern in these images. Here are [some reasons why](#).

(5) Handy [Time magazine guide](#) to shelf lives and expiry dates of common foodstuff and household goods.

(6) A word puzzle: Find ordinary dictionary words in which the following 10 names are hiding.

_ _ JACK; _ ALAN _ _; _ _ AVA; _ EVA _ _; _ _ RITA _; LIZA _ _; _ _ TONY _; _ _ GARY; _ PHIL _; _ _ DAVE _

(7) MIT professor wins the 2015 Queen Elizabeth Prize for Engineering: Robert Langer, 66, won the British Pound 1M (\$1.5M) prize for drug-delivery research and contributions to other areas of biomedical engineering. This is a significant award that may be viewed as the "Nobel Prize" of engineering.

(8) Mass injury at Cal Poly: Drinking and partying atop an off-campus garage caused the structure's roof to collapse, [injuring 30-40](#), most of them students. Emergency personnel were amazed that nobody died.

2015/03/06 (Friday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) NASA's Dawn spacecraft [begins orbiting Ceres](#): Located in the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter, mini-planet Ceres (at one time classified as a planet) was discovered in 1801. Dawn traveled 3.1B miles in 7.5 years to get there. Among the puzzles Dawn is expected to solve for us in the coming days are the existence of polar icecaps on Ceres and sources of two bright spots, captured by Dawn's cameras on February 19. [Image credit: *USA Today*]

(2) Quote of the day: "Justin Bieber turns 21, can finally drink after



decades of patience and model behavior." ~ *Entertainment Weekly*

(3) FIFA president calls on Iran to [lift the ban](#) on women watching sporting events in stadiums.

(4) Love has no labels: This [public-service announcement](#) shows that love comes in many different shapes and forms.

(5) Hila Sedighi's Norooz message: In this [Persian-language message](#), Sedighi urges that everyone try to propagate messages of peace, hope, and humanity on social media to counter the overwhelmingly negative messages of death, destruction, and economic hardship that dominate the news from the Middle East.

(6) Here's a physical challenge for those who are looking for one: Climb this [91-meter-high spiral staircase](#) (that's about 300 feet) in China's Taihang Mountains.

(7) [Optical illusion](#): As the striped pattern moves in front of the background image, some hidden structure is revealed. This scheme can be viewed as a form of secret encoding, with the striped pattern constituting the decoding key.

(8) Brain-inspired computing: This is the title of a research talk by Karlheinz Meier (U. Heidelberg) that I attended this afternoon. For computing to be brain-inspired or brain-derived, a complete understanding of how the brain works is unnecessary. Instead, researchers can draw upon whatever partial understanding there exists to attain some of the positive attributes of the brain in computational devices. One such attribute is the brain's extreme power/energy efficiency. The human brain operates on about 20 W, whereas modern high-end microprocessors that can do only a tiny, tiny fraction of the brain's work need more than 100 W. Other attributes of the brain include its robustness and fault tolerance. Robustness means that the brain achieves its computational goals, even if individual neurons are highly variable in their performance parameters. Fault tolerance means that neurons, or in fact chunks of the brain, can malfunction or even die and the brain will find a workaround to perform its critical tasks. The kind of brain-inspired computing that the speaker discussed entails the use of analog circuitry, which are assisted in scheduling and communication functions by digital elements. There are competing approaches to brain-derived computing which include fully-digital, neural-network-based schemes. One tidbit about the human brain that I learned from today's talk is that normal aging reduces the fraction of brain circuitry we can utilize from about 20% at age 20 to under 15% in old age, assuming that Alzheimer's or other degenerative diseases do not further curtail our brain activity.

2015/03/05 (Thursday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) An ancient Roman theater in Libya: This theater, one of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Libya's Leptis Magna, is being threatened by ISIS, which already controls Derna and has a significant presence in the coastal regions, including in Tripoli and Benghazi.



(2) Quote of the day: "We rarely hear the inward music, but we're all dancing to it nevertheless." ~ Rumi

(3) I never get tired of watching this music video: So much energy and skill is packed into this wonderful performance of "[Victory](#)" by Andre Rieu and Bond Girls.

(4) Abraham Maslow's [Hierarchy of needs](#): According to psychologist Maslow, as human beings, we have needs that can be represented in the form of a pyramid, with its 5 layers, from bottom to top, being: Biological and physiological; Safety (protection from harm and fear); Social (love, friendship, sense of belonging, respect); Esteem (achievement and mastery); Self-actualization (fulfillment, personal growth). Our spiritual needs are part of the topmost layer, meaning that, important as they are, we cannot meet them without first satisfying the lower-level needs. The 5-layer hierarchy was subsequently expanded to 8 layers, with two, cognitive needs (knowledge, meaning) and aesthetic needs (beauty, balance), added just under the top layer and transcendence needs (helping others achieve self-actualization) placed at the very top.

[P.S.: Religious governments try to invert this pyramid, saying that one should first seek self-actualization, but if we accept Maslow's model, there is no way one can make a pyramid stand on its head.]

(5) Modern Persian music with lyrics: Jamshid Sheibani's "[Simin Bari](#)."

(6) UK's [new engineering school](#) to launch today: The NMITE (New Model in Technology and Engineering) university will admit its first group of 300 students in September 2017 and is slated to expand to 5000 students over a decade. Meanwhile, a bill in the California legislature that allocates start-up funds for building an 11th UC campus, to serve as a public version of the private Caltech, is facing stiff [opposition in the media](#).

(7) Tonight's lecture on preserving the future: Helen Caldicott, MD, international activist in the area of medical hazards of the nuclear age and the necessary changes in human behavior to stop environmental destruction, delivered the 14th Annual Frank K. Kelly Lecture on Humanity's Future at Santa Barbara's Lobero Theater, held on the exact 45th anniversary of the Nonproliferation Treaty. The program description included the quote: "As a doctor, as well as a mother and a world citizen, I wish to practice the ultimate form of preventive medicine by ridding the earth of these technologies that propagate disease, suffering, and death." Much of what Caldicott said about the dangers of nuclear weapons and nuclear power made sense to me. It was her extreme alarmist attitude and grand pronouncements that lost me midway through her talk. The first sign of overreach came when she advised people not to eat any food made in Japan because of that country's nuclear contamination. She went further and suggested that we should not eat food made in Europe, because Chernobyl has contaminated 40% of that continent's landmass. She implied at one point that Americans and Canadians are naive, whereas Australian citizens and government know better (she is from Australia, but now lives in the US). Finally, she suggested that we use our anger as a tool in our activism against nuclear technology. She got several standing ovations from the audience. I wonder how many of those in attendance would be willing to give up one bedroom in their homes or reduce their use of electricity by 20%? If not, then what is the alternative to nuclear power while we develop less harmful energy sources? How many would not scream if taxes were raised to pay for energy R&D? From my viewpoint, activism in the area of conservation is much more effective in achieving independence from polluting energy sources (be they nuclear or high-emission) than a shouting match. Near the end of her talk, Caldicott suggested that we are on the verge of a nuclear war with Russia. This is just one more example of her alarmist approach. I understand that some of her outrageous claims are made in the service of her goal of rolling back nuclear arms and power plants, but it is rather dishonest not to impress the fact that with or without nuclear energy, conservation is still needed, or to omit any mention of climate change.

2015/03/04 (Wednesday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Today's terrorism requires little more than a camera phone, a knife and a victim." ~ Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott, on the need for tough new antiterrorism measures



(2) Canadians "Spock" their currency in honor of the late Leonard Nemoy.

(3) Mr. Spock displays emotions: The highly logical, emotionless, half-human "Star Trek" character, Mr. Spock, is shown crying in [this video clip](#). And in this [second clip](#), he falls in love.

(4) Persian comedy: Short [stand-up routine](#) about nonsensical rhymes taught to the children of 1950s/1960s Iran.

(5) Uber expands into the animal kingdom: The image shows a weasel hitching a ride on a woodpecker in a London Park.



(6) Partial results of a [Pew Research Center poll](#), asking people in 31 countries whether they were satisfied with their political system: Tanzania 67%; India 63%; Jordan 53%; Venezuela 45%; Mexico 40%; Brazil 29%; Thailand 25%; Lebanon 10%. The regional median of satisfaction was highest for Asia (60%) and lowest for the Middle East (36%).

(7) A debate on the need for America to send troops to confront ISIS: Max Boot, author of a history of guerrilla warfare, and Karl Vick, a former *Time* magazine Jerusalem bureau chief, argue for and against this proposition. Writing in *Time* magazine, issue of March 9, 2015, Boot maintains that the brutal enemy should be uprooted by direct intervention and by leading and coordinating the efforts of Iraqi and Syrian Sunni tribes. He concludes thus: "Without the support of the Sunni tribes, the West will face an impossible task in the war against ISIS." Vick believes that US intervention via sending troops will be akin to supplying pure oxygen and fresh waves of volunteers to ISIS. He ends his piece thus: "We have the planes, but this looks like a fight for guys in pickups who want to take their own country back." From my viewpoint, the situation is filled with irony. Had the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq not occurred, it would have been very likely for the US to take on ISIS directly. Looking back over US military engagements over my lifetime, I see that fighting ISIS is perhaps more justified than nearly all of the other wars, but it is also quite understandable for America and its leaders to have become war-weary.

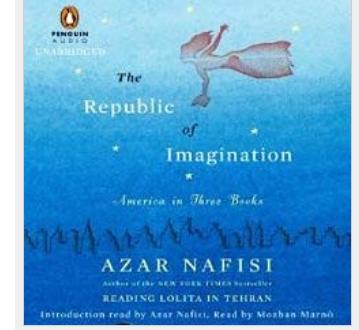
(8) Final thought for the day: "Burdens are the foundations of ease and bitter things the forerunners of pleasure." ~ Rumi

2015/03/03 (Tuesday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "Remember that little talk we had about not believing everything written in the media?" ~ Emma Watson, on rumors that she was dating Prince Harry
- (2) University of California tech campus proposed: **State legislation** has been proposed to set aside \$50M for land acquisition and initial building costs to establish a technology campus for UC, similar to the Caltech model.
- (3) UC budget decline: **University of California budget** not only has not kept pace with the rise of personal income in the state but has actually declined.
- (4) Scary ride, part II: A few days ago, I posted the video of a scary ride. Here's [another one](#).
- (5) The stew is so salty that even the chef himself is complaining: This Persian saying is an apt description of the **critical remarks** by Rahim Pour Azghadi (retired Revolutionary Guard member and one of the ideologues of the Islamic Republic). On the surface, what he says is quite reasonable, though somewhat oversimplified. One must ask, however, where he has been in the 36 years since the Islamic Regime came to power to speak as if these problems have appeared out of the blue just recently.
- (6) Facebook tries to help prevent suicides: Users of the social network will have an option of reporting a post if they believe that a friend is **thinking about suicide** (the preference is for the person reading the post to reach out himself or herself). A specialist team at Facebook then examines the reported post and reaches out to the distressed person with various kinds of messages to engage him/her or to offer a list of help resources.
- (7) Senator uses a snowball to refute global warming: Jim Inhofe, Chairman of the US Senate's Environment and Public Works Committee, **embarrassed himself**, the Republican Party, and the US government by bringing a snowball to the Senate floor as a prop for his speech refuting global warming. Taking the snowball out of a plastic bag, he asked the session chair if he knew what it was. Then, throwing the snowball forward, he proceeded to disclose: "It's a snowball, just from outside here. It's very, very cold out." Here is an apt analogy for these science-challenged politicians: If I contend that the average driving speed in Southern California is going down due to congestion on the roads, you can't refute this hypothesis by showing me video clips of officers issuing speeding tickets to drivers.
- (8) Holocaust Survivor Band: This **group of old men**, in their late 80s, draw inspiration from musical traditions of their childhood home in Poland.
- (9) Funky Friday on a Perth train: Young man persuades commuter train passengers to **dance to funky music**.

2015/03/01 (Sunday): Nafisi, Azar, *The Republic of Imagination: America in Three Books*, unabridged audiobook on 8 CDs, read by Mozhan Marno (Introduction read by the author), Penguin Audio, 2014.

This is the latest book by the best-selling author of *Reading Lolita in Tehran*. Whereas in *RLT* Nafisi focused on the importance of literature, fictional stories in particular, on human development and coping with repression in totalitarian societies, her new *TRI* is an ode to the role literature can play in democratic societies. In other words, Nafisi warns us that intellectual indifference, and its consequences such as bookstore closings and lack of support for the humanities in college curricula, presents the same danger to human spirit as religious fundamentalism and political repression.



The subtitle "America in Three Books" refers to Nafisi's mixing autobiographical tidbits (including heartbreaking escape and immigration tales of a close friend) with observations about her adopted country, while drawing examples and inspiration from Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt*, and Carson McCuller's *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*. Nafisi chose these books because they represent the unending "battle between the desire for prosperity, status and success and the urge to walk away from it all." The lonely, restless, and individualistic Huck provides a stark contrast to Lewis's status-obsessed protagonist. In McCuller's work, Nafisi sees a group of misfits, each yearning to escape from the stifling conformity of small-town life. It was through literature that Nafisi learned about America, many years before she had to flee Iran owing to circumstances that made it impossible for her to teach as a female professor and one who expounded the beauty of Western works of fiction such as *Lolita* and *The Great Gatsby*. So, it is fitting that she uses American literary works to vent about sidelining of the humanities and the book culture and her craving for a Republic where an open mind is the only requirement for entry.

The book isn't as appealing as *RLT* for the broader audience, but Iranian-Americans will find in it plenty of food for thought in looking at their new homeland and its literary traditions.

[This review is also available as a featured blog on [Iranian.com](#).]

2015/02/28 (Saturday): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) The Not-So-Great Dictator: *Newsweek* magazine's March 6, 2015, cover feature is about Kim Jong Un, North Korea's Supreme Leader. The cover

feature contains the photo of a border crossing between China and North Korea that shows the contrast between the prosperity levels on the two sides.

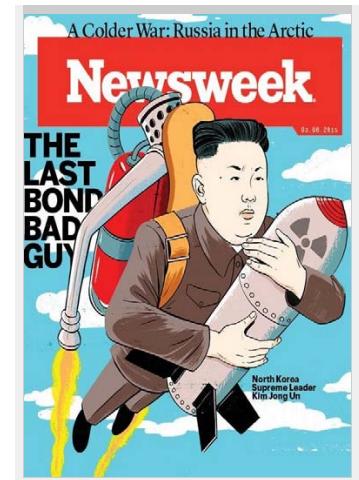
(2) Quote of the day: "The test of courage comes when we are in the minority. The test of tolerance comes when we are in the majority." ~ Ralph W. Sockman

(3) The first US city to hit **100% renewable energy**: In a move that is hoped to serve as a model for other cities, Burlington, Vermont, has achieved complete independence from fossil fuels in its energy production.

(4) Leading Putin critic gunned down: Boris Nemstov, **struck by 7 bullets** on a sidewalk near Kremlin, was planning to take part in a march against the Russian involvement in Ukraine. Even if Putin isn't directly involved in this blatant assassination, his vilification of the opponents of his increasingly authoritarian rule may have been viewed as a green light by his supporters, much like the way political opponents are eliminated in Iran.

(5) Using ugly pictures: Have you noticed that whenever a post or news story wants to make someone seem incompetent or stupid, it uses the worst possible photograph of that person (women, in particular), even if the photo is from a completely different occasion? This is done by a wide spectrum of activists, from extreme left to extreme right. I usually skip such stories, as the use of such photos is a sign of weakness of the arguments.

(6) Final thought for the day: "Honest disagreement is often a good sign of progress." ~ Mahatma Gandhi



2015/02/27 (Friday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) A couple of Rumi verses, with my English translation:

During moments of surrender at the workshop of fate,
I'm calmer than a gazelle and more fearless than a lion.
While moments of attempting to devise a plan,
Bring me suffering after suffering, chain after chain.

هر لحظه که تسلیم در کارگه تقدیر
آرامتر از آهو، بی باکتر از شیرم
هر لحظه که می کوشم در کار کنم تدبیر
رنج از پی رنج آید، زنجیر پی زنجیر

(2) Quote of the day: "We grow tired of everything but turning others into ridicule, and congratulating ourselves on their defects." ~ William Hazlitt

(3) Masih Alinejad honored with Geneva Summit's Women's Rights Award: This **27-minute video** shows the honoring ceremony, including the background film, citation for the award, and her acceptance speech.

(4) Masih Alinejad's CNN interview: The exiled journalist, who created the now-famous "My Stealthy Freedom" Facebook page, where women opposing mandatory hijab in Iran post their hijabless photos in defiance of the Islamic regime, **talks about her efforts** against women's oppression and why she took on the hijab problem.

(5) Leonard Nimoy **dead at 83**: It's a sad day for the fans of "Star Trek" and the very logical Mr. Spock.

(6) US Secretary of State John Kerry **reminds the Congress** of the 2002 visit of private citizen Benjamin Netanyahu, during which he offered the US Congress testimony in support of the invasion of Iraq.

(7) Mosul museum thrashed by Islamic State thugs: Priceless **ancient artifacts**, some dating back to 7000 BC, were destroyed by sledgehammers, crowbars, and power tools, prompting UNESCO to call for an emergency session of the UN Security Council. Someone wrote in a Facebook post that if these are 21st-century radical Muslims, imagine what their 7th-century ancestors must have done when they invaded Iran.

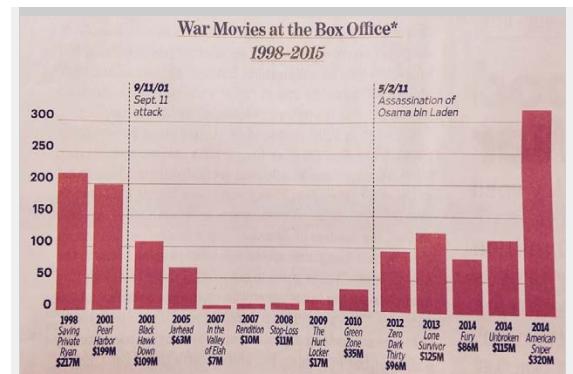
(8) Stephen Hawking's Facebook post: "Congratulations to Eddie Redmayne for winning an #Oscar for playing me in The Theory of Everything. Well done Eddie, I'm very proud of you.—SH"

(9) Final thought for the day: "A long habit of not thinking a thing wrong gives it a superficial appearance of being right." ~ Thomas Paine

2015/02/26 (Thursday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) War movies are back: After the 9/11 attacks, people lost interest in war movies and most of them flopped at the box office, including the critically acclaimed Oscar-winner "The Hurt Locker." After the death of Bin Laden, however, things changed, culminating with this year's "American Sniper," which has already grossed more than \$300M. Other war movies about Iraq and Afghanistan are sure to follow. [Info and chart from *Entertainment Weekly*, March 6, 2015.]

(2) For some unknown reason, UCSB Library continues to



attach a blue sheet to every new book it acquires, even though the date stamps that were used to imprint the due date on these sheets are long gone.

(3) Quote of the day: "Genius is the power of carrying the feelings of childhood into the powers of manhood." ~ Samuel Taylor [Note: I would have replaced "manhood" with "adulthood," as others have done, but decided to keep Taylor's original wording.]

(4) Tech companies struggle with gender equality: A very interesting segment from last night's PBS NewsHour that begins with the story of Ellen Pao, who has brought a discrimination lawsuit against KPCB, and continues with a general discussion of overt and covert discrimination against women in the high-tech industry's hiring and promotion policies. [[7-minute video](#)]

(5) Business dress codes and religious freedom: Another thought-provoking segment from last night's PBS NewsHour in which the question of whether hijab, beard, and other religious symbols should be accommodated by businesses that are completely free to not hire a person with tattoos, certain kinds of haircut, and the like. In other words, can a business say that its employees should remove their hijabs or shave their beards as part of a dress code? [[11-minute video](#)]

(6) Delkash would have been 100 today: In this [10-minute video](#), the immensely popular Iranian singer Delkash (real name Esmat Bagherpoor), who passed away 10 years ago, sings some of her well-known songs. And here is a [47-minute collection](#) of her original songs.

(7) On Keystone XL pipeline veto: President Obama has made it clear that he vetoed the bill because of concerns over its unresolved environmental impacts and that he may approve a suitably revised pipeline project.

(8) The 4-year full-time residential college education model may have outlived its usefulness: According to Stanford University's education professor Mitchell Stevens, fewer and fewer students take the traditional route of going to school full-time and living on or close to campus, and prestigious universities have been too slow to adapt to changing times. [[LA Times story](#)]

(9) Final thought for the day: "We are what we consistently do. Excellence is defined by our habits." ~ Aristotle

2015/02/25 (Wednesday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Sunday-size KenKen puzzle: KenKen puzzles are often 4 x 4 (easy) or 6 x 6 (challenging). On [this Web site](#), you can solve KenKen puzzles of up to 9 x 9 of various levels of difficulty and with different arithmetic operations allowed. Here is a difficult 9 x 9 puzzle for your enjoyment. The numbers 1-9 should appear once (no repetition) in each row and in each column (much like Sudoku), and the numbers in each box should satisfy the arithmetical property (18+ means that the numbers in the box should add to 18, not that it is an adult subject, and 8- means that the two numbers in the box differ by 8).]

(2) A leading critic of global warming in hot water: Wei-Hock Soon is the subject of [an inquiry](#), because he did not disclose that his research, attributing climate change to solar fluctuations rather than carbon emissions, is almost entirely funded by fossil-fuel interests.

(3) Quote of the day: "There are no passengers on Spaceship Earth. We are all crew." ~ Marshall McLuhan

(4) Bonus quote of the day: "When men speak ill of thee, live so as nobody may believe them." ~ Plato

(5) Polanyi Paradox: Formulated by philosopher Michael Polanyi in 1966, this famous paradox states that we know much more than we can tell; that is, our knowledge of the world's workings often exceeds our explicit

48x	7+	8-		160x	12+			168x
			324x	10+			1-	
1680x						2-		2-
							112x	
				7-				14+
								540x
6-	7-	40x	7	18+				
				4-		2÷		4÷
7-	2÷	3-	2-	175x				5-

understanding of how or why. One oft-cited example is the fact that the skill of a driver cannot be replaced by a detailed study of how an automobile works. Polanyi's formulation has recently taken on much significance in connection with machine learning and replacement of humans with robots. Those who invoke Polanyi believe that humans and machines will likely remain complementary rather than competing entities. On the other side, researchers are trying to overcome the paradox by building machines that learn from human examples, thus incorporating the rules that we apply tacitly, without explicit understanding. A striking example is that of chess-playing programs that have surpassed the ability of the best human chess players, without a need for complete understanding of how human players analyze chess situations or select a move.

(6) Iran is said to have [smuggled more than \\$1B](#) in cash to skirt sanctions: Because the government of Iran is starved for dollars and euros, which help it purchase needed supplies and equipment, it has resorted to using front companies across the globe, particularly in UAE, Iraq, and Turkey, to purchase hard currencies and to ship or carry the cash to Iran in suitcases. The front companies are then paid in other currencies or in oil.

(7) Be careful when [researching disease symptoms](#) on the Web: About a year ago, a University of Pennsylvania researcher designed the webXray program to analyze search results for nearly 2,000 common diseases. He found that 91% of the pages made third-party requests to outside companies. For instance, when you search for "cold sores" and click the highly ranked "Cold Sores Topic Overview WebMD" link, the Web site is passing your request for information about the disease along to several other corporations. According to the research, published in *Communications of the ACM*, about 70 percent of the time, the data transmitted contained information that is considered private. Many such instances of data sharing are for profit; at other times, the companies involved cite their desire for "an improved user experience." In some cases, the companies involved may not even be aware that they are sharing the data; the sharing occurs because they are using free tools and software provided by data collection (aka data-vacuuming) companies. In January 2014, Canadian authorities accused Google of using private information in an unauthorized manner. They did so based on complaint from a man who searched the Web for sleep apnea and was subsequently targeted with ads for devices from companies that claimed to treat the condition.

(8) Final thought for the day: "Never let your sense of morals prevent you from doing what is right." ~ Isaac Asimov

2015/02/24 (Tuesday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) The Children's War Victims Memorial: [The memorial](#), with a heartbreakin story, is located near Prague.



(2) Christina Aguilera does a [great job of impersonating](#) Cher, Britney Spears, and Shakira on "The Tonight Show."

(3) Quote of the day: "The only index by which to judge a government or a way of life is by the quality of the people it acts upon. No matter how noble the objectives of a government, if it blurs decency and kindness, cheapens human life, and breeds ill will and suspicion—it is an evil government." ~ Eric Hoffer

(4) Bonus quote of the day: "My voice had a long, nonstop career. It deserves to be put to bed with quiet and dignity, not yanked out every once in a while to see if it can still do what it used to do. It can't." ~ Beverly Sills

(5) And the Oscar goes to ... the robot: Touted as a play for one robot and two humans, "The Uncanny Valley" made its debut in Brooklyn's Br5ck Theater. The robot was seated throughout the play and was rather limited in its body language, but it was far from stiff. This success can be credited to the researchers behind the charming robot, which uses a combination of motion capture, voice recordings, and videos of actors' faces projected on the interior of the robot's translucent white mask. [Info adapted from: *IEEE Spectrum* magazine, February 2015; The play's [trailer on YouTube](#)]

(6) "p-book," a new term for modern times: Format wars for e-books are reminiscent of the Explorer-Netscape wars of two decades ago. Once these wars are over and we settle on a particular standard format, nearly all books will be e-books and we will simply call them "books." To distinguish paper or printed books, assuming they are still around, we may use the term "p-book" for a while. [Info adapted from: *IEEE Spectrum* magazine, issue of February 2015]

(7) The Accidental Superpower: Peter Zeihan, the author of *The Accidental Superpower: The Next Generation of American Preeminence and the Coming Global Disorder*, was a guest on CNN's Sunday news program "Fareed Zakaria GPS." Let me begin my observations with a startling fact cited by the author: America has more waterways than the rest of the world combined! This fact is extremely important, because throughout history, civilizations have developed around rivers, owing to the fact that shipping is tens of times cheaper on water than on land (for one thing, it doesn't need a lot of infrastructural investment, as roads do). Hence, the book's title, which implies that America's rise to power is in large part due to its geography. After World War II,

America became the de facto enforcer of maritime safety around the world, so other countries benefitted from safe sea lanes, essentially getting a free ride. With America's energy independence looming, other countries may have to fend for themselves in ensuring safety on the seas, putting them at a greater disadvantage in competing with the US, which is poised to sidestep an increasingly dangerous energy market.

(8) Final thought for the day: "I will permit no man to narrow and degrade my soul by making me hate him." ~ Booker T. Washington

2015/02/23 (Monday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Most of us don't think, we just occasionally rearrange our prejudices." ~ Frank Knox

(2) We're more than just our dresses: This is the rallying cry of the #AskHerMore campaign by Reese Witherspoon and other actresses to confront sexism on the red carpet. They say that they expect more questions about their bodies of work and causes they support, instead of about their bodies and support garments. Several actresses mentioned women's issues during their red-carpet interviews and acceptance speeches.

(3) Victims of violence against women remembered in Turkey: Facing **photos placed on stadium seats**, along with a larger photo of a recent victim of violence that particularly shook Turkey, spectators gathered under a large flag of their country to raise cries of apology and shame.

(4) Bonus quote of the day: "How did I get here? I made a film in black and white about the need for silence and withdrawal from the world and contemplation ... and here we are, at this epicenter of noise and world attention ... Life is full of surprises." ~ Director Pawel Pawlikowski, in his best-foreign-language-film-Oscar acceptance speech for "Ida"

(5) Norooz at LACMA: The **Iranian cultural event**, sponsored by Farhang Foundation on Sunday, March 22, 2015, will be held from 11:30 AM to 7:00 PM and will feature a concert by Zohreh Jooya (1:00 PM) and Kiosk Band (5:00 PM). Jooya's concert, "The Sounds of a Persian Spring," will need a ticket, but all else is free.

(6) Averting a space doom: This is the title of a 2-page article in *IEEE Spectrum* magazine (issue of February 2015) that discusses the growing problem of space junk. There are currently about 21,000 objects larger than 10 cm orbiting the Earth, and these objects are being tracked via ground-based radar. The whereabouts of these dangerous objects, traveling at 10 km/second, are reported to satellite owners, who have the option of carrying out collision-avoidance maneuvers, if the satellite has such a capability. Smaller objects, that can still be dangerous to satellites, number in the millions. A special conference to be held in March will examine the problem and possible countermeasures, which include: better tracking; increased shielding of satellites; using lasers to slow the objects down, causing them to burn upon reentry into the Earth's atmosphere; capturing and then tugging the junk into lower orbit, where they burn, or into higher "graveyard" orbits; better enforcement of the "25-year rule," which compels operators to maintain a capability of intentionally crashing satellites at the end of their useful lives, without creating any more debris.

(7) Final thought for the day: "A fault that humbles a man is of greater value than a virtue that puffs him up."

~ Anonymous

2015/02/22 (Sunday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) The 87th Academy Awards ceremony just ended: Neil Patrick Harris did an admirable job of hosting the Oscars, which was extremely competitive in several categories this year. Here are the honorees in major categories.

Best motion picture: "Birdman"

Best director: Alejandro G. Inarritu ("Birdman")

Best lead actor: Eddie Redmayne ("The Theory of Everything")

Best lead actress: Julianne Moore ("Still Alice")

Best supporting actor: J. K. Simmons ("Whiplash")

Best supporting actress: Patricia Arquette ("Boyhood")

All of these were predictable, except for "Boyhood" not winning for best picture or best director.

(2) Lady Gaga salutes Julie Andrews at the Oscars: She performs a **medley of songs** from the Oscar-winning film "The Sound of Music."

(3) The Oscar ceremony's **opening act**: It was well-designed and superbly performed by Neil Patrick Harris (with Anna Kendrick and Jack Black).

(4) Quote of the day: "'Fifty Shades of Grey' star Dakota Johnson hosts [SNL on Saturday 2/28]. She would've hosted earlier, but she was tied up for a while." ~ *Entertainment Weekly*, issue of February 27, 2015

(5) Bonus quote of the day: "Love is full of complicated patterns—patterns that mathematics is uniquely capable of discovering." ~ Hannah Fry, *The Mathematics of Love* [Here is Fry's **17-minute TED talk** on the subject.]

(6) *US News and World Report* ranks **UCSB 10th among public colleges**: In positions 1, 2, 8, 9, and 11, are UC Berkeley, UCLA, UCSD, UC Davis, and UC Irvine. An impressive showing for University of California!

(7) News story claims that Argentine prosecutor Natalio Alberto Nisman's killer is an Iranian "defector": The Iranian agent "Abbas Haqiqat-Ju" (a pseudonym), who had earned Nisman's trust, killed him hours before he was to present evidence to the parliament about the Argentine president and foreign minister conspiring with Iran to hide Iran's involvement in the 1994 bombing of a Buenos Aires Jewish community center, killing 85, two years after another blast that killed 29 at the Israeli embassy. [Disclaimer: I am not certain about the source of **this story** and I have not seen this claim elsewhere.]

(8) Ring of peace: Over 1000 Muslims formed a **human chain** around an Oslo synagogue in a symbolic protective gesture.

(9) Final thought for the day: "As the soft yield of water cleaves obstinate stone, so to yield with life solves the insolvable: To yield, I have learned, is to come back again." ~ Lao-Tzu

2015/02/21 (Saturday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) It's an exciting time to be in neuroscience: This sidebar to an *IEEE Spectrum* magazine article on brain implants used to control pain and neurological disorders is about an epileptic young woman who has been outfitted with a brain stimulator that detects the signature of an approaching seizure and triggers a burst of stimulation to disrupt the abnormal activity. The article indicates that patients experience 38% fewer seizures within the first 5 months of using the implant, with the figure increasing to 50% within a couple of years. Bear in mind that the device is still in its early stages of use. The total number of users so far is about 350, with 256 people receiving implants during clinical trials and about 100 receiving commercial implants since then. The researchers involved believe that 100% prevention is possible with further work.

(2) Quote of the day: "Error is to truth as sleep is to waking. As though refreshed, one returns from erring to the path of truth." ~ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Wisdom and Experience*

(3) Acceptable neurodiversity or a disease/disability to be cured? This is the **question now raging** in the autism, Asperger's, and other neuro-challenged communities. Activists at one extreme believe that autistic people should be accepted, with suitable accommodations, in the same way that we have come to accept variations in race and sexual orientation. Members of the neurodiversity movement accept remedies to relieve suffering from autism but are repelled by attempts at curing it, because such attempts imply that certain neurological variations are "bad." Others, including some autism sufferers, are desperately raising funds and looking for a glimmer of hope on the path to finding a cure.

(4) Smartphone app for helping the blind: "Be My Eyes" allows a blind person to point his/her smartphone at something and, through a video call to a volunteer on the other side, seek help. Examples include finding out which train stop they are at, locating a dropped personal item, snack choices in a vending machine that isn't equipped for use by the blind, and learning the expiry date on a food package.

(5) On the desirability of oil pipelines: Every proposed oil pipeline project creates protests, but oil pipelines are more efficient and much safer than transporting oil by tanker trucks and trains. It is perfectly fine to be against a particular oil pipeline, while proposing an alternate path, but dismissing them altogether is illogical. Oil pipelines are much less likely to create health/environmental hazards than tanker trucks/trains that have rightly been described as "moving bombs"; they have caused multiple explosions in the past few months alone, owing to crashes and derailments in the US. Trucks and trains routinely travel through residential neighborhoods and no amount of design tweaks will make them totally safe.

(6) Food for thought: In the 5600 years between the creation of the universe and the last prophet's appearance (7000 – 1400 = 5600), some 124,000 prophets are said to have been sent by God; all of them in the Middle East region, because people in places like Europe, North America, and Australia were apparently so much better that they didn't need any divine guidance. A simple division yields the rate of 22.1 per year, or roughly one prophet every two weeks or so.

(7) Final thought for the day: "We judge ourselves by what we feel capable of doing, while others judge us by what we have already done." ~ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

2015/02/20 (Friday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) Flexible electronic circuits have a long history:

This full-page ad from the May 1965 issue of *IEEE Spectrum* magazine is about such circuits, and it makes reference to a telephone set incorporating paper-thin circuitry since 1959 (56 years ago).



(2) Advances in face detection algorithms: A new algorithm can spot faces from any angle as well as when partially occluded. Recent research has led to great improvements over the Viola-James detection algorithm from 2001 that aimed at simple detection of faces from the front. The new Yahoo-Stanford algorithm shows promise for image search applications (finding images of specific people).

(3) God Only Knows: The **Brian Wilson song** is performed by many famous musicians.

(4) Quote of the day: "Half of the American people never read a newspaper. Half never voted for President. One hopes it is the same half." ~ Gore Vidal

(5) Good news about UC: University of California **tuition hike put on hold** until after summer session 2015, pending the outcome of budget negotiations.

(6) A debate on hijab: This **Iranian cleric says** that hijab should not be mandatory. A woman arguing against him (with little success, I must add) states that Islam demands hijab. I don't know what to make of this debate, which was broadcast on the government-controlled Iranian TV. Is it just a case of letting people vent, to release some of the stifling social and political pressures, or is it an omen for change?

(7) Modern/Fusion Persian music: Farid Vaghefinazari (half of the Danny & Fraid duo) plays "**The Wild Horse**" on the guitar.

(8) Denmark puts animal rights before religion: They **ban kosher and halal slaughter**, maintaining that it is less painful for the animal if, according to normal practice there, it is stunned before slaughtering. Cries of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia have already been raised.

(9) Final thought for the day: "A hurtful act is the transference to others of the degradation which we bear in ourselves." ~ Simone Weil

2015/02/19 (Thursday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) Noise pollution in the US: Dark blue areas on the map are quietest and light yellow areas are the noisiest.

(2) Quote of the day: "Programming today is a race between software engineers striving to build bigger and better idiot-proof programs, and the Universe trying to produce bigger and better idiots. So far, the Universe is winning." ~ Rich Cook

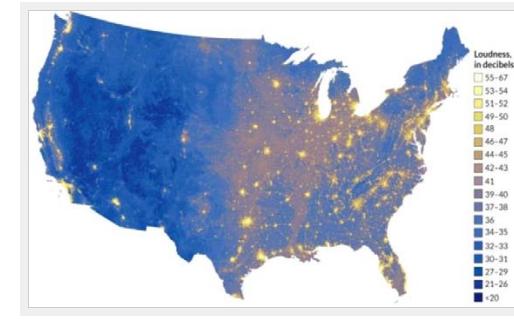
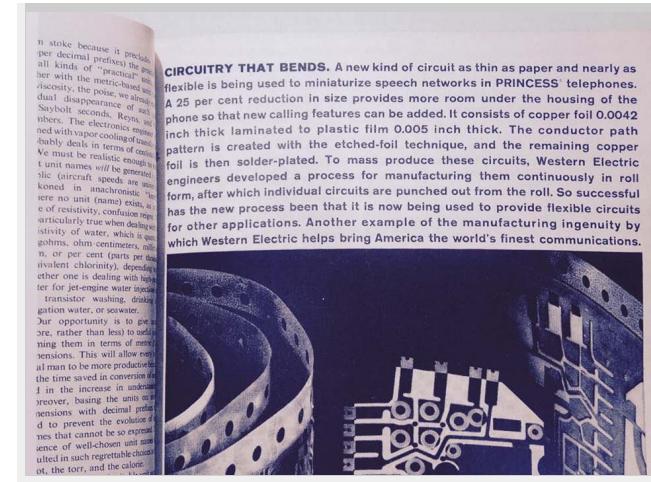
(3) Your body language shapes who you are: This is the title of a **21-minute TED talk** by Amy Cuddy, who discusses the topic, with a focus on nonverbal expression of power and dominance. The talk's take-away is: "You can fake it till you become it."

(4) On Saudi Arabia's relation to ISIS: "If we are going to continue to donate American lives to the fight [against Islamic extremism] ... we need to be clear about exactly who the enemy is." ~ Joe Klein, writing in *Time* magazine, issue of February 23 / March 2, 2015, on the need to bring the Saudi support for Islamic extremism into the open

(5) The Mars One Project: The project for starting a human settlement on Mars by offering free one-way trips has just chosen 100 applicants for training. The eventual 24 travelers will be chosen from among these 100, which include two living in Iran and one other having Iranian roots. Training will start in 2015, with rover and cargo missions launched in 2020 and 2022. The outpost will become operational in 2023 and the first crew will leave in 2024.

(6) Today is the start of the Chinese New Year: Happy year of the goat! In the Chinese tradition, the goat is considered mild-mannered, shy, stable, sympathetic, amicable, and brimming with a strong sense of justice. If you were born in 1919, 1931, 1943, 1955, 1967, 1979, 1991, or 2003, you are considered to have the traits above. Predictions that are about as accurate as those of astrology!

(7) A creepy experience: Returning home tonight, I found a Jehovah's Witnesses flyer and calling card. I have received many religious propaganda flyers before, but this is the first time that it's in Persian, indicating that the visitors knew more about me than I like.



(8) Each person lives and dies differently: I am starting to experience the process that Oliver Sacks writes about so eloquently in *The New York Times*, that is, the pain of seeing your contemporaries perish before your eyes. Sack discovered last month that he will be dying of cancer soon. Here is an excerpt. "I have been increasingly conscious, for the last 10 years or so, of deaths among my contemporaries. My generation is on the way out, and each death I have felt as an abruption, a tearing away of part of myself. There will be no one like us when we are gone, but then there is no one like anyone else, ever. When people die, they cannot be replaced. They leave holes that cannot be filled, for it is the fate—the genetic and neural fate—of every human being to be a unique individual, to find his own path, to live his own life, to die his own death."

(9) Final thought for the day: "Don't find fault with what you don't understand." ~ French proverb

2015/02/18 (Wednesday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Newsweek magazine turned 82 yesterday: This image shows part of the cover and front page of the February 17, 1933, issue. Debt and foreclosure were the main problems then too; plus ca change!

(2) Quote of the day: "Perfection is achieved, not when there is nothing more to add, but when there is nothing left to take away." ~ Antoine de Saint Exupery

(3) Disney characters **surprise & entertain** mall shoppers.



(4) The million-plus restaurant bill for two in Tehran: This will come as a shock to my Iranian friends who left Iran years ago, but the 1,035,000 rials amount-payable shown on a restaurant bill featured on NPR's "On the Road" program is only about \$30, at the exchange rate in effect on that particular day. This brings forth the need for changing the monetary unit in Iran to something other than rial. Even toman (10 rials) is too small a unit. Iranians informally use 1000 tomans as a unit now and that should be designated as a new unit, say "new toman," which, after a period of transition, will become known as simply "toman." This restaurant bill would then be around 100 new tomans. The unit "new rial" can similarly be introduced as equivalent to 1000 rials, roughly equivalent to a nickel in the US (a little over 3 cents, actually). Smaller units aren't needed, as the penny will soon be removed in the US and Canada because of being too small in value.

(5) The **first victims of the First Crusade** were European Jews: "Pope Urban II did not tell crusaders [in 1096] to murder Jews, but that is what happened when at least 100,000 knights, vassals and serfs, unmoored from ordinary social restraints but bearing the standard of the cross, set off to crush what they considered a perfidious Muslim enemy in a faraway land. ... Breaking the bolts and doors, they killed the Jews, about seven hundred in number, who in vain resisted the force and attack of so many thousands. They killed the women, also, and with their swords pierced tender children of whatever age and sex ... Horrible to say, mothers cut the throats of nursing children with knives and stabbed others, preferring them to perish thus by their own hands rather than to be killed by the weapons of the uncircumcised."

(6) Major explosion in southern California refinery: The Exxon-Mobil **refinery explosion** in Torrance, which shook the area like a magnitude-1.7 earthquake, injured 4 workers. Air quality in the Los Angeles area is apparently not affected, but the impact on already rising gas prices will not be as benign.

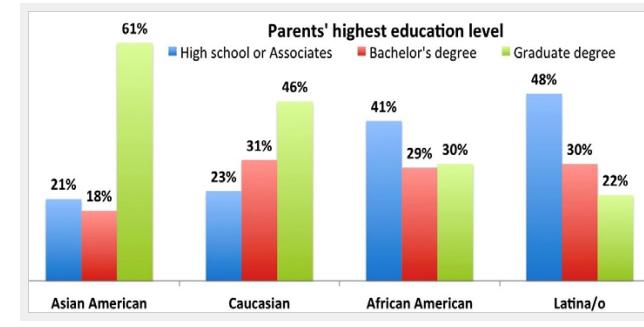
(7) Jimmy Kimmel, on the US East Coast's cold spell: It was so cold in Washington, DC, today that all government offices were closed. Members of Congress had to get nothing done from home.

(8) Final thought for the day: "The boiling water that softens potatoes is the same boiling water that hardens eggs. How circumstances affect you is a function of what you are made of inside." ~ Anonymous

2015/02/17 (Tuesday): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Importance of parental education: This infographic from Computing Research Association, depicting parental education level for computer science/engineering majors of various ethnicities, tells the story of why Asian-Americans are highly successful in this field.

(2) Quote of the day: "Those parts of the system that you can hit with a hammer (not advised) are called hardware; those program instructions that you can only curse at are called software." ~ Anonymous



(3) Netflix in Cuba: In a largely symbolic move (because only 5% of Cubans have Internet access), Netflix has announced that it will make its service available in the Island nation. Netflix is counting on an expansion of WiFi

access when the US embargo is reassessed. Other industries that are poised to benefit are tourism (including medical tourism), energy, and agriculture. [Adapted from: *Time* magazine, February 23 / March 2, 2015.]

(4) Drone detectors: Widespread fears over privacy violations by peeping toms using GoPro-equipped small drones, as well as more serious security risks, have created an industry of drone detection devices. Many celebrities have already installed such devices around their properties and US government agencies are scrambling to bolster security and update operating regulations and no-drone zones. Enforcement of such regulations and restrictions will not be easy. [Adapted from: *Time* magazine, February 23 / March 2, 2015.]

(5) Parking innovations: A UCLA study has found that on 15 blocks near the Los Angeles campus, drivers spend an average of 3.3 minutes and drive an average of 0.5 mile to find parking. This translates to nearly 1M miles of travel and about 50K gallons of wasted gas annually. Other studies suggest that up to 30% of downtown drivers may just be looking for a parking space. In San Francisco, this problem has given rise to mobile valets that come to get your car wherever you want and return it to you at the same location for a \$15 fee, often cheaper than the cost of parking, assuming you can find a space. There are also emerging smartphone apps that allow homeowners to rent out their private driveways and garages, help drivers find available parking, and let parking garage owners adjust their rates automatically in order to stay as full as possible. [Adapted from: *Time* magazine, double-issue of February 23 and March 2, 2015.]

(6) The SNL40 special was truly special: The 3.5-hour star-studded 40th anniversary celebration of "Saturday Night Live," that aired on Sunday 2/15, had a great many memorable moments. **Newsweek magazine** has picked the following five for special mention.

"Celebrity Jeopardy," with the cast impersonating Alex Trebek, Sean Connery, Burt Reynolds, Justin Bieber, etc. "SNL Auditions," showing cast members pitch their talents and skits, some of which made it into the program. "Weekend Update," the comedy news program, reunited its past hosts and also featured many celebrities.* "Musical Comedy," featuring Martin Short, Maya Rudolph, Dana Carvey, Adam Sandler, and other performers. "Questions from the Audience," which featured cast members, actors, and other celebrities, including Sarah Palin.

*During "Weekend Update," Jane Curtin quipped: "I used to be the only pretty blonde reading the fake news. Now there's a whole network for that."

2015/02/16 (Monday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Sandbar off the Bermuda Triangle: Sixteen ships met their demise here.

(2) Quote of the day: "Our negotiators are trying to take the weapon of sanctions away from the enemy." ~ Ali Khamenei, Iran's Supreme Leader, giving his strongest endorsement yet of the nuclear negotiations, after months of insisting that the sanctions are a blessing and that negotiating with Iran's sworn enemies is ill-advised

(3) Humor from *Entertainment Weekly* (issue of February 20, 2015): NBC to test "Chicago Medical" spin-off, with plans to roll out "Chicago DMV," "Chicago Dental," and "Chicago Trader Joe's" through 2018.

(4) *Entertainment Weekly's* Academy Awards choices: Here are the top and second Oscar choices in the main categories (issue of February 20, 2015). It appears that the best-picture and best-director awards will be split. In the supporting actress/actor, other awards this year were swept by a single candidate, so no second choice is provided.

Best picture: "Birdman"; "Boyhood"

Best director: Alejandro Inarritu; Richard Linklater

Best actress: Julianne Moore; Rosamund Pike

Best actor: Michael Keaton; Eddie Redmayne

Best supporting actress: Patricia Arquette

Best supporting actor: J. K. Simmons

(5) Jafar Panahi wins Berlin Film Festival's **Golden Bear award** for best film: Panahi, a banned Iranian opposition filmmaker, was not allowed to leave Iran to attend, so his tearful young niece, one of the actresses in the honored film "Taxi," accepted the award on his behalf.

(6) Bob Simon to be featured in next week's "60 Minutes": The award-winning journalist, who perished in a New York City car crash on February 11, will be the focus of the entire CBS newsmagazine next Sunday. This week's edition of "60 Minutes" aired **a report** he had finished on the day he died.

(7) Today is the 23rd anniversary of my father's passing: The family marked the occasion in a gathering yesterday. At the cemetery, those present related their memories of him. A couple of us recalled his dedication and hard work as he put together textbooks and reference works (mostly authored, but also a few translated



volumes) in electrical engineering. As I write my own technical books, I often think of him, because in those days, he did not have access to computers or word processors, so he would handwrite the text on special lined sheets provided by the publisher and had to apply corrections through tossing entire sheets of paper or by painstakingly erasing paragraphs of text to write them in different forms. When my dad retired, he spent his days in a workshop he had built next to our home. He would bid for industrial installation/repair/maintenance contracts, with both private and public factories and plants, but he would also accept odd jobs from neighbors who brought to him their radios, TV sets, and other electrical/electronic devices for diagnosis and repair. I vividly recall his observation that in more than 90% of the cases, a device doesn't work because a fuse is blown, a toggle switch has been flipped, or a wire is disconnected. Most repair establishments would simply replace the fuse or flip the switch, thus removing the problem, without telling the client that the problem was a minor one needing only minutes to fix, so that they could charge a hefty fee. My dad always told his clients exactly what was wrong and would charge a fair sum for the amount of effort he put in. From this lesson, I know that before taking a failed device to a repair shop or to disassemble it to see what's wrong, I should check the fuses and connections first. This saves me a lot of time and money. May he rest in peace!

2015/02/15 (Sunday): Slack, Jonathan, *Genes: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford Univ. Press, 2014.

This 120-page, pocket-size book is another one in the OUP series that aims to provide stimulating and accessible ways of exploring new subjects (I have previously reviewed the *Microeconomics* and *Geopolitics* volumes in the series). The still-expanding **list of titles**, written by authorities in the respective fields, includes over 400 topics, from *Accounting* to *Writing and Script*.

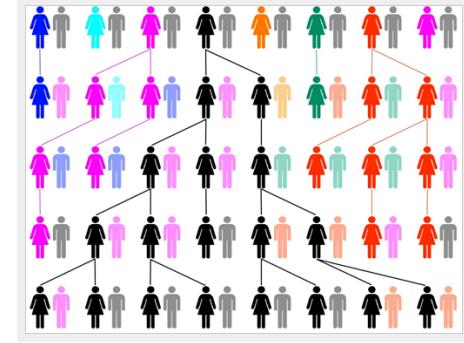
I chose to read this book to gain a better understanding of the field of genetics, after I finished and reviewed *The Double Helix*, Nobel Laureate James D. Watson's highly personal account of the 1953 discovery of the molecular structure of nucleic acids and its significance for information transfer in living material. Watson shared his 1962 Nobel Prize with his collaborator Francis Crick and half of the Wilkins/Franklin team, in equal 1/3 shares (Rosalind Franklin died prematurely in 1958, so she was not named among the awardees).

The book under review consists of the following six chapters, of 15-20 pages each, and a 2-page conclusion: 1. Genes Before 1944; 2. Genes as DNA; 3. Mutations and Gene Variants; 4. Genes as Markers; 5. Genes of Small Effect; 6. Genes in Evolution.

The first two chapters review the history of scientific discoveries in this area and discuss the fundamentals of genes and their role in human evolution. The field of genetics was founded by Mendel's 1866 publication of a paper in what today would be described as a low-impact journal, causing his discoveries to go unnoticed during his lifetime. Rediscovery of Mendel's work in 1900 removed one of the key objections to Darwin's theory of natural selection; namely, that small, random variations are likely to become diluted, because those who carry them are likely to mate with non-carriers.

Chapter 3 contains a description of a series of diseases and genetic mechanisms for their inheritance by offspring. We learn here, for instance, that Gene therapy shows a great deal of potential in treating diseases such as hemophilia (which used to condemn people to death in their childhood). I wonder if those who protest GMO crops today will turn down life-saving genetic treatments in future. In addition to providing a cure, genetics provides an understanding why hemophilia is an almost exclusively male disease. We also learn that some diseases cannot be traced to a particular mutation in a single gene but that certain gene variants and combinations contribute to a predisposition to the disease. Cancer, for example, is a genetic disease in this sense, even though one does not inherit it from parents. Cancer requires a number of mutations, such as those that stimulate cell division, reduce sensitivity to inhibitors of division, suppress cell death, and encourage blood vessel growth, to coincide. The probability of all of these happening sharply increases with time, thus making cancer incidence proportional to the 4th or 5th power of age. Some virus infections introduce one of the 6 mutations needed for cancer and can thus be said to be cancer-causing. Roughly 1/3 of us will die of cancer, so even if all the other causes of death, such as heart disease, stroke, or pneumonia were abolished, our gain in lifespan would be modest.

From Chapter 4, we learn two very interesting and important ideas. One is the role played by genetics in forensics and human identification, both within the criminal justice system and in tracing people's ancestry. For example, in the UK, DNA samples are collected routinely from anyone who is arrested for any reason. When crime scene samples are matched against those in this vast database, there is roughly a 50% chance of finding a match. This has made DNA screening a very powerful tool in fighting crime. The second interesting idea is that we humans carry genes from a particular female ancestor and a male ancestor (the so-called mitochondrial "Eve" and "Adam," except that the woman and man did not live in the



same place or in the same era (they were likely separated in time by tens of thousands of years). The image above (not from the book) shows how genes from a single female can propagate to an entire population. In Chapter 5, we learn that genes do not just affect human's reproductive fitness, and thus chances for survival, but also certain non-critical features such as height and intelligence. For such features, a heritability index is often derived from experimental data that reflects the share of genes in a particular feature. For height, the index is estimated to be between 65% and 90%. It is now widely accepted that certain environmental factors, such as nutrition and healthcare, also play a role in the heights of human populations. Heritability of IQ is estimated in the range 68-78%. These latter findings are highly controversial, particularly in light of the Nazi Germany and several Western democracies embracing eugenics, the practice of selective breeding for positive traits and prevention of negative ones. The Nazi Germany's experiments in this area are well-known, but in the US too about 65,000 people in 33 states were sterilized under these programs.

The most important idea in Chapter 6 is that of genetic drift, a focus of NeoDarwinism (a combination of Darwin's natural selection with Mendel's genetics). This combination explains, for example, why there is an appearance of design in living organisms: such as the fact that an insect's proboscis is just the right length to collect nectar from specific flowers. Genetic drift explains how changes in species occur, even when they do not offer a reproductive advantage. Similarly, explanations for group behavior and altruism can be constructed that are very convincing. Altruism and group loyalty are in fact mechanisms for propagating certain genes, even if it is through other members of the group and not the member that commits the act. One of the founders of NeoDarwinism, J. B. S. Haldane, is quoted as having said: "I would lay down my life for two brothers or eight cousins." Brothers on average share 50% of their gene variants and cousins have 12.5% in common, so Haldane's calculation makes sense in the context of gene propagation. This theory comes into play for social insects, in particular. Some social insects have workers and reproductive individuals, the latter working hard even though such hard work cannot be explained by their own reproductive advantage.

In summary, genes are viewed in different, complementary or even opposing, ways by different scientists. To molecular biologists, the chemical structure of DNA and RNA, as well as cataloging and annotating them, take center stage. Within human population studies, "genes" are DNA markers (some of which are not actual genes, but in DNA outside genes). Likewise, quantitative genetics has still a different view of genes. All of these views are important to society, but they must be treated with care to avoid misunderstandings and abuses.

2015/02/14 (Saturday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) This heart is formed by more people than the number of my real and virtual friends, but I dedicate it to all nonetheless on this Valentine's Day. To my Iranian friends, a happy Esfandgan and Sepandarmazgan as well! Sepandarmazgan is the ancient Iranian day of love during which both romantic love and love of Earth and Mother Nature are celebrated; a sort of combination Valentine's & Earth Day! Its modern revival falls on Bahman 29 (February 18), following a couple of reorganizations of the Persian calendar.

(2) Suicide bombers go on strike: An old **humorous piece**; politically incorrect, but funny nonetheless. The supposed strike is caused by Al Qaeda announcing that the number of virgins allotted to each suicide bomber has been reduced from 72 to 60.



(3) Lego blocks for the **Internet generation**: A 6-person London-based start-up will offer products such as buttons, lights, buzzers, and sensors, that connect together wirelessly through a computer and allow anyone to link devices to a network to make them more intelligent and more useful.

(4) Should we have an e-sports Olympics? This is a question posed in the February 2015 issue of *E&T* magazine. Arguing for the Olympics is Andrea Kates, CEO of the tech company LaunchPad Central, who notes: "When it comes to e-sports, we are not discussing the cultural stereotype of lonely teenagers sitting in darkened rooms. We're talking about people who are as dedicated and put as much preparation into their skills as ... archers and swimmers." Writing against the proposition is Guy Clapperton, author and commentator on social media, who notes: "[C]ulturally, video games are ... in the liberal arts. Bafta now gives an award for the best video game ... that celebrates the creativity behind the product. ... But as for dishing out Olympic gold medals for people who actually play the games, I'm not so sure about that."

(5) The goldfish story: "My goldfish was trying to tell me something, but as soon as it opened its mouth, water went in and he couldn't talk. So, I took him out of the water and put him on a table. He became so excited that he began jumping up and down. Soon he got pretty tired and dozed off. As soon as he was sound asleep, I returned him to the water. He hasn't woken up yet; or maybe he's just pretending to be asleep, because he is upset with me for putting him back in the bowl."

This is the story of some of those around us. They love us and we love them. They are doing their best to help

us the way they know how, but they just have no understanding of our lives.

(6) On the religious importance of the cat: Long ago, there was a temple and a cat lived there. When the clerics wanted to pray, the cat got in their way. So, the head cleric ordered someone to take the cat away from the temple and tie him to a tree, until the prayers ended. This practice became a religious ritual and went on for years. One day, the head cleric died. Some time later, the cat also died. The other clerics bought another cat, so that they could tie him to a tree and perform their prayers properly. Many years after these events, a famous scholar of the religion wrote a thesis on the importance of tying a cat to a tree at prayer time.

(7) Excitable songs: According to *Entertainment Weekly*, issue of February 13, 2015, only 10 songs have ever had an exclamation point as part of their titles. The first one listed is Bruce Channel's 1962 "Hey! Baby"; then come Bobby Vinton's 1963 "There! I've Said It Again," Louis Armstrong's 1964 "Hello, Dolly!" and three songs from 1965, with a total of 5 exclamation points: The Beatles' "Help!"; The Supremes' "Stop! In the Name of Love"; The Byrds' "Turn! Turn! Turn!" Then, you have to wait for about 4 decades to get excited about Outcast's 2003 "Hey Ya!" Usher's 2004 "Yeah!" and Chris Brown's 2005 "Run It!" The last of the 10 is Mark Ronson's 2014 "Uptown Funk!"

(8) Final thought for the day: "Without craftsmanship, inspiration is a mere reed shaken in the wind." ~ Johannes Brahms

2015/02/13 (Friday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Mexico City's planned airport: Mexico needs a new international airport and architects have come up with a bold design that benefits from the experience of a competent foreign firm and young Mexican architects who provide "local flavor." The spectacular 6M square feet single terminal will have 1/3 the mass and 3 times the span of a typical airport. [Info from: *E&T* magazine, issue of February 2015.]



(2) Quote of the day: "Islam values women's rights, especially the rights of those women who give birth to male children." ~ Ayatollah Tanasoli, fictional religious leader who mocks Iranian officials on Facebook and Twitter

(3) President Obama makes a hilarious **BuzzFeed video**: Things everybody does but doesn't talk about. It's good to see the leader of the Free World have some fun and not take himself too seriously. [Okay, here come the conservatives complaining that ISIS and other dire things were ignored while the President made this promotional video for Obamacare.]

(4) Actors on Actors: This is the title of **PBS/Variety's brilliant program**. Instead of having a host interview an actor, they pair actors (say, Michael Keaton and Reese Witherspoon) and let them talk about their craft. The conversations are sometimes boring, but occasionally sparks fly and the actors go deep into their motivations, fears, and insecurities.

(5) The high-tech barrier that puts Israel's West-Bank wall to shame: The 900 km barrier separating Saudi Arabia from Iraq consists of twin chainlink fences with razor wire, 100 m apart, separated by a concertina fence and preceded by embankments designed to slow infiltrators. In the area between the fences, underground movement sensors trigger silent alarms. A service road on the Saudi side will be used by 10 radar-equipped surveillance reconnaissance vehicles and hundreds of rapid-response vehicles. The vehicles, as well as 40 watchtowers, 38 communication towers, and 32 military response stations, will be equipped with the latest electronic gadgets, including 3D face recognition systems. [Info from: *E&T* magazine, issue of

(6) The astrophysicist who is bent on making science a part of pop culture: For Neil deGrasse Tyson, the only living scientist with a cult-like celebrity status, this is a great time to start people thinking daily about science. Movies like "Intergalactic" and "Gravity," and the popular science biopics "The Theory of Everything" and "The Imitation Game" have grabbed people's attention and Tyson's own late-night talk show on National Geographic's TV channel will act as a catalyst. Tyson's **"Star Talk" show** tries to get a scientist and a comedian as its nightly guests, and it features hearty laughs and selfies in an effort to attract the younger crowd.

(7) The bionic pancreas: Inspired by his son's condition, Ed Damiano, a professor of biomedical engineering at Boston University, has made it his mission to build a wearable bionic pancreas by the time he heads to college in 2017. The device consists of an under-skin glucose monitor and miniature external infusion pumps that deliver insulin and glucagon optimally, based on a mathematical algorithm. [Time magazine, issue of February 9, 2015.]

(8) Final thought for the day: "Man is rich in proportion to the amount of things he can leave alone." ~ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

2015/02/12 (Thursday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) The award-winning Apple Computer campus: In a field where women are still facing the glass ceiling, Cristina Segni has made *Architects' Journal's* Women Architect of the Year shortlist for her breathtaking design of the new Apple Computer campus in Cupertino, California.



(2) To celebrate Valentine's Day, a San Francisco zoo is letting people "adopt" a cockroach or scorpion in the name of an ex. [From: *Time* magazine, issue of February 9, 2015.]

(3) Quote of the day: "Everyone wants to understand art. Why not try to understand the song of a bird? Why does one love the night, flowers, everything around one, without trying to understand them? But in the case of a painting people have to understand. If only they would realize above all that an artist works of necessity, that he himself is only a trifling bit of the world, and that no more importance should be attached to him than to plenty of other things which please us in the world, though we can't explain them." ~ Pablo Picasso

(4) Nothing's left in Kobani: The Kurds who liberated the strategically important border town have their work cut out for them to make it livable again. A 2-page photo in *Time* magazine, issue of February 16, 2015, shows Kobani in total ruins.

(5) SNL's 40th Anniversary Special: I am looking forward to NBC's 3-hour "Saturday Night Live" special on Sunday February 15, 2015, in which many of the show's alums will come together to celebrate its best moments.

(6) Tom Petty, on Sam Smith: "Let me say I have never had any hard feeling toward Sam. All my years of songwriting have shown me these things can happen. Most times you catch it before it gets out the studio door but in this case it got by. Sam's people were very understanding of our predicament and we easily came to an agreement." ~ On the story behind Sam Smith's Grammy-winning hit "Stay With Me," on which Tom Petty has been awarded co-writing credits and a 12.5% share of the royalties, in view of the song's strong similarity to Petty's "I Won't Back Down"

(7) The historical city of Hamadan: When one talks about the ancient history of Iran, the western city of Hamadan does not immediately come to mind. It turns out that Hamadan has **some of the oldest** structures and historical artifacts in Iran, not to mention the burial places of philosopher/scientist/physician Avi Sina, poet Baba Taher, and the biblical Queen Esther and her uncle Mordechai, the latter being a Jewish shrine.

(8) How to get to Heaven from Ireland (humor): I was testing children in my Dublin Sunday school class to see if they understood the concept of getting to heaven. I asked them, 'If I sold my house and my car, had a big garage sale and gave all my money to the church, would that get me into heaven?' 'NO!' the children answered. If I cleaned the church every day, tended the garden, and kept everything tidy, would that get me into heaven? 'Again, the answer was 'NO'!'

By now I was starting to smile. 'Well, then, if I was kind to animals and gave sweets to all the children, and loved my husband, would that get me into heaven? Again, they all answered 'NO'!'

I was just bursting with pride for them. I continued, 'Then how can I get into heaven?'

A six-year-old boy shouted out: "YUV GOTTA BE FOKKN' DEAD ..."

2015/02/11 (Wednesday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) The anthropologist who flew in this plane over some primitive tribes decided that he should not try to contact them.



(2) Quote of the day: "Millennials are bored, unchallenged—to the point of abandoning lucrative salaries to do something interesting in an environment where their work can have impact." ~ Jenna P. Carpenter, Dean for Undergraduate Studies in the College of Engineering and Science, Louisiana Tech University, writing about young graduates' quarterlife crisis in *ASEE Prism* magazine, issue of January 2015

(3) Memory loss associated with Alzheimer's reversed for the first time: In a small-scale study reported in the on-line journal *Aging*, **UCLA researchers** showed the reversal of memory loss in 9 out of 10 patients.

(4) New elevators to make taller, more space-efficient skyscrapers possible: Elevators are still built with 1.5-century-old technology based on steel cables holding up and moving cars. In our tallest buildings, which devote up to 40% of their floor space to elevator shafts, wait times can still be quite long. Many soaring architectural visions are constrained by the current elevator technology. Magnetic levitation, now used for high-speed (bullet) trains, will soon come to the rescue. With maglev, the use of a larger number of smaller cars inside narrower shafts can halve the amount of space needed for elevators, while also improving wait times. [From: *ASEE Prism* magazine, issue of January 2015]

(5) A vision for smart luggage of the future: Five University of Buffalo students have received \$1.66M from a crowdfunding site (they were aiming for \$50K) to bring a smart suitcase to market. The Bluesmart suitcase has

a built-in digital scale, a location tracker, a smartphone-controlled digital lock, a battery with 3 USB ports, and a data display for travel and weather information. [From: ASEE Prism magazine, issue of January 2015]

(6) Three young, educated Muslims **shot to death** in North Carolina: So far no official explanation has been provided, but hate crime is a real possibility.

(7) Epic sandstorm **suffocates the Middle East**: Reports from Iran indicate that cities in the Khuzestan province are in particularly dire state. Iranian clerics are as usual blaming lax morals for the wrath of God.

(8) Exhibition soccer: Sacramento Republic, in town today for a friendly match against UCSB, outsmarted and outhustled the Gauchos to lead 2-0 midway through the first half. I was hoping for better results in this first look at UCSB's 2015 team. UCSB made the score 1-2 before halftime, but lost at the end 1-4. Now it's back to the drawing board to patch all the defensive holes and generate some offensive sparks in the few months left to the start of the 2015 season on August.

2015/02/10 (Tuesday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) A lovely Persian poem by Forough Farrokhzad:

I journey, but no longer ask myself: | Which is the way? Where's home? What's the destination?

Kisses, I dispense, but carry no notion, | About who might be this crazy heart's beloved.

Oh, surely this is me, but what's the point, | The real me is gone; isn't in me any more.

I roar crazily, but all's in my mind, | Asking, who's the real me? ... Who?

(2) Quote of the day: "No, this is your work." ~ Pablo Picasso's reply to a German officer who inquired whether a displayed painting depicting the chaos of World War II was his work

(3) Anticipated comic deficit: Stephen Colbert already terminated his fake news program on Comedy Central and Jon Stewart is reportedly also quitting "The Daily Show." We may have a deficit of humorous analyses and outrageous interviews, until a new equilibrium is established in the comedy world. On second thought, unintentionally funny clips from Fox News may provide the needed comic relief in their absence.

P.S.: Comic news is a fairly recent phenomenon in the US, but it has a long history in Iran.

(4) How to pass time on the train: I personally prefer reading, but, hey, I'm open to **new suggestions**.

(5) Be brave, be safe: This is the title of an essay by Susanna Schrobendorff [Time magazine, issue of February 9, 2015] giving advice to her two teenage daughters, as they prepare to head to college. "The irony is that while we've always warned our little girls about strangers, the numbers say that if our college-age daughters are assaulted, it will likely be by someone they know. ... I've spent years telling my girls that they can do anything a boy can, that they can rely on their smarts above all and that they should never be ashamed of their bodies. But that's not exactly true. No, girls can't get drunk like guys can at a party, not without compromising their safety."

(6) Did any women grieve the death of Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah? They are nowhere to be found in published photos of the formal state events in the wake of the King's passing.

(7) NASA scientists excited by the proposed Europa Clipper Mission: The US administration's 2016 budget includes funding for a **mission to Europa**, one of Jupiter's largest of 50 moons and the most promising target to find life outside Earth. Europa is believed to hold twice the amount of ocean water that the Earth has.

(8) Final thought for the day: "Art is not a mirror held up to reality but a hammer with which to shape it." ~ German poet/playwright Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956)

2015/02/08 (Sunday): Here are three items of potential interest.

(1) Lecture on Hafez and his 'Shirazi Turk': Today, I attended the lecture "Hafez, Timur and Khosrow of Delhi: A Geo-Historical Investigation about the 'Shirazi Turk'" by Domenico Ingenito, Italian-born Assistant Professor of Classical Persian at UCLA; the thirty-something speaker said that he became interested in, and started learning, Persian some 15 years ago, which made his delivery in Persian quite impressive. Unfortunately, the paper that the speaker said he has in the works isn't yet available online, so the following is based on my recollection and sparse notes.

The main focus of the talk was the well-known ghazal by Hafez (shown in the image) that begins with the verse containing the expression 'Shirazi Turk.' Like much of Hafez's poetry (wherein each person sees his/her own worldview and biases, from religious notions to eroticism), the 'Shirazi Turk' in this verse has been interpreted in different ways.

بجال بندویش نم مر قند و خارا	اک آن ترک شیرازی بست اردول مارا
گنارا ب رکنا باد و گلشیسلا را	به ساقی می باقی که در جنت نخواهی یافت
چنان د نم بر از دل که ترکان خوان یارا	فغان که نین لولان شخ شرین کار شرآشوب
بابه رنگ خال فخطچا جاتی نی زیارا	رخش نامه ام حباس یار نشی نیست
کشتن از پر و غصت برون آرد زنی را	من از آن جن از دخون کروش داشت داشم
چواب تل سریز لب لعل بگز خارا	اک د شام فشن باید کفرنین دها کویم
چوانان حاده نند پند پرید دان را	نیست که من از عالم اک باجان دیست ترا وارد
که کن خود و نکدید بجکت این تمارا	حد شا طرب دی کو و ازو هر گز تجو
که تلم تو اف شان فلک عست در بیارا	غزل نهی درستی یاد نوش بخان خاط

At one extreme is the literal meaning of a beautiful woman (or perhaps a young boy) from Shiraz who had tickled the poet's fancy. At the other extreme lie possible political (Timur, a Turk ruler) or spiritual references. As little is known about Hafez's personal life, it is hard to tell. He does have overtly political poems, including one that he is known to have modified in order to avoid getting in trouble with the authorities.

The great Persian poet Sa'adi used 'Shirazi Turk' before Hafez, so the notion must have been a common one in that era. Sa'adi's verse also references 'Khata'i Turk,' and Hafez elsewhere writes about 'Samarqandi Turk.' These notions are all interrelated and scholars have not come to definite conclusions about their exact meanings. The speaker tied these ideas to those appearing in the works of Amir-Khosro Dehlavi, from Delhi, a city that became an important center of Persian culture in the aftermath of the Mongol invasion of Iran and territories to its north.

(2) The Grammy Awards, 2015: On the way back from Los Angeles tonight, I stopped by at my sister's and we watched the Grammy Awards show together (I missed the first half hour). I found the show a lot more enjoyable than other awards shows, primarily because it was light on speeches and heavy on music. Highlights for me included performances by Beyonce, **Tony Bennett with Lady Gaga**, Madonna, Sam Smith with Mary J. Blige, and Annie Lennox with Hozier, as well as President Obama's well-delivered message against domestic violence; something that many music stars needed to hear. I won't name the bathroom-break-worthy performances.

(3) Joke of the day: A man and a woman, involved in a high-speed car accident, emerge from their cars unhurt. The woman says to the man: "Listen! Neither one of us seems to have been hurt, so the hand of fate must be behind this crash. Even this bottle of wine is unbroken; we have to celebrate our chance meeting." She hands the bottle to the man who drinks half of it, and hands it over to the woman. She puts the bottle away. "Aren't you drinking?" inquires the man. The woman replies: "Later; first we have to wait for the police to establish fault in this accident."

2015/02/07 (Saturday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Terms of endearment: Comparing pre- and post-Islamic-Revolution terms used in connection with Iran's top leader shows little change in how people convey absolute loyalty to the unelected leader. In Shah's time, everyone could be ridiculed (in cartoons and other published satire) except the Shah himself. Now, lower-level officials are out of bound as well.

(2) 3D printing is key to a successful Mars landing by humans: It would be very difficult to take everything that might come in handy, but with a **3D printer**, any needed item can be created from suitable ingredients.

(3) Jordan's air force releases slick PR ad against ISIS. [**2-minute video**]

(4) Comedy sketch, performed in a tilted room. [**3-minute video**]

(5) Wonderful Iranian choral music: The Maghami Heray Ensemble (based in Ghoochan, northeastern Iran) performs "**Melvary**" (translation?).

(6) Variations for piano: Performed by the composer, Ludwig Tuman. [**18-minute sound recording**]

(7) Shirin and Kerstin perform "**Heart of Glass**" on piano and percussion. Shirin and her collaborators post their performances on YouTube under the moniker "**ahang1001**" (there are hundreds of videos, arranged under playlists such as Tango, Ragtime, Jazz and Blues, Spanish Classical, Music for Relaxing, Human Rights, Opera and Operetta Melodies, Love Songs, Piano Bar, Persian Piano, and Persian Dance Music).

(8) All 121 Billy Joel songs ranked, with a link provided for each song: **The ultimate resource** for people like me who are into the Piano Man's music.

اعلیحضرت همایونی | مقام عظمای ولایت
فوی شاه | عاشق ولایت

جان نثار شاه | جانم فدای رهبر

سلطنت عطیه‌ای است الهی | ولی فقیه جانشین امام زمان است

تاج، تاجدار | عمامه، معجم

2015/02/06 (Friday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) A poem composed on the spot by the Iranian Azeri Poet Shahriar: Here is the (alleged) story behind this couplet. After an evening of drinking and having a good time, Shahriar supposedly ad libbed the first verse. A young woman who was present complimented him on the verse but expressed doubts that he composed it right there and then. She asked Shahriar if he was sure he had not preplanned the verse.

Shariar asked the young lady what her name was, and she responded "Ghazaal." After a brief pause, he proceeded to recite the second verse.

Rough English translation (for non-Persian-speakers): As the wine graciously took away my weariness | Enjoyment came about tonight of all nights || Hey Shahriar, a beautiful gazelle has liked your ghazal | How lucky to have attracted a gazelle with a ghazal

(2) Heartbroken mother of Jordanian pilot who was burned alive dies: ISIS cheered the news of her death. I am

امشب از دولت می دفع ملائی کردیم
این هم از عمر شنی بود که حالی کردیم
شهریارا غزل خوانده غزالی زیبا
بد نشد با غزلی صید غزالی کردیم

an optimist by nature, but such news make it difficult to maintain hope in the future of humanity.

(3) ISIS and the Crusaders: **President Obama's comparison** of the ISIS atrocities with those committed in the name of Christ during the Crusades draws fire from the conservatives. America, it seems, isn't ready for reasoned discourse, but prefers slogans and sugar-coated magic pills. Those of us who have Muslim friends know that peaceful Muslims do exist, but the right cannot grasp this simple notion.

(4) The **single mom** who went back to school and earned a PhD.

(5) Soprano 10: Yesterday, I posted a performance of Mozart music (with a twist) by a group that I later discovered is Russian and goes by the name "Soprano 10." Here is their 5-minute **medley of ABBA hit songs**. There are many more wonderful performances by the group on YouTube. Examples include "**Billie Jean**," "**Chattanooga Choo-Choo**," "**Bamboleo**," and "**Santa Lucia**."

(6) Joke of the day: Father: "When your mom set out to find a husband, she never paid much attention to her clothes or used excessive make-up." Daughter: "And I see the results she got!"

(7) Rumi's famous "Moses and Shepard" story continues: This **humorous Persian poem**, postulating an encounter between Moses and the same Shepard in the 21st-century Tehran, is due to Hadi Khorsandi. There is an additional continuation, in a footnote due to D. Shaaki (a pen name), who imagines the Shepard now living in Los Angeles.

(8) Gangnam Style investing: Last night's PBS Newshour featured a fascinating story about some seemingly irrational, but ultimately explainable, behavior in the stock market. When Psy's "Gangnam Style" video went viral, the stock price of a tech company chaired by his dad soared to 8 times its previous value, despite the lack of any pertinent change in the company or its technology. When Psy released his second popular song, the stock price soared again. Both times, the price came back down, but it eventually settled at a much higher level than the original price. Before you invoke the Persian saying about the relationship between "g - - z" and "shaghigheh" (for non-Iranian friends, the saying is about things that should bear no relationship to each other, but are somehow related), read the explanation in the **news story**. Along the same lines, when a company hires a good-looking CEO, its stock price soars. The latter seemingly irrational reaction is predictable (and thus rational in economics terms), in that it reflects our society's irrational trust in, and preference for, good-looking leaders.

(9) Final thought for the day: "We adore chaos because we love to produce order." ~ M. C. Escher

2015/02/05 (Thursday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) The magic of aerial photography: New York City's Central Park from above. The southern end of the park is at the top.

(2) Superlong quote of the day:

"Do not fall in love with a woman who reads,
a woman who feels too much,
a woman who writes ...

Do not fall in love with a
cultured, magical, delusional, crazy woman.

Do not fall in love with a woman who thinks,
who knows what she knows and also knows how to fly;
a woman confident in herself.

Do not fall for a woman who laughs or cries while making
love,
who knows how to convert her flesh into spirit;
much less one that loves poetry
(these are the most dangerous),
or who would stay half an hour contemplating a painting
and who doesn't know how to live without music.

Do not fall in love with a woman who is interested in politics
and who is rebellious and feels immense horror at injustice.
One who likes ball games and soccer
and does not like to watch television at all.

Or a woman who is beautiful
no matter the features of her face and her body.
Do not fall for an intense, entertaining, lucid
and irreverent woman.
You don't want to fall in love with a woman like that.
Because when you fall for a woman like that,
whether she stays with you or not,



whether she loves you or not,
she, a woman like that, never returns ..."~ Dominican poet Martha Rivera Garrido

(3) Mozart, with a twist. [[3-minute video](#)]

(4) Les Measlesrables: Comedian Jon Stewart's term for those refusing to vaccinate their kids.

(5) Roasting disbelievers in fire is indeed explicated in Quran: This [Web page](#) contains the pertinent verse in Arabic, along with a number of translations, some using the literal "fire" and others alluding to "Hell."

(6) The sharing economy, and computer-managed work in general, is reducing job quality and pay: UC Berkeley Professor and President Clinton's Secretary of Labor, Robert Reich, maintains that the **sharing economy** is really the share-the-scrap economy.

(7) Bond strings quartet concert at London's Royal Albert Hall. [[61-minute video](#)]

(8) Plans for Michael Jackson's Neverland Ranch: Tuesday night's Santa Barbara local news included an item about a potential buyer wanting to convert the former Santa Barbara County amusement park into a center for housing and treating abused children. What a wonderfully appropriate use for the property! They can even call it an "abusement park."

2015/02/03 (Tuesday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) A wonderful poem by Rumi.

(2) Quote of the day: "It is wonderful how much time good people spend fighting the devil. If they would only expend the same amount of energy loving their fellow men, the devil would die in his own tracks of ennui." ~ Helen Keller, *The Story of My Life*

(3) Superbowl **domestic violence ad**: An abuse victim contacts 911 under the guise of ordering pizza for delivery. It takes a while for the dispatcher to figure

out what's going on and to send help to the woman's residence. The clever ad is based on a story that has been circulating in cyberspace for some time, but Snopes.com classifies it as urban legend. Still, it's a powerful message and a welcome change for a league that has tended to ignore the issue for years.

(4) Bob Dylan, the crooner: The **transformed Dylan** tackles songs made famous by Frank Sinatra. Dylan's just-released album, "Shadows in the Night," appeals to old-timers, hence his decision to promote it by giving a sole interview to *AARP magazine*.

(5) Mother-in-law (Joke of the day): A young man invites the girl he loves, along with two of her friends, to his house to meet his mother, who is instructed to try to guess the girl of his dreams after they leave. When the mother guesses correctly, the young man is surprised and asks her how she could tell. "Easy, my boy," comes the reply, "I just had a feeling that I didn't like her."

(6) Another case of acid spraying: An Iranian woman's father and brother pin her down, spray acid on her face, and strangle her, leaving her for dead (she survived), because she had filed for divorce from her drug-addict husband. Such acts are barbaric and must be condemned unconditionally. Any statement against the act, that is followed by "but," implies tacit approval, essentially saying that under some conditions acid spraying and other acts of violence against women are legitimate. It doesn't even matter what the victim thinks of her father and brother, whether she filed a complaint, or what she had done for them to think she deserved punishment. The act is inhumane and criminal, period! [[German TV report](#)]

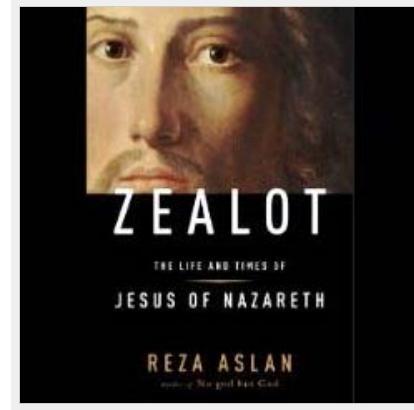
(7) Three-parent babies: The UK parliament has just **approved a procedure** by which a healthy egg from another woman has its nucleus removed and replaced by the egg nucleus of a woman who wants to bear a child but has unhealthy mitochondria known to lead to genetic diseases. The modified egg is then fertilized by the husband's sperm and is allowed to grow in the mother's uterus normally. The vote was 382-128. I can't imagine such bold procedures for preventing genetic diseases ever passing the US Congress.

2015/02/02 (Monday): Aslan, Reza, *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth*, unabridged audiobook on 7 CDs read by the author, Random House Audio, 2013.

I learned about this book from a friend's post of a [Fox News interview](#) with the author. Instead of talking about the book's contents, the interviewer relentlessly attacked the author for daring to write a book about Jesus, despite being a Muslim (Aslan was actually born Muslim, converted to Christianity when his family became disillusioned with Iran's Islamic Revolution, and later returned to his Muslim faith). The author argued that he has a PhD in history of religions and is teaching in the field for a living, and is thus eminently qualified to write a book about a historical figure in Christianity. Anyway, this exchange prompted me to puruse the book at the first opportunity (in the mid 2014).

In *Zealot*, Aslan points out that historical facts about Jesus are scarce. Much of what is available in the scripture

مرده بدم زنده شدم گریه بدم خنده شدم
دیده سیر است مرا جان دلیر است مرا
گفت که دیوانه نه ای لایق این خانه نه ای
گفت که سرسست نه ای رو که از این دست نه ای
گفت که تو گشته نه ای در طرب آگشته نه ای
گفت که تو بزرگی مست خیالی و شکی
گفت که تو شمع شدی قبله این جمع شدی
گفت که شیخی و سری پیش رو راهبری
گفت که با بال و بری من پر و بالت ندهم
گفت مرا عشق کهن از بار ما نقل مکن
چشمہ خورشید تویی سایه گه بید منم
تابش جان یافت دلم واشد و بشکافت دلم
صورت جان وقت سحر لاف همی زد زیطر
شکر کند کاغذ توار شکر بی حد تو
شکر کند خاک دزم از فلک و جرخ به خم
کز نظر و گردش او نورینیرنده شدم
کز کرم و بخشش او روشن بخشندۀ شدم
بر زیر هفت طبق اختر رخشندۀ شدم
یوسف بودم ر کنون یوسف زینده شدم
کز اثر خنده تو گلشن خنندۀ شدم
کز رخ آن شاه جهان فرج و فرجنده شدم



concerns his teachings and faith, rather than about the man who grew up a poor laborer and roamed the earth 2000 years ago. The one undisputed fact about Jesus, that is, his crucifixion, provides more than enough evidence that he was viewed by the Romans and their collaborators as a troublemaker, given that crucifixion was reserved exclusively for seditionists and bandits in those days. The two other men crucified alongside Jesus were also no mere "thieves," as crucifixion wasn't used to punish ordinary thieves.

Jesus did try to start a rebellion against the Romans and their upper-class Jewish clients, but the specific crime for which he was tried and crucified was claiming to be the promised messianic king of the Jews. Given that Roman rulers reserved for their Senate the right of appointing kings within the empire, the claim was considered treasonous and punishable by a torturous death. Apparently, Aslan's musings on the crucifixion and its significance, like most other claims in the book, aren't as new or controversial as the publisher's cover blurbs and other promotional material claim.

Using historical sources, Aslan provides an excellent introduction to the economic conditions, political power structure, and heavy-handed enforcement of religion in 1st-century Palestine, including how the Romans and upper-class Jews exploited the poor through the use of religion. Even though Aslan's depiction of the ministry and teachings of Jesus, as well as the course of Christianity after his death, have been questioned by other scholars of religion (including Dale B. Martin of Yale University, who wrote a review of the book for *The New York Times*), the book is generally deemed historically accurate and well-written.

The audiobook production has a good flow and is easy to listen to; and the author's reading lends some authenticity to the ideas. For people like me, whose knowledge of the history of Christianity is rather limited, this book constitutes a good starting point.

2015/02/01 (Sunday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "I have said that behind Sorrow there is always Sorrow. It were still wiser to say that behind sorrow, there is always a soul. And to mock at a soul in pain is a dreadful thing." ~ Oscar Wilde

(2) As we bask in the springlike sun of Southern California, our hearts and minds are with family and friends bracing for continued **blizzard conditions** in the US Midwest to Northeast.

(3) Little cutie shakes it off: Watch out Katy Perry! [\[4-minute video\]](#)

(4) Iran's state-sponsored Prophet Muhammad biopic: [The \\$30M film](#) is the most expensive ever for Iran. Even though the film follows Islamic norms by not showing the Prophet's face, it has irked a number of Sunni scholars and clerics in multiple countries, to the extent that Qatar is making a competing film with a \$1B budget.

(5) Do you want to see the comments on your college application? *Time* magazine columnist Joel Stein (February 2 issue) thinks not. He and a group of other Stanford students used the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act to gain access to the comments in 1992. It was an ego-deflating experience for him, and many students were rightfully upset with the tone of the comments. After that incident, Stanford decided to shred the applications upon the completion of each admissions cycle. Now that we have fully electronic applications and related files (shredding doesn't work), students are again bent on reading these comments. Joel Stein's advice: "Seriously, you never want to find out what people really think of you."

(6) The race is on for building an Exascale supercomputer: Floating-point operations per second (FLOPS) is the unit often used to measure the computational power of a supercomputer. Gigaflops (10^9 FLOPS) machines built in the mid-1980s were no more powerful than today's laptops and, in some cases, smartphones. The next two milestones of Teraflops (10^{12} FLOPS) and Petaflops (10^{15} FLOPS) were reached in 1997 and 2008, respectively. Now, computer engineers and manufacturers have their sights set on the next milestone, dubbed Exascale computing, which means achieving Exaflops-level (10^{18} FLOPS) performance. One key difficulty to overcome is ensuring the reliable operation of millions of processors needed to synthesize such a behemoth. The Petascale Sequoia machine has a mean time between failures (MTBF) of just under one week. It is anticipated that the MTBF will be reduced to under one hour for a Petascale machine.

(7) Cars weigh too much: A measure of efficiency for various modes of transportation is the ratio of the weight of a vehicle to the weight of the typical number of passengers in it (the number of passengers is unfortunately 1 for most private cars driven in America). Some approximate ratios, assuming 70-kg passengers, follow. As we improve the fuel efficiency of engines, the ratio above must also go down for best results. Ironically, at 6.3, a Boeing 787-9 offers a better ratio than the fairly efficient Citroen 2CV. [Weight data from *IEEE Spectrum* magazine, issue of January 2015.]

0.1 Lightweight bicycle; 1.6 Italian Vespa scooter; 5.0 Typical modern bus

7.5 French Citroen 2CV or Ford Model T; 12 Smart Car; 17 Mini Cooper or Honda Civic LX

26 Average American light-duty vehicle; 32 Ford F-150 (best-selling American car); 39 Cadillac Escalade EXT

(8) Final thought for the day: "According to a new survey, women say they feel more comfortable undressing in front of men than they do undressing in front of other women. They say that women are too judgmental, where, of course, men are just grateful." ~ Robert De Niro

2015/01/30 (Friday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) A Persian poem by Morteza Keyvan Hashemi: The poem "Tars" ("Fear") is unfortunately being circulated in cyberspace as a composition of Simin Behbahani. However, the moniker "Keyvan" in the last verse betrays this misguided attribution. Here is the piece's theme: The poet states that he doesn't mind certain commonly-feared things, such as ferocious beasts, enemy battlefield, and kings themselves; rather, he is scared of wily coyotes, backstabbing friends, and kings' goons.

(2) Quote of the Day: "Happiness is a butterfly, which, when pursued, is always just beyond your grasp, but which, if you sit down quietly, may alight upon you." ~ American novelist Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864), best known for *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables*

(3) Beautiful **harp music**.

(4) Tajik **wedding music**.

(5) Typo may do some good: A Florida sheriff's office, which received a custom-ordered rug inscribed with "In Dog We Trust," will auction it to benefit an animal rescue group. [From: *Time* magazine, issue of February 2, 2015]

(6) The electric friendship generator (aka Facebook): Funny **4-minute video** containing tips about Facebook relationship etiquette.

(7) Womanhood isn't a crime: An Iranian woman breaks two taboos by posting a **video of herself** singing without a headscarf in her kitchen, while making a statement about Iranian women having been confined to the kitchen for too long.

(8) Final thought for the day: "Bigamy is having one wife too many. Monogamy is the same." ~ Oscar Wilde

من از شب ها ی تاریک و بدون ماه می ترسم
نه از شیر و پلنگ، از این همه روباه می ترسم
مرا از جنگ رو در روی در میدان هراسی نیست
ولی از دوستان آب زیر کاه می ترسم
من از صد دشمن دانای لامذهب نمی ترسم
ولی از راهد بی عقل نا آگاه می ترسم
پی گم گشته ام در چاه نادانی نمی گردم
اصولن من نمی دام چرا از چاه می ترسم
اگرچه راه دشوار است و مقصد نایید اما
نه از سختی ره سستی همراه می ترسم
من از تهدیدهای ضمی طالم نمی ترسم
من از نفرین یک مظلوم، از یک آه می ترسم
من از عمامه و تسییح و تاج و مسند شاهی
اگر افتد به دست آدم خودخواه می ترسم
مرا از داریوش و کوروش و این جمله باکی نیست
من از قدره بندهان مرید شاه می ترسم
نمی ترسم ز درگاه خدای مهریان، اما
ز برخی از طرفداران این درگاه می ترسم
خدای من! نمی دام چرا از تو نمی ترسم
ولی از این برادرهای حزب الله می ترسم
جو "کیوان" بر بدار خوبیش می گردم، ولی گاهی
از این سینگ شهاب ابله و گمراه می ترسم

2015/01/29 (Thursday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Happiness is neither virtue nor pleasure nor this thing nor that but simply growth. We are happy when we are growing." ~ Author/poet William Butler Yeats (1865-1939)

(2) The worsening income/wealth gap: By 2016, the richest 1% across the globe will hold 50% of the world's wealth. [Source: Antipoverty charity Oxfam]

(3) Cheap oil and the airline industry: Yes, we are paying less at the pump, but airlines have kept the fuel surcharges, which they added to their airfares at the time of high oil prices, and are pocketing the difference now.

(4) A director of "Lego Movie" built his own Oscar statue from Lego blocks in view of the film being snubbed as a best-animated-feature candidate. [From: *Time* magazine, issue of February 2, 2015]

(5) Teenager in custody for the **shooting death** of a Minnesota teacher: The highly respected and beloved David Frigaard, 46, taught art, served as an at-risk program teacher, was an adviser for the gay-straight alliance, and held several athletic coaching positions.

(6) Amal Clooney **presents her case** in Armenian genocide hearing before Europe's top human rights court. Good to see her professional side, after much coverage of glamour and personal attributes.

(7) On the need for praising positive actions, even if small: Two events in the last couple of days made me write this post. One was the appearance of multiple posts criticizing those who praised Michelle Obama for forgoing a headscarf during her visit to Saudi Arabia, citing the fact that Laura Bush, Condi Rice, and Hillary Clinton had done the same. Kudos to all of them! Why do we have to trivialize the action of Michelle Obama? The second was a post by Bill Gates, saying that digital banking will help the poor transform their lives. I found myself defending Gates against critics deeming him out of touch, by adding a few points to what Gates himself had stated. Again, even if Gates' statement is misguided, why not give him credit for trying and for thinking about social issues, which is much more than one can say about most other rich people?

(8) Final thought for the day: "I don't understand why being concerned with the status of the middle class makes you leftist, liberal, socialist, etc., when clearly you are front and center." ~ From a letter to the editor of *Time* magazine (issue of February 2, 2015), objecting to the portrayal of Elizabeth Warren

2015/01/28 (Wednesday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Breaking weather alert: "The National Weather Service is warning these areas to brace for what could be a crippling amount of Instagrammed snow photos." ~ From a cartoon caption

(2) Topaz solar farm: Covering an area 1/3 of Manhattan in California's San Luis Obispo County, the **solar farm** produces 500 MW of electricity.

(3) Babies in car seats react as the cars go through tunnels. (**3-minute video**)

(4) Je Suis Avazi: This is a slogan adopted by many individuals of Iranian origins in response to Ayatollah Jannati calling "avazi" (the closest English term that comes to my mind is "jerk") all those who criticized the

house arrest, without trials or other due process, of several regime opponents.

(5) A simple Enigma machine: If you were intrigued by Alan Turing's code-breaking activities, featured in the movie "The Imitation Game," and you are into building stuff, a simple working version of the German coding machine Enigma is available as the kit "Enigma Mark 4" from S&T Geotronics that sells for about \$200. More complete versions of the kit are also available from the same source for around \$300 and \$425.

(6) Panoramic photos of Iran: A [5-minute slide show](#) of panoramic photos of Iran's nature and tourist sites by Abbas Arabzadeh, set to Iranian folk music.

(7) A tongue-in-cheek opinion piece against binge-watching TV shows: Kristin van Ogtrop, writing in *Time* magazine (issue of January 26, 2015), enumerates 4 personal reasons why she does not binge-watch anything. Her mother's advice, taking care of her family, and the way her binge-watching friends have started to look are the first 3 reasons. The last reason is James Taylor, who propounded in a song that the secret of life is enjoying the passage of time. "Still, there is this nagging sense of inadequacy when I don't binge-watch seven episodes in a row like the rest of the world. Maybe I just don't fit in. And so I ask myself—as one must whenever one is feeling like a misfit—is there some way in which my inadequacy actually makes me ... superior?" She believes that anticipation is good for us, citing the results of the well-known marshmallow experiment of many decades ago at Stanford University, in which kids who chose the immediate gratification of eating one marshmallow now, over waiting a bit and then getting 2 marshmallows, did worse in life.

2015/01/27 (Tuesday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) International Holocaust Remembrance Day: January 27 has been designated by the 2005 UN General Assembly Resolution 60/7 as a day to commemorate the genocide that led to the death of 6 million Jews, 1 million Gypsies, 250,000 mentally and physically disabled people, and 9,000 homosexual men by the Nazi regime and its collaborators. January 27, 2015, marks the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz.

(2) The blizzard of 2015: This is serious folks! [Record snowfall](#) is expected in northeastern US. Thousands of flights out of the region's main airports have been cancelled, most schools have been closed, public transit has been shut down, and people have been asked to stay indoors for their own safety and for the sake of emergency crews being able to get to where help is needed unimpeded. Hope family and friends in the region stay safe.

(3) Nordlingen (in Bavaria, southern Germany) is built in a 14M-year-old meteor impact crater. [[Image](#)]

(4) The Oscars love biopics: Over the past few years, biopics have done well as best-picture Oscar winners ("The King's Speech," "Argo," "12 Years a Slave") and have also collected a bunch of best-actor/actress statues (Sean Penn, Colin Firth, Daniel Day-Lewis, Matthew McConaughey, Helen Mirren, Marion Cotillard, Sandra Bullock, Meryl Streep). So, it's no surprise that this year's crop is also loaded with biopics: 5 of the 8 best-picture nominees are biopics ("American Sniper," "Boyhood," "The Imitation Game," "Selma," "The Theory of Everything"). Two other biopics ("Unbroken," "Wild") may garner some awards, although they are not best-picture nominees.

(5) Greek singer Demis Roussos dead at 68: Even though I attended a concert of his in Tehran in the late 1970s, I wasn't particularly fond of his style of music. He was immensely popular in Iran at the time, alongside a number of Italian and French singers. I did not realize that he was almost exactly my age; a sobering thought!

(6) Kudos to Michelle Obama: She [foregoes wearing a headscarf](#) in Saudi Arabia, where the President and First Lady stopped on the way back from India to pay respects to the deceased King Abdullah.

(7) The largest land transport in the world: [Bagger 288](#), built by Krupp, is a bucket-wheel excavator (a kind of mining machine) that replaced NASA's transporter for the Space Shuttle and Apollo Saturn V launch vehicle as the world's largest land vehicle in 1978.

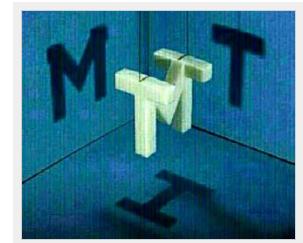
(8) Monica Lewinsky speaks up: In a public lecture, delivered after many years of silence, Lewinsky makes some valid points about the coarsening of our culture and a deficit in compassion that turned a 22-year-old's indiscretion into a nightmarish experience that literally took her to the brink of death. This [26-minute video](#) is well worth watching.

2015/01/25 (Sunday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) The same situation may seem different from various vantage points: Take extreme care when judging or, better yet, don't judge.

(2) The significance of maps: In my review of the book *Geopolitics*, posted on January 20, I noted a world map centered at the North Pole that the US promoted during the cold war to emphasize the fact that the Soviet Union was closer to the US than most people thought. Note also the larger sizes of Africa and South America in [this map](#) compared with those in commonly used maps. Yes, maps play a big role in how we perceive the world.

(3) Eradicating diseases: In the course of the entire human history, a single disease has been eradicated



(smallpox, in 1980). Over the next 15 years, we expect to **eradicate 4 other diseases**, including polio.

(4) Efforts to preserve a historic gas station: Elwood, a neighborhood in Goleta, just to the north of Santa Barbara, is home to the remains of a **historic gas station**, completed in 1929, that's slowly falling into disrepair. Efforts to save the landmark are underway.

(5) Jokes about Asian Cup soccer: In Iran, making up jokes is one of the key mechanisms for coping with the difficult sociopolitical situation. Here are a couple of new jokes.

Joke 1: We may have lost in soccer to an Arab country but we prevailed in the thrilling battle between Ayatollah Jannati and King Abdullah. [Jannati's longevity has fueled much humor over the past few years.]

Joke 2: Asian Soccer Federation's voting results [about Iran's allegations that Iraq had fielded an ineligible player]: Overturning Iraq's win, 54%; banning the Iraqi player for life, 39%; Mohsen Rezaee, 7% [Rezaee is the perpetual last-place finisher in presidential elections in Iran.]

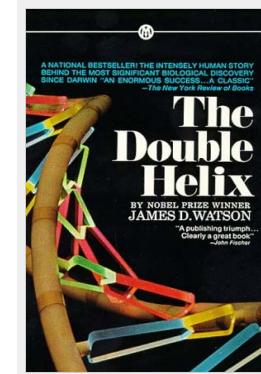
(6) Ten scientists who were **killed by their own experiments**.

(7) The hypocrisy of Saudi kings: *Newsweek* on-line reports that Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah, who passed away at age 90 a few days ago, was buried in an unmarked grave in accordance with the conservative Wahabbi belief that there should be nothing left of a king that might become a site for veneration. If only the Saudi royals exhibited such modesty during their living years in billion-dollar palaces and in their use of private or chartered 747s to bring their luxury cars and other shopping-spree collections from Europe and USA to their homeland.

(8) Final thought for the day: "Ironically, terrorism is an act against the very religion the perpetrators claim to believe in. It's an acknowledgment that the religion and its teachings aren't enough to persuade people to follow it. Any religion that requires coercion is not about community but leaders who want power." ~ Six-time NBA champ and MVP Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, writing in *Time* magazine, issue of January 26, 2015

2015/01/24 (Saturday): Watson, James D., *The Double Helix*, Signet, 1968.

The author is one of the three researchers honored, in equal shares, with the 1962 Nobel Prize in medicine for discovering the molecular structure of nucleic acids and its significance for information transfer in living material (the double-helix structure of the book's title). The other two co-winners were the author's fellow researcher Francis Crick and a pioneer in the field, Maurice Wilkins. Other key personalities appearing often in the narrative are Lawrence Bragg (who wrote the book's foreword, warning the readers that the frank observations offered by the author should not be taken as offensive), Linus Pauling (a competing Caltech scientist who was also pursuing the problem of DNA structure and was feared by the author as someone who might beat him to the solution), Rosalind (Rosy) Franklin (an X-ray specialist whose work provided clues to the author and others in their scientific pursuits), and Pauling's son, Peter.



This book has been hailed as "lively, wholly brash, full of sharp and sudden opinion, often at the edge of scandal" (*Life* magazine) and "vividly observant, full of suspense and mounting tension, and so directly candid about the brilliant and abrasive personalities ... of scientists. ... Seldom, if ever, has a scientist written so frankly about his colleagues or about the trade secrets, or silences of, his profession" (*The New York Times*). In his foreword, Bragg urges the reader not to judge the book as a definitive history of how the double-helix structure was discovered, but as a scientific autobiography which will eventually be used as a key source for writing such a definitive history.

Watson's book was recommended to me by my daughter, and I approached it with enthusiasm, given the monumental importance of the subject matter and reviews such as those cited above. Having lived as a researcher for some 2/3 of my life, I am no stranger to the backroom politics of science, but what goes on in my domains of expertise (mathematics, computer science, engineering) appears tame compared with what I learned about the fields of biology and chemistry from this book. It is dismaying to see scientists feel threatened by, and lose sleep over, an imminent discovery by another scientist, rather than be overjoyed by the anticipated advance. One message of the book is that scientific discovery is anything but a clean process and that it is often motivated more by rivalries among scientists than by noble truth-seeking motives.

First, let me devote a part of my review to the book's style, which is highly unusual among autobiographies written by scientists. In justifying his approach of writing about his first impressions of people and events, rather than use the benefits of hindsight to offer a more objective assessment, the author informs us in the book's preface: "[S]cience seldom proceeds in the straightforward logical manner imagined by outsiders. Instead, its steps forward (and sometimes backward) are often very human events in which personalities and cultural traditions play major roles."

The author's description of women borders on misogyny. It is disheartening to read the author ruminate about his luck that a scientist he dreamed of working with became interested in his pretty sister [p. 29]. He seems to devote more attention to people's looks, hair, and glasses, than to the technical aspects of their contributions.

In one passage [p. 20], we read this about Rosalind Franklin: "Though her features were strong, she was not unattractive and might have been quite stunning had she taken even a mild interest in clothes. ... There was never lipstick to contrast with her straight black hair, while at the age of thirty-one her dresses showed all the imagination of English blue-stocking adolescents." In another passage [p. 51], he describes Ms. Franklin thus: "There was not a trace of warmth or frivolity in her words. And yet I could not regard her as totally uninteresting. Momentarily I wondered how she would look if she took off her glasses and did something with her hair." And here is what the author has to say about his own sister: "Though my sister was upset when she saw me, I knew that months, if not years, might be required to replace her superficial values with those of the English intellectual" [p. 72].

On the subject of scientists envying a colleague who is cheery and animated, and thus well-liked by audiences attending his technical talks, we read (p. 30): "Several fellow professors ... watched this performance with mixed feelings. Seeing Linus [Pauling] jumping up and down on the demonstration table and moving his arms like a magician about to pull a rabbit out of his shoe made them feel inadequate." The author himself apparently had similar misgivings, because he characterizes the methods used by Linus Pauling as "tricks" (p. 32) rather than innovations or insightful attacks on the problems. Other scientists do not escape the barbs either: "[A] goodly number of scientists are not only narrow-minded and dull, but also just stupid" [pp. 18-19].

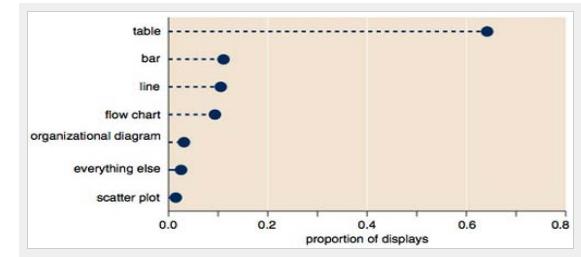
The study of genetics goes back to the work of Gregor Mendel (1822-1884), who pretty much mapped out how traits are carried from parents to offspring. Mendel's mid-1860s laws, ignored for decades and rediscovered in 1900, became the core of modern genetics upon integration with the chromosome theory of inheritance in 1915. Much was discovered about functional and chemical properties of genes between 1915 and the beginning of the author's interest in them as a postdoctoral researcher at Cambridge some 35 years later. For example, Erwin Schrodinger's *What Is Life?* (1946) "very elegantly propounded the belief that genes were the key components of living cells and that, to understand what life is, we must know how genes act" [p. 18].

The first half of the book is devoted to the author's introduction to Europe and European ways, and to his attempts to fit in as a researcher and as a member of Cambridge's high-society party scene. The chapters in the second half of the book are devoted mostly to a blow-by-blow account of how the author's team closed in on the double-helix structure of DNA, using information gleaned from X-rays and insight provided by mechanical models of the structures under study, using metal parts built by a campus workshop. When the discovery came, and confirmation was obtained from various co-workers that the findings made sense, they finally wrote and submitted a paper to *Nature* that began: "We wish to suggest a structure for the salt of deoxy nucleic acid (DNA). This structure has novel features which are of considerable biological interest" [p. 140].

The detailed exposition of the discovery of DNA's double-helix structure is quite exciting and eye-opening. However, the book's uniqueness is in its portrayal of the research scene in biological sciences and the interpersonal relationships, and rivalries, among scientists. For example, it is interesting to learn that in the 1950s, scholarships and fellowships were awarded mostly via referrals by respected scientists and those who knew someone in the funding agency, rather than through open competition. This fascinating book provides a window into how science and scientists operated in the 1950s.

2015/01/23 (Friday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) How to draw a bar graph: Here's a great way to present a bar graph. The heavy dots draw attention to data points and the dashed lines are simpler than boxes, leading to a less cluttered chart. The particular bar graph depicted makes the point that people tend to use tables, instead of the more readily understood graphic forms, way too often. [From an [article in American Scientist](#), entitled "A Window on Data Can Be a Window on Discovery"]



(2) Quote of the day: "The most exciting phrase to hear in science, the one that heralds new discoveries, is not 'Eureka!' but 'That's funny ...!'" ~ Isaac Asimov (1920-1992)

(3) Design concepts for [pre-fab homes](#): These homes can be propped up into place by unfolding parts from a standard-size shipping container.

(4) This will change the way you look at selfies: Hillarious [compilation of selfie photos](#), and what went on immediately before the final pose.

(5) For frequent Amazon.com shoppers, some of these [20 tips](#) are quite useful.

(6) Who wants a computer to be a millionaire? After the success of IBM's Watson in *Jeopardy!* it was inevitable that people would program a computer to participate in other game shows. The April 2015 issue of *Information Processing Letters* contains an article, by S. Momtazi and F. Naumann, that reports on average winnings of \$250K and becoming a millionaire in 6 out of 50 runs (better than normal winnings among human contestants) achieved by a computer program using a combination of search engine and knowledge base accesses.

(7) Iran ousted from the Asian Cup soccer tournament: After a 1-1 tie at the end of 90 minutes and a 3-3 score through an explosive overtime in this quarterfinals match, Iran lost to Iraq in penalty shootout 6-7. The Australian referee's controversial decision to issue a second yellow card to an Iranian player for diving led to Iran playing with 10 men for much of the match. [[Match highlights](#)]

(8) Final thought for the day: It would be great if we could deflate some over-inflated sports figures, from wife-beating football players to coaches who think they should win at any cost, even if it means turning a blind eye on a pedophile among their staff or deflating footballs against league rules.

2015/01/22 (Thursday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Destiny: A tyrant's authority for crime and a fool's excuse for failure." ~ Ambrose Bierce

(2) Small is beautiful: This [tiny prefab house](#) looks quite comfortable when you peek inside it (that is, if you don't own a large collection of books, many tools, decades worth of records/notes, etc.).

(3) Palestinian media and cartoonists cheerfully praise the [stabbing of 13 Israelis](#) on a bus in Tel Aviv.

(4) Losing weight by controlling when you eat: Although [these reported results](#) are restricted to mice at this time, there is reason to believe that the strategy might work for humans just as well. Mice whose diets were restricted to include fasting periods between 9 and 15 hours lost weight and showed improved cholesterol and blood glucose levels, even when they consumed identical foods with the same number of calories.

(5) Cancer is on the verge of overtaking heart disease as [the leading killer](#): Given that cancer is engrained in human evolution, simply throwing money at it may not lead to solutions. Thus, even though cancer mortality has been on the decline when accounting for the rising and graying population, death from heart disease has shrunk at a greater rate.

(6) Put your money where your mouth is: This sage advice is for us mere mortals and does not apply to billionaires. Case in point is Jeff Greene, who made a fortune by betting against subprime mortgage securities, and is now [going long on the US](#), while at the same time opining, "Our economy is in deep trouble. We need to be honest with ourselves. We've had a realistic level of job destruction, and those jobs aren't coming back."

(7) Learn Persian (humor): "Antar khanoom," literally "monkey lady," is an expression used by some women to describe any attractive, well-dressed, and friendly woman as she enters a party.

(8) Today's final thought: "The high destiny of the individual is to serve rather than to rule." ~ Albert Einstein

2015/01/21 (Wednesday): Here are Eight items of potential interest.

(1) Fun on MLK Day: Comedian Jimmy Kimmel asked 14 randomly chosen people on the street whether they had heard Dr. Martin Luther King's speech on Monday morning. Alarmingly, half of them had heard the speech and were able to elaborate on its contents.

(2) President Obama's State of the Union Address: [Full text](#) of last night's SOTU address, for those who may have missed it. The President appeared comfortable and confident. If only House Speaker John Boehner didn't look like he was undergoing a colonoscopy (to borrow a phrase from Bill Maher) throughout the speech.

(3) Honor Diaries: Nine courageous women speak out against societies that practice "honor violence" against women, questioning how a man's honor can manifest itself in a woman's body. [Extended [11-minute preview](#) of the 61-minute documentary film]

(4) New York City at night, from 7500 feet above. [[Photo gallery](#)]

(5) Nearly 100M views and counting: Europe performs "[The Final Countdown](#)" on stage.

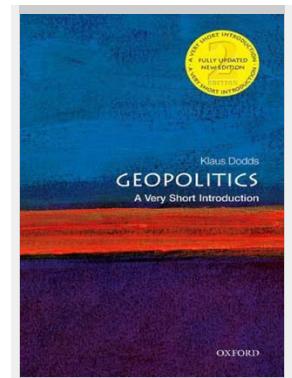
(6) United Breaks Guitars: Dave Carroll, whose Taylor guitar was broken through mishandling by United Airline's baggage personnel, and then got the runaround when seeking damages, posted this [retaliatory video](#) on YouTube, garnering more than 14M views so far. After the posting, United offered to reimburse him in exchange for pulling the video, which he declined. Taylor Guitars gave Carroll two new guitars to thank him for the publicity.

(7) Four causes of [phantom hunger](#): Eating the wrong foods (simple carbs, instead of whole grains and protein); emotions (boredom, anxiety, loneliness, or stress); lack of sleep (lowers leptin and raises ghrelin levels); being surrounded by food ("out of sight, out of stomach")

(8) Consumer reviewers for hire: A couple of nights ago, PBS NewsHour ran a story about a burgeoning business run by people who would post a 5-star review of your restaurant, say, and a 1-star review of a competitor for an agreed sum of money. Yelp and other companies are bent on filtering/flagging dishonest reviews and taking action against perpetrators.

2015/01/20 (Tuesday): Dodds, Klaus, *Geopolitics: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford Univ. Press, 2014.

This 157-page, pocket-size book is another one in the OUP series that aims to provide stimulating and accessible ways of exploring new subjects (I have previously reviewed the *Microeconomics* volume in the series). The still-expanding [list of titles](#), written by authorities in the respective fields, includes over 400 topics, from *Accounting* to *Writing and Script*.



Nearly everyone has heard the term "geopolitics," but few (myself included) know its exact meaning. I had not given the word much thought, thinking that it is a straightforward compound word meant to represent the impact of geography on politics and vice versa. It is certainly that, but also much more. I usually provide a list of chapter titles as a way of summarizing such a book, but here, the chapter titles are as enigmatic as the subject matter itself. For example, the title of chapter 3, "Geopolitical Architectures," provides no clue as to what the chapter covers.

One learns early in the book that the term "geopolitics" has gained a highly negative connotation, so much so that many people avoid its use. The roots of the word go back 115 years, but it was the Nazis who latched onto it and used it to advance their goals, and this is certainly one reason why the word is detested. Of course, the study of how geography influences trade and economics goes even further back. In the latter part of the 20th century, US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger revived the use of the term to denote his interest in a realistic and hardheaded approach to foreign policy and to the world in general. Kissinger perhaps added to the hatred for the term with famous proclamations such as: "The issues are much too important for the Chilean voters to be left to decide for themselves."

Sovereignty is often raised in discussing the geopolitics of international relations. In truth, however, sovereignty is exercised rather flexibly by different countries. Some do not mind, or even encourage, foreign investments, ignoring the threats they pose. Others express outrage at sovereignty violations, such as drone strikes in Pakistan, not based on principles but to quell domestic opposition, while tacitly approving of the actions. The communist threat to Latin American dictatorial regimes was often couched in geopolitical terms.

Al Qaeda and other extremist groups now rampant and spreading in the Middle East and elsewhere were geopolitical creations. The southward expansion of the Soviet Union into Afghanistan was motivated by gaining geographical advantages in trade and military (perhaps eying further expansion to the shores of the Indian Ocean), and the US's use of Islamic proxy fighters to prevent this expansion was also a geopolitical decision. Such groups might have emerged anyway, but they probably would not have been as battle-hardened in the absence of US support and training.

The emphasis of geopolitics and its very definition changed once again when the role of the sovereign state was weakened by the spread of globalization. One school of thought maintains that while states are still relevant and do interact directly among themselves and via the United Nations, domestic economic and political decisions are increasingly influenced by their trade implications and thus by the transnational corporations managing the trade. The increase in the number of states flies in the face of the claim of globalization making them irrelevant, as do anti-WTO protests and Occupy movements.

Whereas identities are often firmly tied to nation-states, they sometimes leak or fuse across territorial boundaries, the prime example being the notion of a unified Europe. Connectivity via social media is thought to dilute national and tribal identities, but may ironically have the opposite effect. For example, when Facebook recognized Kosovo as a country, the action did not sit well with Serbia. Kosovars were, of course, delighted about being recognized by an American business, given that recognition by real countries around the world was not forthcoming.

Group identities are enforced primarily through political clout and military power. However, other tools are in play as well. In a striking example, soccer has been used in Spain to express regional identity and pride, along with any frustrations and ambitions, when rival teams such as Athletic Bilbao (Basque) and Barcelona (Catalan) meet.

Maps have always been tools for expressing regional identities and they are often fuzzy or conflicting when it comes to defining inclusions and exclusions. During the Cold War, a map of the world with the North Pole at its center gained prominence. It was simply a tool for the US government to provide a better view of the world for Americans and to emphasize the relative geographical proximity of the Soviet Union to the US via the Arctic. Flags constitute another important symbolism, with trampling on flags, burning them, or distorting their imagery forming common means of expressing outrage at perceived misdeeds. Maps and flags aren't the only objects that inform geopolitical discussions and disputes. The AK-47 machine gun has also presented a powerful symbolism over the years. The ultimate object in this arena is the human body, which is smuggled, sold, and otherwise treated as if it were inanimate.

The importance of films, TV programs, and other media cannot be overemphasized in this regard. We learn from this book that the Bush-43 administration held meetings with Hollywood executives after the 9/11 attacks to explore ways in which the entertainment industry, and popular culture more generally, could play a role in

promoting homeland security and the notion of War on Terror.

Like everything else, geopolitics is being reshaped by the new media. "When former [US] Vice President Dick Cheney called for 'total information awareness,' it was perhaps not apparent at the time how this quest would lead to what some have described as a surveillance-internet-industrial complex." Satire, and, in particular, the comic news genre, such as those popularized by Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert, is another important facet of popular culture that impacts geopolitics. The recent terrorist attack on cartoonists in France serves as a testament to the power of media, old and new.

This book piqued my interest to pursue the topic further, so I examined its list of references and further readings. It appears that numerous English-language books and periodicals with geopolitical content are available. There are also specialized scholarly publications, such as *Geopolitics* and *Political Geography*, dealing with the topic.

All in all, while I learned new facts and concepts from this book, I did not find it as useful as the *Microeconomics* volume I had read and reviewed previously. Perhaps some fuzziness in discussing a domain within social sciences is unavoidable. Unfortunately, such fuzziness makes it difficult for a reader like me to integrate the notions learned into his understanding (model) of human affairs and societal interactions on the world stage.

2015/01/19 (Monday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Remembering Dr. Martin Luther King's words on his birthday: "Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable. ... Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals."

(2) Traditional Persian music: Vesal Alavi sings "**Tanhaa Maandam**" ("I Stayed Lonely"), a composition by Homayoun Khorram, with lyrics by Abdollah Olfat; arranged and conducted by Mohammad Ali Fallahi.

(3) This **singing male nurse** at Valencia hospital soothes the suffering of his patients.

(4) The decline of network TV: "There were no [Golden Globes] given for shows on CBS, NBC, ABC, or Fox, and HBO took home only one statuette Tuesday. Signaling a pronounced shift in power, Amazon—which wasn't even part of the awards conversation a year ago—triumphed with two of the night's biggest prizes: A best-comedy trophy for 'Transparent,' and another for its star, Tambor." [From *Entertainment Weekly*, issue of January 23, 2015.]

(5) Spinning book data into art: A recently published book, *Infographic Guide to Literature*, presents analytic and comparative data via 100 graphs, Venn diagrams, and charts. *Entertainment Weekly* has included three of these infographics in its issue of January 23, 2015: Austen vs. Bronte (comparing their obsession with bonnets, balls, dresses, marriage, and matters of the heart); Death by Shakespeare (from stabbings to death by grief); and Wood for Books (fate of trees).

(6) Iran to play the runner-up of Group D (Iraq, most likely) in the Asian Cup quarterfinals: The Iranian national soccer team won its third preliminary-round match against UAE 1-0 on a 90th-minute goal to advance as the top team in its group [**6-minute video highlights**]. UAE also advances to the quarterfinals as the runner-up team of Group C. Iran's quarterfinals match will be on Thursday 1/22, and, assuming advancement, the next two will be on Monday 1/26 (against winner of South Korea vs. Uzbekistan) and Saturday 1/31 (possible championship opponent: China, Australia, UAE, or Japan).

(7) Spring/Vernal equinox in California: The beginning of the Persian New Year 1394 and the festival of Norooz will be on Friday, March 20, 2015, at 3:45 PM PDT (10:45 PM UTC). Let the countdown begin: 60 days left.

(8) Final thought for the day: "There is no remedy for love but to love more." ~ Henry David Thoreau

2015/01/18 (Sunday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) This is how Photoshop is done: Actor Ellar Coltrane, who portrayed a boy as he (and the actor himself) went from 1st to 12th grade in the movie "Boyhood," **at his current age of 20 and at 11 and 12**.

(2) The world's most beautiful theaters: **Pictorial**

(3) Lover, loving, and loved are one: "**The meaning of love**" is a Rumi poem, whose words (in English) are set to a beautiful video of satellite images of the Earth and traditional Persian music.

(4) Distant planets X and Y may actually exist in the solar system: **These planets**, thought to be larger than Earth, lurk undiscovered far beyond Pluto, according to two astronomers, who, in early 2014, noticed perturbations in some extreme trans-Neptunian objects that are consistent with the existence of such planets. Other explanations for these perturbations may be found in future, but for now, the existence of planets X and Y can't be ruled out.

(5) A digital **mirror that remembers you**, and all the outfits you have tried on, for side-by-side comparisons.

(6) John Boehner uses **12 Taylor Swift GIFs** to express his opposition to President Obama's plan for free community college education: If someone didn't hack the House Speaker's Web site, then one of his staffers must be pulling a prank on him.

(7) The movie "Selma" corrects a major omission: There have been no full-length films devoted to Martin Luther King, only short cameos in other films. And the new film is coming out at an excellent time, when a renewed conversation about race is much needed. One wonders how it is possible to have had biopics about all

sorts of Americans, but not about a significant national figure who merits a federal holiday. The film's director explains: "We were not doing a sainted version of him or an overcorrected, antihero version ... [We set out to portray] a dynamic leader who was at times depressed and let his ego get in control. ... Most Americans don't know Dr. King's conversational voice [having heard only his speeches]. They haven't seen interviews or heard him laugh. They know the 'I Have a Dream' speech and then that he was killed, There's a lot in between." [From: *Time* magazine, issue of January 19, 2015.]

(8) Final thought for the day: "Some people are like photographs: the more you blow them up the fuzzier they get." ~ Anonymous

2015/01/17 (Saturday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Cover a middle strip of this GIF image, and you appear to go faster; cover the right and left, and your speed seems to decrease.



(2) Quote of the day: "We still believe in this nation's future ... It's a story ... I didn't read in a book, or learned in a classroom. I saw it and lived it." ~ Former New York governor Mario Cuomo (1932-2015), in his keynote address at the 1984 Democratic National Convention

(3) Here is a list of **21 well-known actors/actresses** who have never won an Oscar: It seems that the list may shrink by up to 3 names after this year's awards (Julianne Moore, Michael Keaton, and Edward Norton).

(4) These **10 charts** tell the story of the US economy over the past few decades: They show, among other things, how income inequality, regressive taxation, soaring CEO-to-worker income ratio, and absurdly low minimum wage are flatlining the middle class and expanding poverty.

(5) Most cancer is beyond our control: About 65% of cancer cases result from **random genetic mutations** and are thus beyond our control. The faster a cell type divides (notably skin cells), the more likely it is to suffer copying errors. This does not mean, however, that you should stop wearing sunscreen or take up smoking.

(6) Breathtaking aerial photos: A collection of **17 beautiful photos** from around the world.

(7) Israel and Arab states are showing a greater willingness to form alliances: This is in large part due to chaos and heightened instability in the Middle East. Is it possible that something positive will come out of the carnage and barbarity of ISIS/Daesh? "[A] conversation that is occurring across the Arab states ... is to bank on the regional forces of stability to create a security alliance against the extremist threat of both Shi'ite and Sunni militias, even if it means partnering with Israel." [From: *Time* magazine, issue of January 19, 2015.]

(8) The threat of terrorism is overblown: This threat is being pushed on us by the same military-industrial complex that has sold us multiple wars. Here's a good article entitled "We Worry Too Much about Terrorism." And here's a chart of **lifetime odds of death** for selected causes, United States, 2010 (terrorism isn't on the list at all). So, are those advocating a broader war on terror concerned about the odds of dying from terrorism in the US or other Western countries? If so, then pay attention to statistics on the various causes of death, in which terrorism does not even show up. Yes, terrorism is on the rise in the West, but any changes will make it a tiny dot at the bottom of the chart appearing in the chart cited above, alongside dog bites and lightning strikes. If we are concerned about Africa, odds of dying from hunger, curable diseases, or government-sanctioned violence is much greater there. If, on the other hand, our concern is for the Middle East, war between countries (including the two US occupations) have killed many more civilians there than terrorism.

2015/01/16 (Friday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "America's total health care bill for 2014 was \$3 trillion. That's more than the next 10 biggest spenders combined: Japan, Germany, France, China, the U.K., Italy, Canada, Brazil, Spain and Australia. All that extra money produces no better, and in many cases worse, results. ... And all those high tech advances—pacemakers, MRIs, 3-D mammograms—have produced an ironically upside-down health care marketplace. It is the only industry in which technological advances have increased costs instead of lowering them." ~ Steven Brill, writing in *Time* magazine, issue of January 19, 2015

(2) Cybercrime is on the rise: Some 40M Americans have had their personal information stolen by cybercriminals, with financial losses in 2013 estimated to be \$100B. [Source: *Time* magazine, issue of January 19, 2015.]

(3) Iran's national soccer team beats Qatar 1-0 in the Asian cup, to earn its **second victory** in two games on a beautifully executed attack and an even prettier goal by Sardar Azmoun, ensuring its advancement to the quarterfinals round.

(4) Iranian extremist group cheers the Paris terror attacks: Iran's **Ansar-e Hezbollah**, the same group thought to be behind incidents of acid-spraying on women with inadequate hijab, has condoned and celebrated the French terror attacks, calling them just punishment. In a different news story, I was disappointed to hear that

Pope Francis has opined that "You cannot make fun of the faith of others." Please note his choice of words: "cannot," instead of "better not."

(5) Marine artist: Fish creates an amazingly **beautiful pattern** on the sea floor to impress a female.

(6) *Time* magazine's feature on the high cost of healthcare: Steven Brill, who has written a great deal about problems afflicting the US healthcare system, provides insights on how to reduce costs and improve outcomes. The feature's cover headline is: "What I Learned from my \$190,000 Open-Heart Surgery." [Subscriber content]

(7) *Time* magazine's digital archives: Through time.com/vault, you can gain access to a valuable information resource that allows you to browse by year or subject or to search by keywords within defined time intervals.

(8) Oscar nominations announced: "Birdman" and "The Grand Budapest Hotel," with 10 nominations each, and "The Imitation Game" with 9, lead the way. There are 8 best-picture nominees, including the 3 above, plus "American Sniper," "Boyhood," "Selma" (its director and actor were snubbed), "The Theory of Everything," and "Whiplash." Best-actor nominees are Steve Carell, Bradley Cooper, Benedict Cumberbatch, Michael Keaton, and Eddie Redmayne. Best-actress nominees are Marion Cotillard, Felicity Jones, Julianne Moore, Rosamund Pike, and Reese Witherspoon. The directing honorees are Alejandro G. Inarritu, Richard Linklater, Bennett Miller, Wes Anderson, and Morten Tyldum. [[Complete list of nominees](#)]

2015/01/15 (Thursday): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) The hardest climb in the world: Two free-climbers reached the summit of Yosemite's El Capitan after 19 days of climbing. [Image credit: BBC News]

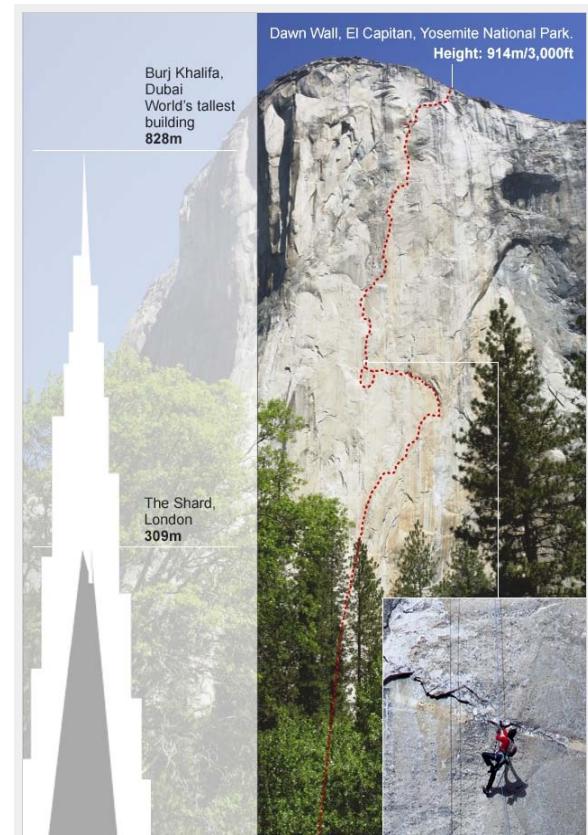
(2) Quote of the day: "Since Obama has achieved all the Republican goals, does he get any credit?" ~ Bill Mahr, referencing Mitt Romney's campaign promise to raise the GDP growth to 5% by 2016, Paul Ryan's plan to reduce unemployment to under 6% by 2016, and New Gingrich's program to get gas prices below \$2.50

(3) The deliberate grounding of car-carrier ship Hoegh Osaka: Occasionally, we read news stories about ships sinking and airplanes crashing due to the inexperience or ineptitude of the captain/pilot. [This story and photos](#) are about smart action by the captain that saved a fully loaded cargo ship from capsizing near the Isle of Wight on January 3, 2015.

(4) What is going on with Viagra ads? Previously, the messages were delivered by handsome, graying men. But the latest ads have a sultry woman sing the praises of the medication, while grooming herself, as if getting ready for a date. There is no man in sight.

(5) Google's modular phone, code named "Project Ara": **Spiral 2 phone** is the improved version of Google's initial idea of building a phone in which modules can be swapped in and out with ease. Some of the existing kinks should be ironed out by the time Spiral 3 rolls around.

(6) Broadband access and ISIS: A video of President Obama talking about his plans for improving Internet access speeds in the US has elicited much negative commentary, the gist of it being that he is wasting his time on trivial things instead of attending to ISIS and other life-threatening problems. I don't see how the two issues are mutually exclusive, so that only one or the other can be handled. First, many of these commentators (the same bunch that criticize President Obama, no matter what he does) equate Internet with entertainment. Yes, we get some entertainment from the Internet, but we also get our news and info about scientific discoveries, self-improvement, travel planning, and healthcare. As I am writing my next graduate-level textbook, I find myself consulting on-line books and technical journals on a regular basis, instead of making daily trips to the campus library, as I did for my first book years ago, only to discover that the library does not hold the book or the particular journal issue that I need. Just as the languishing of our school system in the US has led to erosion of our economic competitiveness, being surpassed by several countries in terms of Internet access ease and speed will dictate our future standing in science and technology. All of these aside, entertainment itself isn't something to ridicule. If someone is struggling financially and taking care of sick relatives, what is wrong with s/he picking a couple of roses and putting them in a vase to enjoy? We won't tell that person that s/he is wasting his or her time on something trivial, would we? Also remember that an open-information society, which is facilitated by better Internet access, is the best long-term antidote to religious extremism that thrives on the



ignorance of the masses to recruit its foot soldiers.

2015/01/14 (Wednesday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) A remarkable 17th-century warship: The Swedish warship Vasa set off on its maiden voyage from Stockholm toward Poland in 1628. It sank, killing some 30 people, after sailing for a bit over 1 km. The ship's 64 valuable bronze cannons were salvaged, but the rest of the ship remained pretty much intact at the bottom of the sea and forgotten, until its recovery in 1961. The ship now sits majestically in Stockholm's Vasa Museum, where it is one of Sweden's most popular tourist attractions.



(2) Iran beats Bahrain 2-0 in a preliminary-round soccer match played in the Asian Cup tournament: The first of the **two goals** is particularly beautiful.

(3) Subzero temperatures turn Michigan's St. Joseph Lighthouse into a **giant icicle**.

(4) UCSB deemed one of the greenest campuses in the US: Based on data from Sierra Club, EPA, and other groups, UCSB has been **ranked 3rd in the US** (1st among public universities) with regard to environmental sustainability efforts.

(5) Persian poetry: The poem "Khoda Nashenas" ("Godless"), composed by Ali-Akbar Saidi Sirjani (1931-1994) at age 28, was **recited by Hassan Khayatbashi** during ceremonies honoring the poet's 80th birthday in 2011. An old poem that has assumed new relevance in today's religious wars.

(6) The 28 missing pages of the 9/11 report: Former US Senator Bob Graham, the lead author of the report, has called for the release of the **redacted pages**, said to contain material that are embarrassing to the Saudis.

(7) Political power transitions in Iran resemble coup d'etats more than elections: In most Western countries, former presidents are considered elder statesmen, whose opinions are sought on important matters of national interest and who tend to speak regularly to enthusiastic audiences. Not one former president of Iran enjoys such a stature, as if they were all removed from power forcefully and sent into exile.

2015/01/13 (Tuesday): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "The movie 'The Theory of Everything' was successful because it combined two things that audiences love: a crippling disease and complicated math." ~ From the introduction to Sunday's Golden Globe Awards ceremony by Tina Fey and Amy Poehler

(2) On blasphemy laws and religious reforms: Farid Zakaria has made a valid point that blasphemy isn't punishable by death according to Quran, but is cause for death in the Old Testament. So, according to Zakaria, killing people (lawfully, as in Saudi Arabia and Iran, or by lawless terrorism) constitutes a misunderstanding of Islam. I beg to differ. A religion is defined more by how its followers act than by what the holy book says. Unless religious and political leaders of the Islamic world denounce such (mis)interpretations, what the scriptures say will remain irrelevant, especially in a country such as Iran, where a vast majority of people have no direct understanding of the Arabic Quran. Reforms implemented in Christianity, and still continuing under the leadership of Pope Francis, are overdue in both Islam and Judaism.

(3) Memories may be transmitted genetically: A **study on mice** suggests that experiences (particularly traumatic or stressful ones) can be transferred from the brain into the genome, thus affecting both the structure and function of the nervous system in the offspring. If confirmed by other independent researchers, this may end up as one of the more significant discoveries of the decade in neuroscience.

(4) If airline food tastes bland, it is likely **not their fault**: "Get on board a plane and cruise to a level of thousands of feet, and the flavour of everything from a pasta dish to a mouthful of wine becomes manipulated in a whole host of ways that we are only beginning to understand."

(5) Why President Obama's free community college education program makes sense: The plan, dubbed "America's College Promise" pursues the goal of expanding free education from high school to the first two years of college, so as to enhance social mobility by allowing a less expensive path into the middle class. Chicago and Tennessee have similar programs in place, which can serve as models. The Republican-controlled congress has already indicated its distaste for the proposal, citing that the federal government should not meddle in such matters and should leave them to the states. All 50 US states have mandatory school attendance laws and offer free education up to 12th grade. So, stretching the free education by two years makes sense for keeping up with the times (mandatory attendance and free education weren't always the law of the land in the US). A byproduct of such a program is a reduction of the burden of student debt, which is currently stifling our economy.

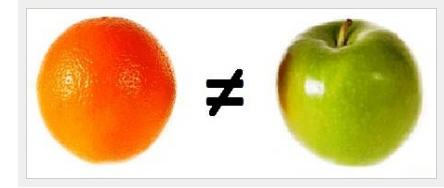
(6) Body language is more important than facial expression: According to **this article** in Newsweek magazine, many people focus on eye contact and facial expression, forgetting that positioning of other body parts, such as

arms and legs, can also sabotage one's message and ruin the chances for collaboration.

2015/01/12 (Monday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Why are we told that we can't compare or add apples to oranges?

We can surely compare an apple to an orange with regard to weight, price, size, calories, vitamin-C content, color, and many other attributes. I can also look at my fridge's fruit compartment and decide that with a total of 11 pieces of fruit (3 apples, 1 pear, 5 oranges, 2 peaches), I do not need to buy fruit on my next shopping trip.



(2) Quote of the day: "Demanding that women should cover themselves to keep men from sinning is like saying that the sun should stop shining to prevent our ice creams from melting." ~ Simin Daneshvar

(3) Elizabeth Gilbert on women's body image problems: The best-selling author writes a beautiful and heartfelt essay on why women should stop judging other women on decisions they make about their bodies and appearance. She asks how liberal woman can stand up for other women's reproductive rights but then criticize them for decisions pertaining to other body parts or clothing. [The essay](#) is long, but definitely worth reading.

(4) Crazy people with guns: The [news headline](#) reads, "Indiana couple arrested after video shows handgun in toddler's mouth." In recent days, we have witnessed other headlines about "accidental" shooting of parents by toddlers and mass killings by terrorists. The gun lobby keeps insisting that guns are not at fault and that crazy people intent on killing will kill by other means, citing baseball bats, knives, and the like. There are two responses to this argument. First, what's wrong with removing or regulating one of the methods of killing? Isn't it better to have 80% as many deaths, say, through violence? They surely can't claim that the same number of people would die if obtaining guns weren't this easy! Studies have shown that even without restricting gun ownership, just reducing the maximum size of magazines will lead to a significant reduction in deaths from violence.

(5) Charice, a young girl with a powerful voice, [performs on stage](#) alongside Celine Dion.

(6) Name that toon: This is the title of a word puzzle from the January-February 2015 issue of *AARP Bulletin*, in which you are asked to return stolen consonants to the names of eight cartoon characters.

_ E _ _ Y _ O O _ ; _ U _ _ _ U _ _ Y ; _ O _ A _ _ _ U _ _ ; _ _ E _ _ _ I _ _ _ O _ E
_ I _ _ _ Y _ O U _ E ; _ O _ _ Y _ I _ ; _ O _ E _ _ A _ _ I _ ; _ O O _ Y _ O O _ _ E _ _ E _

(7) Mirrors of the Mind: "Monkey see, monkey do. When we observe an action, imitating it almost feels like a no-brainer. Though this proverb is well-rooted in the English language, only in the past two decades have researchers been able to show that there may be a neural basis to this 'monkey business.' In other words, imitation is not quite the no-brainer we thought it was—it actually relies on specific components of the brain called mirror neurons." ~ Opening paragraph of a cover feature in the latest issue of UCLA's *Total Wellness* magazine, written by my daughter Sepideh. [[The article](#) appears on pages 32-37 of the fall 2014 issue.]

(8) Final thought for the day: "Prejudice can't survive proximity." ~ Anonymous (I heard this quote on an NPR program, but didn't catch the source)

2015/01/11 (Sunday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "The imbalance of far more women than men at colleges has been a factor in the various sex scandals that have made news in the last couple of years." ~ Anti-feminist Phyllis Schlafly (apparently confusing sexual assaults with scandals and taking the "blame the victim" mentality to the extreme)

(2) Crazy news of the past week: After years of trying to block each and every initiative of the Obama administration, US Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell brazenly takes credit for the improving economy based on the coincidence of the improvements with the Republican takeover of the US Senate.

(3) UC Regents' threat of tuition hikes was a strategic mistake: The University of California Regents had decided several weeks ago to provisionally increase tuition by up to 5% per year for 5 years as a way of signaling to the state that underfunding the University might lead to loss of accessibility and added pressure on families, particularly the middle class. [Governor Jerry Brown](#) has apparently countered by indicating that any increase in tuition might lead to cuts in state funding, putting the UC Regents in a lose-lose situation: they either have to back away from their plan or else answer to angry parents on the loss of state funding.

(4) A Muslim employee saved lives in the Paris kosher market attack: [Lassana Bathily](#) let customers into the store's basement freezer, while he kept lookout.

(5) Indian sitar music, with flamenco vocals: Anoushka Shankar and Raga Flamenco perform [fusion music](#).

(6) Boko Haram kills 2000 in 5 days: That's an average of 400 a day, or 33 times the number of deaths in Paris in one day. Except that few in the West care about the plight of African and other Third-World nations. And there are still people who claim that these killings are the acts of those who have deviated from "true" Islam. I don't always agree with Bill Mahr, but he was dead right when he said, "If there are so many bad apples, then there must be something wrong with the orchard."

- (7) Eight books that every intelligent person should read, and why, according to physicist Neil deGrasse Tyson.
The Bible: Learn that it's easier to be told by others what to think and believe than it is to think for yourself.
The System of the World (Isaac Newton): Learn that the universe is a knowable place.
On the Origin of Species (Charles Darwin): Learn of our kinship with all other life on Earth.
Gulliver's Travels (Jonathan Swift): Learn, among other satirical lessons, that humans are mostly Yahoos.
The Age of Reason (Thomas Paine): Learn how rational thought is the primary source of freedom in the world.
The Wealth of Nations (Adam Smith): Learn that capitalism, or economy of greed, is a force of nature unto itself.
The Art of War (Sun Tzu): Learn that the act of killing fellow humans can be raised to an art.
The Prince (Machiavelli): Learn that people (not) in power will do all they can to acquire/keep it.
- (8) World leaders express solidarity with the cause of freedom in Paris: Notable among the 1.5M marchers was the absence of a high-level representative from the US. Also notable was the presence of representatives from governments that routinely harass and imprison journalists.

2015/01/10 (Saturday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Traffic violations on the UCSB campus: Several years ago, I started a [Web page](#) in which I documented the abuse of UCSB walkways by vehicles of all kinds. Eventually, I gave up, because while campus officials acknowledged the gravity of the problem and its direct effects on the safety of students and staff, they failed to act to stop the abuse. This vehicle on a UCSB lawn, seemingly affiliated with an exercise group, must have gotten there by driving a long distance on walkways (Wednesday 1/7, shortly before noon). And this is just one example of many that I encounter daily.



(2) This lively [music and dance number](#) sounds/looks like Kurdish, but I'm unsure about its country of origin.

(3) Stanley Steamer [ad jingle](#), performed in different musical styles. Quite well done!

(4) The toughest nontechnical interview question: Getting the salary you deserve that also fairly reflects the scope and responsibilities of the position isn't easy. Go in too low, and you'll lose years of potential earnings (the low salary may also affect you in your next job). Demand too much, and you may be passed over quickly. Here are [some hints](#) on how to avoid giving a direct answer, without seeming obnoxious.

(5) The biggest statues in the world. [[Slide show](#)]

(6) Songs by the Eagles: A collection of [13 MP3 files](#), playable on-line.

(7) How language affects the way we think: [Studies have shown](#) that our language and its rules and structures affect our thinking in many different areas. Examples include our ability to save money, keeping our orientation in space, assigning blame, and recognizing gender.

(8) Final thought for the day: "Creativity requires the courage to let go of certainties." ~ Erich Fromm

2015/01/09 (Friday): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) How the unsafe skies over Iraq and Syria have altered the paths of international flights.



(2) Je Suis Ahmed: [The cop executed](#) by a point-blank shot from one of the terrorists after the massacre in Paris was Ahmed Merabet, a Muslim who was assigned to protect the offices of Charlie Hebdo. He died protecting the free-speech rights of those who poked fun at his religion.

(3) New honors for UCSB: Shuji Nakamura, who (along with two Japanese researchers) won the 2014 Nobel Prize in physics, has added US National Academy of Engineering's Draper Prize to his list of honors. In other news, [USA Today](#) has ranked UCSB's Department of Sociology #1 in the country. UC Berkeley and UCLA are also in the top 10 (#2 and #4).

(4) An excellent visualization of how the desktop paradigm has taken over and organized our lives. [[34 years of change in 1 minute](#)]

(5) Ground broken on the first US [bullet train project](#): Governor Jerry Brown and other state officials were present for the ceremony held in Fresno, dubbed "the nation's high-speed rail capital."

(6) A possible game-changer in medicine: After nearly 3 decades, during which no new usable antibiotics were discovered, scientists are on the verge of introducing [25 new varieties](#), one of which may be highly effective, because bacteria are unlikely to develop resistance to it.

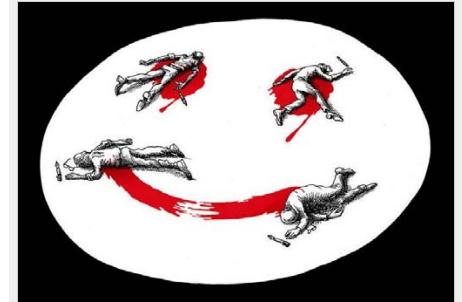
(7) A selection of [songs about freedom](#), in memory of the slain journalists in Paris.

(8) This [video message](#) raises some interesting points about why boys underachieve in school.

(9) Final thought for the day: "If we believe absurdities, we shall commit atrocities." ~ Voltaire

2015/01/08 (Thursday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Iranian cartoonist Mana Neyestani's take on the massacre of cartoonists by Islamic terrorists is depicted in the opposite image. The attack killed 12 at the Paris offices of satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo. News of the incident have been widely circulated over the past two days, so I won't add more details here. What I do want to add is that often such attacks are attributed to rogue Islamic elements who have deviated from "true" Islam. This explanation is, in my view, inadequate in this case. As long as it is legitimate in Islam to kill someone for insulting the religion or its prophet and imams, or even for leaving the religion, incidents like this will happen.



We will take a step toward eliminating these kinds of killings only if imams and countries that consider Islam their official religion announce, unequivocally, that Islam does not sanction killing anyone for an insult, no matter the subject of the insult. In the case of Iran, I know that such an announcement will not be forthcoming, because insulting sacred figures (including the Supreme Leader) is one of the charges used to execute members of the opposition; the other commonly used fictitious charge being drug trafficking.

(2) Quote of the day: "[The Paris] attack also demonstrates again that violent Islam isn't a reaction to poverty or Western policies in the Middle East. It is an ideological challenge to Western civilization and principles, including a free press and religious pluralism." ~ From the *Wall Street Journal* editorial, January 8, 2015

(3) Our shared sense of responsibility: A [short video message](#) from former US congresswoman Gabby Gifford and her husband Mark Kelly, advocating responsible solutions to confront gun violence.

(4) It seems that the Harbin Ice and Snow Festival becomes more impressive each year: Here are [photos](#) from the 2015 edition.

(5) Chicken at the billiards table: Nice job of editing and CGI in this [12-second video!](#)

(6) Stunning 1.5B-pixel image of the Andromeda Galaxy: On [this photo](#), taken by the Hubble Space Telescope, you can zoom in to explore the various parts.

(7) Persons of Iranian origins: I keep reading on Facebook and other on-line sources stories about some "Iranian" having accomplished an important feat or earned a prestigious award. In most cases, these are second-generation Iranian immigrants who were born in the West or were reared and educated here. These are people of Iranian origins, not Iranians. The same goes for those who were driven from Iran by restrictive or intolerant laws and are now successful people in their adopted countries, having to rebuild their careers from scratch in some cases. There is a hidden racism in remarks to the effect that these people are successful because they are Iranian. In fact, the truth is that they are successful, despite having Iranian roots. There is a big difference. A related point is that when we boast that Iranian graduate students do well in prestigious schools such as Stanford and Berkeley (true), we must bear in mind that these are the top students from top Iranian universities who have passed rigorous admissions filters multiple times (in Iran and eventually in a Western university), not typical Iranian students.

2015/01/07 (Wednesday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) School lunches in various countries: If you want to understand causes of the obesity epidemic in the US, look no further than school lunch menus.



(2) Scenes and music from Kurdish villagers in Turkey. [[1-minute video](#)]

(3) Songs by the Beach Boys: A collection of [23 MP3 files](#), playable on-line.

(4) One hundred and one obscure but useful Web sites: Presented in no particular order, [the list](#) includes consolidation tools, entertainment guides, collections of templates/icons, productivity tools, security aids, and more.

(5) On dealing with Facebook friends with no photos or other identifying info: In a recent Facebook post, Parvaneh Aref warns her Facebook friends against accepting add requests from people with fake names and generic or stolen profile photos. She suggests that people with legitimate reasons to remain anonymous should, at the very least, disclose their identities to friends via private messages. The warning is particularly important to people of Iranian origins who may inadvertently let in Iranian regime's cyberspies.

(6) The challenges of being a good-looking, female, blonde engineer at MIT: [This essay](#), by Alice Zelinski, is quite touching and well-argued.

(7) Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Persian Food: Orly Minazad's [delightful essay](#) on her Persian cooking adventures, in an attempt to declare independence from her mother's food, brought home in tupperware.

(8) Final thought for the day: "There is nothing more deceptive than an obvious fact." ~ Arthur Conan Doyle

2015/01/06 (Tuesday): Here are eight items of potential interest.

(1) Artist denied permission to leave Iran: Majid Derakhshani, who leads and performs with the "Mah Banoo" women's musical group in Iran found out at the airport, when trying to board a flight to Dubai, that his passport has been revoked.

(2) Quote of the day: "That's an interesting point. If they are both on the same team, is it a penalty?" ~ One referee to another, in the caption of a *Los Angeles Times* cartoon showing two ice-hockey players throwing punches

(3) One of the oldest time capsules, discovered last December, was opened today: The **cigar-box size capsule** was buried 220 years ago by the American Revolution hero Paul Revere and the then-governor of Massachusetts, Samuel Adams.



(4) There is no point to **this video**: Just having some fun with rubber balls on an escalator.

(5) The Known Universe: **This video**, made by the American Museum of Natural History using visualization software, takes the viewer from the Himalayas, through the atmosphere, and far beyond, all the way to the afterglow of the Big Bang, and then back to Earth.

(6) Family planning in Iran: A comprehensive and insightful [article about family planning in Iran](#) and its uphill battle with conservatives who prefer a population boom, interwoven with the story of Hourieh Shamshiri, a gynecologist involved in the fight for many years.

(7) Enchanting Christmas music: **Daniela Andrade sings** to a puppy.

(8) Final thought for the day: "Everything you can imagine is real." ~ Pablo Picasso

2015/01/05 (Monday): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Stonehenge road tunnel: Because vibrations and emissions from vehicles traveling on nearby roads and parking area have been causing damage to Stonehenge, construction of a tunnel under the site was finally given the green light in 2014, after being considered for nearly two decades. One of the roads near the site will be closed and the other one will be put underground for about 1.5 km on each side of the historic site.



(2) Israel's "Photoshop Law" goes into effect: According to the new law, as of January 1, 2015, any digitally altered image must be clearly labeled as such. This provision is part of a **broader law** that also requires medical certificates for a minimum body mass index (BMI) of 18.5 from those who model in print ads or runway shows.

(3) Crowdfunding for Rain on Request: A US start-up has begun raising funds for developing the use of an ionization technology to **bring rain** to drought-stricken areas.

(4) Don't mind the **silly image**; this is serious news: A bus that runs on gas generated from human waste and food leftovers will start running for the first time in Bristol, UK.

(5) The highest unclimbed mountain in the world: At 7570 m, **Gangkhar Puensum**, located on disputed land between Bhutan and Tibet, is still unconquered, whereas most Himalayan peaks were scaled decades ago.

(6) Persian parody song: Featuring conservative and reformist politicians of Iran, **the song** is titled "Hassan Ey Bi-Vafa" ("Hassan, You Disloyal You").

2015/01/03 (Saturday): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Manifesto for a simple life: "Eat less, move more. Buy less, make more. Stress less, laugh more. Feel blessed, love more. Find a quiet spot every day and ... breathe." ~ Anonymous

(2) Solo piano music: This performance of Beethoven's **Moonlight Sonata** (op 27 #2 mov 3) by Valentina Lisitsa has garnered 8.5M views on YouTube. Enjoy!

(3) This mullah offers advice to women on **how to dress** to sexually excite their husbands.

[Note added on 1/04: When I posted this video clip on Facebook, a friend commented that what the mullah says is actually sane and perhaps helpful to illiterate women with limited knowledge of marital relationships, forcing me to add the following clarification. What is funny about this clip isn't the content but the context. It is one thing for a marriage counselor to give this kind of advice to a woman in private. It is another thing for a cleric affiliated with a regime that demeans women and considers them their husbands' properties (they have to submit to their husbands whenever the husbands feel the urge, according to Islamic law, and it is permissible for husbands to lie to them to keep them in check; see this **2-minute video** for the second claim) to make public pronouncements on how women should sexually arouse their husbands.]

(4) Iran's Ebrat Museum: The Islamic Republic has built a [memorial wall](#) on which names of victims of Shah's torture cells are engraved. Do the Islamic torturers and rapists of prisoners have no shame? Yes, the intelligence service of Shah did torture prisoners, but his crimes are dwarfed by what has been happening in Iran over the past 35 years.

(5) A Christian and a Muslim debate on whether ISIS is Islamic: Unfortunately for Muslims, the person arguing their side was incompetent, resorting to prophecies and conspiracy theories (including claims that both Osama bin Laden and Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi are Jews), rather than base his arguments on facts. [[94-minute video](#)]

(6) A very important JFK speech: If you can spare 20 minutes, watch JFK's "[Secret Societies](#)" speech, delivered on April 27, 1961. The video also provides the full text of the speech. Here are five quotes I have selected from this speech.

"We decided long ago that the dangers of excessive and unwarranted concealment of pertinent facts far outweighed the dangers which are cited to justify it."

"[T]here is little value in insuring the survival of our nation if our traditions do not survive with it."

"No president should fear public scrutiny of his program. For from that scrutiny comes understanding; and from that understanding comes support or opposition. And both are necessary."

"Without debate, without criticism, no administration and no country can succeed—and no republic can survive."

"[Informing and educating the public by the press] means greater coverage and analysis of international news—for it is no longer far away and foreign but close at hand and local."

(7) Final thought for the day: "Be as you wish to seem." ~ Socrates

2015/01/01 (Thursday): Old blog entries for 2005-2014 have been archived and a new Blog & Books page begins today with seven items of potential interest.

(1) Happy New Year to all readers of this blog! As we wish for a more peaceful and gentler world in 2015, let us remember that the source of our happiness is inside us and that we can make our world brighter by giving more and expecting less. Instead of going for big resolutions that are difficult to keep, I resolve to take small steps to improve myself and my surroundings. May you be empowered to take steps to reach your dreams in 2015!



(2) Quote of the day: "An error does not become a mistake until you refuse to correct it." ~ Orlando Aloysius Battista [This quote is sometimes incorrectly attributed to JFK, who used it in his "Secret Societies" speech.]

(3) Cheek to Cheek: Full album of duets by Tony Bennett and Lady Gaga. The track list is provided under the YouTube album post. [[60-minute audio file](#)]

(4) The world remembers: Holocaust memorials around the globe. [[60 slides](#)]

(5) Made in Britain: A beautifully assembled collection of [time-lapse videos](#) (mostly of nature) by the British artist Chad Gordon Higgins.

(6) Kurdish music: "Shirin Jan" ("Shirin, My Love"), performed by Shahab Jazayeri. [The audio](#) is presented over images of Bisotun, an important archeological site near Kermanshah, and comes with the Kurdish lyrics and their Persian translation.

(7) Piano [variations on Carmen](#): Performed by Shirin (aka ahang1001).