**2005**

**200501**

I remember meeting him one evening with his pushcart. I had managed to sell all my papers and was coming home in the snow. It was that strange hour in downtown New York when the workers were pouring homeward in the twilight. I marched among thousands of tired men and women whom the factory whistles had unyoked. They flowed in rivers through the clothing factory districts, then down along the avenues to the East Side.

I met my father near Cooper Union. I recognized him, a hunched, frozen figure in an old overcoat standing by a banana cart. He looked so lonely, the tears came to my eyes. Then he saw me, and his face lit with his sad, beautiful smile-Charlie Chaplin's smile.

“Arch, it's Mikey,” he said. “So you have sold your papers! Come and eat a banana.”

He offered me one. I refused it. I felt it crucial that my father sell his bananas, not give them away. He thought I was shy, and coaxed and joked with me, and made me eat the banana. It smelled of wet straw and snow.

“You haven’t sold many bananas today, pop,” I said anxiously. He shrugged his shoulders.

“What can I do? No one seems to want them.”

It was true. The work crowds pushed home morosely over the pavements. The rusty sky darkened over New York building, the tall street lamps were lit, innumerable trucks, street cars and elevated trains clattered by. Nobody and nothing in the great city stopped for my father’s bananas.

“I ought to yell,” said my father dolefully. “I ought to make a big noise like other peddlers, but it makes my throat sore. Anyway, I'm ashamed of yelling, it makes me feel like a fool.”

I had eaten one of his bananas. My sick conscience told me that I ought to pay for it somehow. I must remain here and help my father.

“I'll yell for you, pop,” I volunteered.

“Arch, no,” he said, “go home; you have worked enough today. Just tell momma I’ll be late.”

But I yelled and yelled. My father, standing by, spoke occasional words of praise, and said I was a wonderful yeller. Nobody else paid attention. The workers drifted past us wearily, endlessly; a defeated army wrapped in dreams of home. Elevated trains crashed; the Cooper Union clock burned above us; the sky grew black, the wind poured, the slush burned through our shoes. There were thousands of strange, silent figures pouring over the sidewalks in snow. None of them stopped to buy bananas. I yelled and yelled, nobody listened.

My father tried to stop me at last. “Nu,” he said smiling to console me. “That was wonderful.” yelling Mikey.

“But it’s plain we are unlucky today! Let’s go home.”

I was frantic, and almost in tears. I insisted on keeping up my desperate yells. But at last my father persuaded me to leave with him.

**200502**

When former President Ronald Reagan fell and broke his hip two weeks ago, he joined a group of more than 350,000 elderly Americans who fracture their hips each year. At 89 and suffering from advanced Alzheimer’s disease, Reagan is in one of the highest-risk groups for this type of accident. The incidence of hip fractures not only increases after age 50 but doubles every five to six years as the risk of falling increases. Slipping and tumbling are not the only causes of hip fractures; weakened bones sometimes break spontaneously. But falling is the major cause, representing 90% of all hip fractures.

These injuries are not to be taken lightly. According to the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons, only 25% of those who suffer hip fractures ever fully recover; as many as 20% will die within 12 months. Even when patients do recover, nearly half will need a cane or a walker to get around.

When it comes to hip fractures, the most dangerous place for elderly Americans, it turns out, is their homes; nearly 60% of these dangerous spills will occur in ore around the patient’s domicile. This isn't all bad news, however, because a few modifications could prevent a lot of accidents.

The first thing to do is to get rid of those throw rugs that line hallways and entrances. They often fold over or bunch up, turning them into booby traps for anyone shuffling down the hall.

Entering and leaving the house is a particularly high-risk activity, which is why some experts suggest removing any doorsills higher than 1/2 in. if the steps are bare wood, you can increase traction by applying non-slip treads.

Because many seniors suffer from poor balance (whether from neurological deficits or from the inner-ear problems that increase naturally with aging), it also helps to install grab bars and handrails in bathrooms and along hallways.

The bedroom is another major hazard area that can be made much safer with a few adjustments. Avoid stain sheets and comforters, and opt for non-slip material like wool or cotton. Easy access to devices is important, so place a lamp, telephone and flashlight near the bed within arm's reach. Make sure the pathway between the bedroom and bathroom is completely clear, and install a night-light along the route for those emergency late-night trips.

It’s a good idea to rearrange the furniture throughout the house, so that the paths between rooms are free of obstructions. Also, make sure telephone and appliance cords aren’t strung across common walkways, where they can be tripped over.

In addition to these physical precautions, there are the health precautions every aging body should take. Physical and eye examinations, with special attention to cardiac and blood-pressure problems, should be performed annually to rule out serious medical conditions. Blood pressure that's too low or an irregular heartbeat can put you at risk for fainting and falling. Don’t forget to take calcium and vitamin D, two critical factors in developing strong bones. Finally, enrolling in an exercise programme at your local gym can improve agility, strength, balance and coordination - all important skills that can keep you on your feet and off the floor.

**200503**

In his classic novel, “The Pioneers”, James Fenimore Cooper has his hero, a land developer, take his cousin on a tour of the city he is building. He describes the broad streets, rows of houses, a teeming metropolis. But his cousin looks around bewildered. All she sees is a forest. “Where are the beauties and improvements which you were to show me?” she asks. He’s astonished she can’t see them. “Where! Everywhere,” he replies. For though they are not yet built on earth, he has built them in his mind, and they as concrete to him as if they were already constructed and finished.

Cooper was illustrating a distinctly American trait, future-mindedness: the ability to see the present from the vantage point of the future; the freedom to feel unencumbered by the past and more emotionally attached to things to come. As Albert Einstein once said, “Life for the American is always becoming, never being.”

In 2012, America will still be the place where the future happens first, for that is the nation’s oldest tradition. The early Puritans lived in almost Stone Age conditions, but they were inspired by vision of future glories, God’s kingdom on earth. The early pioneers would sometimes travel past perfectly good farmland, because they were convinced that even more amazing land could be found over the next ridge. The Founding Fathers took 13 scraggly Colonies and believed they were creating a new nation on earth. The railroad speculators envisioned magnificent fortunes built on bands of iron. It’s now fashionable to ridicule the visions of dot–com entrepreneurs of the 1990s, but they had inherited the urge to leap for the horizon. “The Future is endowed with such a life, that it lives to us even in anticipation,” Herman Melville wrote. “The Future is the Bible of the Free.”

This future–mindedness explains many modern features of American life. It explains workaholism: the average American works 350 hours a year more than the average European. Americans move more, in search of that brighter tomorrow, than people in other lands. They also, sadly, divorce more, for the same reason. Americans adopt new technologies such as online shopping and credit cards much more quickly than people in other countries. Forty-five percent of world Internet use takes place in the United States. Even today, after the bursting on the stock-market bubble, American venture-capital firms which are in the business of betting on the future–dwarf the firms from all other nations.

Future-mindedness contributes to the disorder in American life, the obliviousness to history, the high rates of family breakdown, the frenzied waste of natural recourses. It also leads to incredible innovations. According to the Yale historian Paul Kennedy, 75 percent of the Nobel laureates in economics and the sciences over recent decades have lived or worked in the United States. The country remains a magnet for the future-minded from other nations. One in 12 Americans has enjoyed the thrill and challenge of starting his own business. A study published in the Journal of International Business Studies in 2000 showed that innovative people are spread pretty evenly throughout the globe, but Americans are most comfortable with risk. Entrepreneurs in the US are more likely to believe that they possess the ability to shape their own future than people in, say, Britain, Australia or Singapore.

If the 1990s were a great decade of future-mindedness, we are now in the midst of a season of experience. It seems cooler to be skeptical, to pooh–pooh all those IPO suckers who lost their money betting on the telecom future. But the world is not becoming more French. By 2012, this period of chastisement will likely have run its course, and future-mindedness will be back in vogue, for better or worse.

We don’t know exactly what the next future-minded frenzy will look like. We do know where it will take place: the American suburb. In 1979, three quarters of American office space were located in central cities. The new companies, research centers and entrepreneurs are flocking to these low buildings near airports, highways and the Wal-Mart malls, and they are creating a new kind of suburban life. There are entirely new metropolises rising–boom suburbs like Mesa, Arizona, that already have more people than Minneapolis or St. Louis. We are now approaching a moment in which the majority of American office space, and the hub of American entrepreneurship, will be found in quiet office parks in places like Rockville, Maryland, and in the sprawling suburbosphere around Atlanta.

We also know that future-mindedness itself will become the object of greater study. We are discovering that there are many things that human beings do easily that computers can do only with great difficulty, if at all. Cognitive scientists are now trying to decode the human imagination, to understand how the brain visualizes, dreams and creates. And we know, too, that where there is future-mindedness there is hope.

**200504**

“In every known human society the male's needs for achievement can be recognized... In a great number of human societies men’s sureness of their sex role is tied up with their right, or ability, to practice some activity that women are not allowed to practice. Their maleness in fact has to be underwritten by preventing women from entering some field or performing some feat.”

This is the conclusion of the anthropologist Margaret Mead about the way in which the roles of men and women in society should be distinguished.

If talk and print are considered it would seem that the formal emancipation of women is far from complete. There is a flow of publications about the continuing domestic bondage of women and about the complicated system of defences which men have thrown up around their hitherto accepted advantages, taking sometimes the obvious form of exclusion from types of occupation and sociable groupings, and sometimes the more subtle form of automatic doubt of the seriousness of women’s pretensions to the level of intellect and resolution that men, it is supposed, bring to the business of running the world.

There are a good many objective pieces of evidence for the erosion of men’s status. In the first place, there is the widespread postwar phenomenon of the woman Prime Minister, in India, Sri Lanka and Israel.

Secondly, there is the very large increase in the number of women who work, especially married women and mothers of children. More diffusely there are the increasingly numerous convergences between male and female behaviour: the approximation to identical styles in dress and coiffure, the sharing of domestic tasks, and the admission of women to all sorts of hitherto exclusively male leisure-time activities.

Everyone carries round with him a fairly definite idea of the primitive or natural conditions of human life. It is acquired more by the study of humorous cartoons than of archaelology, but that does not matter since it is not significant as theory but only as an expression of inwardly felt expectations of people’s sense of what is fundamentally proper in the differentiation between the roles of the two sexes. In this rudimentary natural society men go out to hunt and fish and to fight off the tribe next door while women keep the fire going. Amorous initiative is firmly reserved to the man, who sets about courtship with a club.

**2006**

**200601**

The University in transformation, edited by Australian futurists Sohail Inayatullah and Jennifer Gidley, presents some 20 highly varied outlooks on tomorrow’s universities by writers representing both Western and non-Western perspectives. Their essays raise a broad range of issues, questioning nearly every key assumption we have about higher education today.

The most widely discussed alternative to the traditional campus is the Internet University. A voluntary community to scholars/teachers physically scattered throughout a country or around the world but all linked in cyberspace. A computerized university could have many advantages, such as easy scheduling, efficient delivery of lectures to thousands or even millions of students at once, and ready access for students everywhere to the resources of all the world’s great libraries.

Yet the Internet University poses dangers, too. For example, a line of franchised courseware, produced by a few superstar teachers, marketed under the brand name of a famous institution, and heavily advertised, might eventually come to dominate the global education market, warns sociology professor Peter Manicas of the University of Hawaii at Manoa. Besides enforcing a rigidly standardized curriculum, such a “college education in a box” could undersell the offerings of many traditional brick and mortar institutions, effectively driving then out of business and throwing thousands of career academics out of work, note Australian communications professors David Rooney and Greg Hearn.

On the other hand, while global connectivity seems highly likely to play some significant role in future higher education, that does not mean greater uniformity in course content-or other dangers-will necessarily follow. Counter-movements are also at work.

Many in academia, including scholars contributing to this volume, are questioning the fundamental mission of university education. What if, for instance, instead of receiving primarily technical training and building their individual careers, university students and professors could focus their learning and research efforts on existing problems in their local communities and the world. Feminist scholar Ivana Milojevic dares to dream what a university might become “if we believed that child-care workers and teachers in early childhood education should be one of the highest (rather than lowest) paid professionals?”

Co-editor Jennifer Gidley shows how tomorrow’s university faculty, instead of giving lectures and conducting independent research, may take on three new roles. Some would act as brokers, assembling customized degree-credit programmes for individual students by mixing and matching the best course offerings available from institutions all around the world. A second group, mentors, would function much like today’s faculty advisers, but are likely to be working with many more students outside their own academic specialty. This would require them to constantly be learning from their students as well as instructing them.

A third new role for faculty, and in Gidley’s view the most challenging and rewarding of all, would be as meaning-makers: charismatic sages and practitioners leading groups of students/colleagues in collaborative efforts to find spiritual as well as rational and technological solutions to specific real-world problems. Moreover, there seems little reason to suppose that any one form of university must necessarily drive out all other options. Students may be “enrolled” in courses offered at virtual campuses on the Internet, between or even during-sessions at a real-world problem-focused institution.

As co-editor Sohail Inayatullah points out in his introduction, no future is inevitable, and the very act of imagining and thinking through alternative possibilities can directly affect how thoughtfully, creatively and urgently even a dominant technology is adapted and applied. Even in academia, the future belongs to those who care enough to work their visions into practical, sustainable realities.

200602

Every street had a story, every building a memory, Those blessed with wonderful childhoods can drive the streets of their hometowns and happily roll back the years. The rest are pulled home by duty and leave as soon as possible. After Ray Atlee had been in Clanton (his hometown) for fifteen minutes he was anxious to get out. The town had changed, but then it hadn’t. On the highways leading in, the cheap metal buildings and mobile homes were gathering as tightly as possible next to the roads for maximum visibility. This town had no zoning whatsoever. A landowner could build anything with no permit, no inspection, no notice to adjoining landowners. nothing. Only hog farms and nuclear reactors required approvals and paperwork. The result was a slash-and-build clutter that got uglier by the year.

But in the older sections, nearer the square, the town had not changed at all The long shaded streets were as clean and neat as when Kay roamed them on his bike. Most of the houses were still owned by people he knew, or if those folks had passed on the new owners kept the lawns clipped and the shutters painted. Only a few were being neglected. A handful had been abandoned.

This deep in Bible country, it was still an unwritten rule in the town that little was done on Sundays except go to church, sit on porches, visit neighbours, rest and relax the way God intended.

It was cloudy, quite cool for May, and as he toured his old turf, killing time until the appointed hour for the family meeting, he tried to dwell on the good memories from Clanton. There was Dizzy Dean Park where he had played little League for the Pirates, and (here was the public pool he'd swum in every summer except 1969 when the city closed it rather than admit black children. There were the churches-Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian-facing each other at the intersection of Second and Elm like wary sentries, their steeples competing for height. They were empty now, but in an hour or so the more faithful would gather for evening services.

The square was as lifeless as the streets leading to it. With eight thousand people, Clanton was just large enough to have attracted the discount stores that had wiped out so many small towns. But here the people had been faithful to their downtown merchants, and there wasn’t single empty or boarded-up building around the square-no small miracle. The retail shops were mixed in with the banks and law offices and cafes, all closed for the Sabbath.

He inched through the cemetery and surveyed the Atlee section in the old part, where the tombstones were grander. Some of his ancestors had built monuments for their dead. Ray had always assumed that the family money he’d never seen must have been buried in those graves. He parked and walked to his mother’s grave, something he hadn’t done in years. She was buried among the Atlees, at the far edge of the family plot because she had barely belonged.

Soon, in less than an hour, he would be sitting in his father’s study, sipping bad instant tea and receiving instructions on exactly how his father would be laid to rest. Many orders were about to be give, many decrees and directions, because his father (who used to be a judge) was a great man and cared deeply about how he was to be remembered.

Moving again, Ray passed the water tower he’d climbed twice, the second time with the police waiting below. He grimaced at his old high school, a place he’d never visited since he’d left it. Behind it was the football field where his brother Forrest had romped over opponents and almost became famous before getting bounced off the team.

It was twenty minutes before five, Sunday, May 7. Time for the family meeting.

**200603**

Campaigning on the Indian frontier is an experience by itself. Neither the landscape nor the people find their counterparts in any other portion of the globe. Valley walls rise steeply five or six thousand feet on every side. The columns crawl through a maze of giant corridors down which fierce snow-fed torrents foam under skies of brass. Amid these scenes of savage brilliancy there dwells a race whose qualities seem to harmonize with their environment. Except at harvest-time, when self-preservation requires a temporary truce, the Pathan tribes are always engaged in private or public war. Every man is a warrior, a politician and a theologian. Every large house is a real feudal fortress made, it is true, only of sun-baked clay, but with battlements, turrets, loopholes, drawbridges, etc. complete. Every village has its defence. Every family cultivates its vendetta; every clan, its feud. The numerous tribes and combinations of tribes all have their accounts to settle with one another. Nothing is ever forgotten, and very few debts are left unpaid. For the purposes of social life, in addition to the convention about harvest-time, a most elaborate code of honour has been established and is on the whole faithfully observed. A man who knew it and observed it faultlessly might pass unarmed from one end of the frontier to another. The slightest technical slip would, however, be fatal. The life of the Pathan is thus full of interest; and his valleys, nourished alike by endless sunshine and abundant water, are fertile enough to yield with little labour the modest material requirements of a sparse population.

Into this happy world the nineteenth century brought two new facts: the rifle and the British Government. The first was an enormous luxury and blessing; the second, an unmitigated nuisance. The convenience of the rifle was nowhere more appreciated than in the Indian highlands. A weapon which would kill with accuracy at fifteen hundred yards opened a whole new vista of delights to every family or clan which could acquire it. One could actually remain in one’s own house and fire at one’s neighbour nearly a mile away. One could lie in wait on some high crag, and at hitherto unheard-of ranges hit a horseman far below. Even villages could fire at each other without the trouble of going far from home. Fabulous prices were therefore offered for these glorious products of science. Rifle-thieves scoured all India to reinforce the efforts of the honest smuggler. A steady flow of the coveted weapons spread its genial influence throughout the frontier, and the respect which the Pathan tribesmen entertained for Christian civilization was vastly enhanced.

The action of the British Government on the other hand was entirely unsatisfactory. The great organizing, advancing, absorbing power to the southward seemed to be little better than a monstrous spoil-sport. If the Pathan made forays into the plains, not only were they driven back (which after all was no more than fair), but a whole series of subsequent interferences took place, followed at intervals by expeditions which toiled laboriously through the valleys, scolding the tribesmen and exacting fines for any damage which they had done. No one would have minded these expeditions if they had simply come, had a fight and then gone away again. In many cases this was their practice under what was called the “butcher and bolt policy” to which the Government of India long adhered. But towards the end of the nineteenth century these intruders began to make roads through many of the valleys, and in particular the great road to Chitral. They sought to ensure the safety of these roads by threats, by forts and by subsidies. There was no objection to the last method so far as it went. But the whole of this tendency to road-making was regarded by the Pathans with profound distaste. All along the road people were expected to keep quiet, not to shoot one another, and above all not to shoot at travellers along the road. It was too much to ask, and a whole series of quarrels took their origin from this source.

**200604**

“Museum” is a slippery word. It first meant (in Greek) anything consecrated to the Muses: a hill, a shrine, a garden, a festival or even a textbook. Both Plato’s Academy and Aristotle’s Lyceum had a mouseion, a muses’ shrine. Although the Greeks already collected detached works of art, many temples notably that of Hera at Olympia (before which the Olympic flame is still lit)-had collections of objects, some of which were works of art by well-known masters, while paintings and sculptures in the Alexandrian Museum were incidental to its main purpose.

The Romans also collected and exhibited art from disbanded temples, as well as mineral specimens, exotic plants, animals; and they plundered sculptures and paintings (mostly Greek) for exhibition. Meanwhile, the Greek word had slipped into Latin by transliteration (though not to signify picture galleries, which were called pinacothecae) and museum still more or less meant “Muses’ shrine”.

The inspirational collections of precious and semi-precious objects were kept in larger churches and monasteries-which focused on the gold-enshrined, bejewelled relics of saints and martyrs. Princes, and later merchants, had similar collections, which became the deposits of natural curiosities: large lumps of amber or coral, irregular pearls, unicorn horns, ostrich eggs, fossil bones and so on. They also included coins and gems-often antique engraved ones-as well as, increasingly, paintings and sculptures. As they multiplied and expanded, to supplement them, the skill of the fakers grew increasingly refined.

At the same time, visitors could admire the very grandest paintings and sculptures in the churches, palaces and castles; they were not “collected” either, but “site-specific”, and were considered an integral part both of the fabric of the buildings and of the way of life which went on inside them-and most of the buildings were public ones. However, during the revival of antiquity in the fifteenth century, fragments of antique sculpture were given higher status than the work of any contemporary, so that displays of antiquities would inspire artists to imitation, or even better, to emulation; and so could be considered Muses’ shrines in the former sense. The Medici garden near San Marco in Florence, the Belvedere and the Capitol in Rome were the most famous of such early “inspirational” collections. Soon they multiplied, and, gradually, exemplary “modern” works were.

In the seventeenth century, scientific and prestige collecting became so widespread that three or four collectors independently published directories to museums all over the known world. But it was the age of revolutions and industry which produced the next sharp shift in the way the institution was perceived: the fury against royal and church monuments prompted antiquarians to shelter them in asylum-galleries, of which the Musee des Monuments Francais was the most famous. Then, in the first half of the nineteenth century, museum funding took off, allied to the rise of new wealth: London acquired the National Gallery and the British Museum, the Louvre was organized, the Museum-Insel was begun in Berlin, and the Munich galleries were built. In Vienna, the huge Kunsthistorisches and Naturhistorisches Museums took over much of the imperial treasure. Meanwhile, the decline of craftsmanship (and of public taste with it) inspired the creation of “improving” collections. The Victoria and Albert Museum in London was the most famous, as well as perhaps the largest of them.

**2007**

**200701**

The Welsh language has always been the ultimate marker of Welsh identity, but a generation ago it looked as if Welsh would go the way of Manx. Once widely spoken on the isle of Man but now extinct. Government financing and central planning, however, have helped reverse the decline of Welsh. Road signs and official public documents are written in both Welsh and English, and schoolchildren are required to learn both languages. Welsh is now one of the most successful of Europe’s regional languages, spoken by more than a half-million of the country’s three million people.

The revival of the language, particularly among young people, is part of a resurgence of national identity sweeping through this small, proud nation. Last month Wales marked the second anniversary of the opening of the National Assembly, the first parliament to be convened here since 1404. The idea behind devolution was to restore the balance within the union of nations making up the United Kingdom. With most of the people and wealth, England has always had bragging rights. The partial transfer of legislative powers from Westminster, implemented by Tony Blair, was designed to give the other members of the club-Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales-a bigger say and to counter centrifugal forces that seemed to threaten the very idea of the union.

The Welsh showed little enthusiasm for devolution. Whereas the Scots voted overwhelmingly for a parliament, the vote for a Welsh assembly scraped through by less than one percent on a turnout of less than 25 percent. Its powers were proportionately limited. The Assembly can decide how money from Westminster or the European Union is spent. It cannot, unlike its counterpart in Edinburgh, enact laws. But now that it is here, the Welsh are growing to like their Assembly. Many people would like it to have more powers. Its importance as figurehead will grow with the opening in 2003, of a new debating chamber, one of many new buildings that are transforming Cardiff from a decaying seaport into a Baltimore-style waterfront city. Meanwhile a grant of nearly two million dollars from the European Union will tackle poverty. Wales is one of the poorest regions in Western Europe-only Spain, Portugal, and Greece have a lower standard of living.

Newspapers and magazines are filled with stories about great Welsh men and women, boosting self-esteem. To familiar faces such as Dylan Thomas and Richard Burton have been added new icons such as Catherine Zeta-Jones, the movie star, and Bryn Terfel, the opera singer. Indigenous foods like salt marsh lamb are in vogue. And Wales now boasts a national airline. Awyr Cymru. Cymru, which means “land of compatriots,” is the Welsh name for Wales. The red dragon, the nation’s symbol since the time of King Arthur, is everywhere-on T-shirts, rugby jerseys and even cell phone covers.

“Until very recent times most Welsh people had this feeling of being second-class citizens,” said Dyfan Jones, an 18-year-old student. It was a warm summer night, and I was sitting on the grass with a group of young people in Llanelli, an industrial town in the south, outside the rock music venue of the National Eisteddfod, Wales’s annual cultural festival. The disused factory in front of us echoed to the sounds of new Welsh bands. “There was almost a genetic tendency for lack of confidence,” Dyfan continued. Equally comfortable in his Welshness as in his membership in the English-speaking, global youth culture and the new federal Europe, Dyfan, like the rest of his generation, is growing up with a sense of possibility unimaginable ten years ago. “We used to think. We can’t do anything, we’re only Welsh. Now I think that’s changing.”

**200702**

Getting to the heart of Kuwaiti democracy seems hilariously easy. Armed only with a dog-eared NEWSWEEK ID, I ambled through the gates of the National Assembly last week. Unscanned, unsearched, my satchel could easily have held the odd grenade or an anthrax-stuffed lunchbox. The only person who stopped me was a guard who grinned and invited me to take a swig of orange juice from his plastic bottle.

Were I a Kuwaiti woman wielding a ballot, I would have been a clearer and more present danger. That very day Parliament blocked a bill giving women the vote; 29 M. P. s voted in favour and 29 against, with two abstentions. Unable to decide whether the bill had passed or not, the government scheduled another vote in two weeks-too late for women to register for June’s municipal elections. The next such elections aren’t until 2009. Inside the elegant, marbled Parliament itself, a sea of mustachioed men in white robes sat in green seats, debating furiously. The ruling emir has pushed for women’s political rights for years. Ironically, the democratically elected legislature has thwarted him. Traditionalists and tribal leaders are opposed. Liberals fret, too, that Islamists will let their multiple wives vote, swelling conservative ranks. “When I came to Parliament today, people who voted yes didn't even shake hands with me,” said one Shia clerc. “Why can't we respect each other and work together?”

Why not indeed? By Gulf standards, Kuwait is a democratic superstar. Its citizens enjoy free speech (as long as they don't insult their emir, naturally) and boast a Parliament that can actually pass laws. Unlike their Saudi sisters, Kuwaiti women drive, work and travel freely. They run multibillion-dollar businesses and serve as ambassadors. Their academic success is such that colleges have actually lowered the grades required for make students to get into medical and engineering courses. Even then, 70 percent of university students are females.

In Kuwait, the Western obsession with the higab finds its equivalent. At a fancy party for NEWSWEEK’s Arabic edition, some Kuwaiti women wore them. Others opted for tight, spangled, sheer little numbers in peacock blue or parrot orange. For the party’s entertainment, Nancy Ajram, the Arab world’s answer to Britney Spears, sang passionate songs of love in a white mini-dress. She couldn’t dance for us, alas, since shaking one’s body onstage is illegal in Kuwait. That didn’t stop whole tables of men from raising their camera-enabled mobile phones and clicking her picture. You’d think not being able to vote or dance in public would anger Kuwait’s younger generation of women. To find out, I headed to the malls-Kuwait’s archipelago of civic freedom. Eager to duck

Strict parents and the social taboos of dating in public. young Kuwaitis have taken to cafes, beaming flirtatious infrared e-mails to one another on their cell photos. At Starbucks in the glittering Al Sharq Mall, I found only tables of men, puffing cigarettes and grumbling about the service. At Pizza Hut, I thought I'd got an answer after encountering a young woman who looked every inch the modern suffragette drainpipe jeans, strappy sliver high-heeled sandals and a higab studded with purple rhinestones. But, no, Miriam Al-Enizi, 20, studying business administration at Kuwait University, doesn’t think women need the vote. “Men are better at politics than women,” she explained, adding that women in Kuwait already have everything they need. Welcome to democracy, Kuwait style.

**200703**

Richard, King of England from 1189 to 1199, with all his characteristic virtues and faults cast in a heroic mould, is one of the most fascinating medieval figures. He has been described as the creature and embodiment of the age of chivalry, In those days the lion was much admired in heraldry, and more than one king sought to link himself with its repute. When Richard’s contemporaries called him “Coeur de Lion” (The Lion heart), they paid a lasting compliment to the king of beasts. Little did the English people owe him for his services, and heavily did they pay for his adventures. He was in England only twice for a few short months in his ten years’ reign; yet his memory has always English hearts, and seems to present throughout the centuries the pattern of the fighting man. In all deeds of prowess as well as in large schemes of war Richard shone. He was tall and delicately shaped strong in nerve and sinew, and most dexterous in arms. He rejoiced in personal combat, and regarded his opponents without malice as necessary agents in his fame He loved war, not so much for the sake of glory or political ends, but as other men love science or poetry, for the excitement of the struggle and the glow of victory. By this his whole temperament was toned; and united with the highest qualities of the military commander, love of war called forth all the powers of his mind and body.

Although a man of blood and violence, Richard was too impetuous to be either treacherous on habitually cruel. He was as ready to forgive as he was hasty to offend; he was open-handed and munificent to profusion; in war circumspect in design and skilful in execution; in political a child, lacking in subtlety and experience. His political alliances were formed upon his likes and dislikes; his political schemes had neither unity nor clearness of purpose. The advantages gained for him by military geoids were flung away through diplomatic ineptitude. When, on the journey to the East, Messina in Sicily was won by his arms he was easily persuaded to share with his polished, faithless ally, Philip Augustus, fruits of a victory which more wisely used might have foiled the French King’s artful schemes. The rich and tenable acquisition of Cyprus was cast away even more easily than it was won. His life was one magnificent parade, which, when ended, left only an empty plain.

In 1199, when the difficulties of raising revenue for the endless war were at their height, good news was brought to King Richard. It was said there had been dug up near the castle of Chaluz, on the lands of one of his French vassals, a treasure of wonderful quality; a group of golden images of an emperor, his wife, sons and daughters, seated round a table, also of gold, had been unearthed. The King claimed this treasure as lord paramount. The lord of Chaluz resisted the demand, and the King laid siege to his small, weak castle. On the third day, as he rode daringly, near the wall. confident in his hard-tried luck, a bolt from a crossbow struck him in the left shoulder by the neck. The wound, already deep, was aggravated by the necessary cutting out of the arrow-head. Gangrene set in, and Coeur de Lion knew that he must pay a soldier’s debt. He prepared for death with fortitude and calm, and in accordance with the principles he had followed. He arranged his affairs, he divided his personal belongings among his friends or bequeathed them to charity. He declared John to be his heir, and made all present swear fealty to him. He ordered the archer who had shot the fatal bolt, and who was now a prisoner, to be brought before him. He pardoned him, and made him a gift of money. For seven years he had not confessed for fear of being compelled to be reconciled to Philip, but now he received the offices of the Church with sincere and exemplary piety, and died in the forty-second year of his age on April 6, 1199, worthy, by the consent of all men, to sit with King Arthur and Roland and other heroes of martial romance at some Eternal round Table, which we trust the Creator of the Universe in His comprehension will not have forgotten to provide.

The archer was flayed alive.

**200704**

The miserable fate of Enron’s employees will be a landmark in business history, one of those awful events that everyone agrees must never be allowed to happen again. This urge is understandable and noble: thousands have lost virtually all their retirement savings with the demise of Enron stock. But making sure it never happens again may not be possible, because the sudden impoverishment of those Enron workers represents something even larger than it seems. It’s the latest turn in the unwinding of one of the most audacious promise of the 20th century.

The promise was assured economic security-even comfort-for essentially everyone in the developed world. With the explosion of wealth, that began in the 19th century it became possible to think about a possibility no one had dared to dream before. The fear at the center of daily living since caveman days-lack of food warmth, shelter-would at last lose its power to terrify. That remarkable promise became reality in many ways. Governments created welfare systems for anyone in need and separate programmes for the elderly (Social Security in the U.S.). Labour unions promised not only better pay for workers but also pensions for retirees. Giant corporations came into being and offered the possibility-in some cases the promise-of lifetime employment plus guaranteed pensions. The cumulative effect was a fundamental change in how millions of people approached life itself, a reversal of attitude that most rank as one of the largest in human history. For millennia the average person’s stance toward providing for himself had been. Ultimately I’m on my own. Now it became, ultimately I’ll be taken care of.

The early hints that this promise might be broken on a large scale came in the 1980s. U.S. business had become uncompetitive globally and began restructuring massively, with huge Layoffs. The trend accelerated in the 1990s as the bastions of corporate welfare faced reality. IBM ended it’s no-layoff policy. AT&T fired thousands, many of whom found such a thing simply incomprehensible, and a few of whom killed themselves. The other supposed guarantors of our economic security were also in decline. Labour-union membership and power fell to their lowest levels in decades. President Clinton signed a historic bill scaling back welfare. Americans realized that Social Security won't provide social security for any of us.

A less visible but equally significant trend a affected pensions. To make costs easier to control, companies moved away from defined benefit pension plans, which obligate them to pay out specified amounts years in the future, to defined contribution plans, which specify only how much goes into the play today. The most common type of defined-contribution plan is the 401 (k). the significance of the 401 (k) is that it puts most of the responsibility for a person’s economic fate back on the employee. Within limits the employee must decide how much goes into the plan each year and how it gets invested-the two factors that will determine how much it’s worth when the employee retires.

Which brings us back to Enron? Those billions of dollars in vaporized retirement savings went in employees’ 401 (k) accounts. That is, the employees chose how much money to put into those accounts and then chose how to invest it. Enron matched a certain proportion of each employee’s 401 (k) contribution with company stock, so everyone was going to end up with some Enron in his or her portfolio; but that could be regarded as a freebie, since nothing compels a company to match employee contributions at all. At least two special features complicate the Enron case. First, some shareholders charge top management with illegally covering up the company’s problems, prompting investors to hang on when they should have sold. Second, Enron’s 401 (k) accounts were locked while the company changed plan administrators in October, when the stock was falling, so employees could not have closed their accounts if they wanted to.

But by far the largest cause of this human tragedy is that thousands of employees were heavily overweighed in Enron stock. Many had placed 100% of their 401 (k) assets in the stock rather than in the 18 other investment options they were offered. Of course that wasn’t prudent, but it’s what some of them did.

The Enron employees’ retirement disaster is part of the larger trend away from guaranteed economic security. That’s why preventing such a thing from ever happening again may be impossible. The huge attitudinal shift to I’ll-be-taken-care-of took at least a generation. The shift back may take just as long. It won’t be complete until a new generation of employees see assured economic comfort as a 20th-century quirk, and understand not just intellectually but in their bones that, like most people in most times and places, they’re on their own.

**2008**

**200801**

At the age of 16, Lee Hyuk Joon’s life is a living hell. The South Korean 10th grader gets up at 6 in the morning to go to school, and studies most of the day until returning home at 6 p.m. After dinner, it’s time to hit the books again at one of Seoul’s many so-called cram schools. Lee gets back home at 1 in the morning, sleeps less than five hours, then repeats the routine five days a week. It’s a grueling schedule, but Lee worries that it may not be good enough to get him into a top university. Some of his classmates study even harder.

South Korea’s education system has long been highly competitive. But for Lee and the other 700,000 high-school sophomores in the country, high-school studies have gotten even more intense. That’s because South Korea has conceived a new college-entrance system, which will be implemented in 2008. This year’s 10th graders will be the first group evaluated by the new admissions standard, which places more emphasis on grades in the three years of high school and less on nationwide SAT-style and other selection tests, which have traditionally determined which students go to the elite colleges.

The change was made mostly to reduce what the government says is a growing education gap in the country: wealthy students go to the best colleges and get the best jobs, keeping the children of poorer families on the social margins. The aim is to reduce the importance of costly tutors and cram schools, partly to help students enjoy a more normal high-school life. But the new system has had the opposite effect. Before, students didn’t worry too much about their grade-point averages; the big challenge was beating the standardized tests as high-school seniors. Now students are competing against one another over a three-year period, and every midterm and final test is crucial. Fretful parents are relying even more heavily on tutors and cram schools to help their children succeed.

Parents and kids have sent thousands of angry online letters to the Education Ministry complaining that the new admissions standard is setting students against each other. “One can succeed only when others fail,” as one parent said.

Education experts say that South Korea's public secondary-school system is foundering, while private education is thriving. According to critics, the country’s high schools are almost uniformly mediocre the result of an egalitarian government education policy. With the number of elite schools strictly controlled by the government, even the brightest students typically have to settle for ordinary schools in their neighbourhoods, where the curriculum is centred on average students. To make up for the mediocrity, zealous parents send their kids to the expensive cram schools.

Students in affluent southern Seoul neighbourhoods complain that the new system will hurt them the most. Nearly all Korean high schools will be weighted equally in the college-entrance process, and relatively weak students in provincial schools, who may not score well on standardized tests, often compile good grade-point averages.

Some universities, particularly prestigious ones, openly complain that they cannot select the best students under the new system because it eliminates differences among high schools. They’ve asked for more discretion in picking students by giving more weight to such screening tools as essay writing or interviews.

President Roh Moo Hyun doesn’t like how some colleges are trying to circumvent the new system. He recently criticized “greedy” universities that focus more on finding the best students than faying to “nurture good students”. But amid the crossfire between the government and universities, the country’s 10th graders are feeling the stress. On online protest sites, some are calling themselves a “cursed generation” and “mice in a lab experiment”. It all seems a touch melodramatic, but that’s the South Korean school system.

**200802**

Wilfred Emmanuel-Jones was a teenager before he saw his first cow in his first field. Born in Jamaica, the 47-year-old grew up in inner-city Birmingham before making a career as a television producer and launching his own marketing agency. But deep down he always nurtured every true Englishman’s dream of a rustic life, a dream that his entrepreneurial wealth has allowed him to satisfy. These days he’s the owner of a thriving 12-hectare farm in deepest Devon with cattle, sheep and pigs. His latest business venture: pushing his brand of Black Fanner gourmet sausages and barbecue sauces. “My background may be very urban,” says Emmanuel-Jones. “But it has given me a good idea of what other urbanites want.”

And of how to sell it. Emmanuel-Jones joins a herd of wealthy fugitives from city life who are bringing a new commercial know-how to British farming. Britain’s burgeoning farmers’ markets-numbers have doubled to at least 500 in the last five years-swarm with specialty cheesemakers, beekeepers or organic smallholders who are redeploying the business skills they learned in the city. “Everyone in the rural community has to come to terms with the fact that things have changed,” says Emmanuel-Jones. “You can produce the best food in the world, but if you don't know how to market it, you are wasting your time. We are helping the traditionalists to move on.”

The emergence of the new class of superpeasants reflects some old yearnings. If the British were the first nation to industrialize, they were also the first to head back to the land. “There is this romantic image of the countryside that is particularly English,” says Alun Howkins of the University of Sussex, who reckons the population of rural England has been rising since 1911. Migration into rural areas is now running at about 100,000 a year, and the hunger for a taste of the rural life has kept land prices buoyant even as agricultural incomes tumble. About 40 percent of all farmland is now sold to “lifestyle buyers” rather than the dwindling number of traditional farmers, according to the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors.

What’s new about the latest returnees is their affluence and zeal for the business of producing quality foods, if only at a micro-level. A healthy economy and surging London house prices have helped to ease the escape of the would-be rustics. The media recognize and feed the fantasy. One of the big TV hits of recent years, the “River Cottage” series, chronicled the attempts of a London chef to run his own Dorset farm.

Naturally, the newcomers can’t hope to match their City salaries, but many are happy to trade any loss of income for the extra job satisfaction. Who cares if there’s no six-figure annual bonus when the land offers other incalculable compensations?

Besides, the specialist producers can at least depend on a burgeoning market for their products. Today’s eco-aware generation loves to seek out authentic ingredients. “People like me may be making a difference in a small way,” Jan McCourt, a onetime investment banker now running his own 40-hectare spread in the English Midlands stocked with rare breeds.

Optimists see signs of far-reaching change: Britain isn’t catching up with mainland Europe; it’s leading the way. “Unlike most other countries, where artisanal food production is being eroded, here it is being recovered,” says food writer Matthew Fort. “It may be the mark of the next stage of civilization that we rediscover the desirability of being a peasant.” And not an investment banker.

**200803**

In Barcelona the Catalonians call them castells, but these aren’t stereotypical castles in Spain. These castles are made up of human beings, not stone. The people who perform this agile feat of acrobatics are called castellers, and to see their towers take shape is to observe a marvel of human cooperation.

First the castellers form what looks like a gigantic rugby scrummage. They are the foundation blocks of the castle. Behind them, other people press together, forming outward-radiating ramparts of inward-pushing muscle: flying buttresses for the castle. Then sturdy but lighter castellers scramble over the backs of those at the bottom and stand, barefoot, on their shoulders ? then still others, each time adding a higher “story”.

These human towers can rise higher than small apartment buildings: nine “stories”, 35 feet into the air. Then, just when it seems this tower of humanity can’t defy gravity any longer, a little kid emerges from the crowd and climbs straight up to the top. Arms extended, the child grins while waving to the cheering crowd far below.

Dressed in their traditional costumes, the castellers seem to epitomize an easier time, before Barcelona became a world metropolis arid the Mediterranean’s most dynamic city. But when you observe-them tip close, in their street clothes, at practice, you see there’s nothing easy about what the castellers do-and that they are not merely reenacting an ancient ritual.

　None of the castellers can-give a logical answer as to why they love doing this. But Victor Luna, 16, touches me on the shoulder and says in English: “We do it because it’s beautiful. We do it because we are Catalan.”

Barcelona’s mother tongue is Catalan, and to understand Barcelona, you must understand two words of Catalan: seny and rauxa. Seny pretty much translates as common sense, or the ability to make money, arrange things, and get things done. Rauxa is reminiscent of our words “raucous” and “ruckus”.

What makes the castellers revealing of the city is that they embody rauxa and seny. The idea of a human castle is rauxa, it defies common sense, but to watch one going up is to see seny in action. Success is based on everyone working together to achieve a shared goal.

The success of Carlos Tusquets’ bank, Fibanc, shows seny at work in everyday life. The bank started as a family concern and now employs hundreds. Tusquets said it exemplifies how the economy in Barcelona is different.

Entrepreneurial seny demonstrates why Barcelona and Catalonia the ancient region of which Barcelona is the capital are distinct from the rest of Spain yet essential to Spain’s emergence, after centuries of repression, as a prosperous, democratic European country. Catalonia, with Barcelona as its dynamo, has turned into an economic powerhouse. Making up 6 percent of Spain's territory, with a sixth of its people, it accounts for nearly a quarter of Spain's production everything from textiles to computers even though the rest of Spain has been enjoying its own economic miracle.

Hand in hand with seny goes rauxa, and there’s no better place to see rauxa in action than on the Ramblas, the venerable, tree-shaded boulevard that, in gentle stages, leads you from the centre of Barcelona down to the port. There are two narrow lanes each way for cars and motorbikes, but it’s the wide centre walkway that makes the Ramblas a front-row seat for Barcelona’s longest running theatrical event. Plastic armchairs are set out on the sidewalk. Sit in one of them, and an attendant will come and charge you a small fee. Performance artists throng the Ramblas-stilt walkers, witches caked in charcoal dust, Elvis impersonators. But the real stars are the old women and happily playing children, millionaires on motorbikes, and pimps and women who, upon closer inspection, prove not to be.

Aficionados (Fans) of Barcelona love to compare notes: “Last night there was a man standing on the balcony of his hotel room,” Mariana Bertagnolli, an Italian photographer, told me. “The balcony was on the second floor. He was naked, and he was talking into a cell phone.”

There you have it, Barcelona's essence. The man is naked (rauxa), but he is talking into a cell phone (seny).

**200804**

The law firm Patrick worked for before he died filed for bankruptcy protection a year after his funeral. After his death, the firm's letterhead properly included him: Patrick S. Lanigan, 1954-1992. He was listed up in the right-hand corner, just above the paralegals. Then the rumors got started and wouldn’t stop. Before long, everyone believed he had taken the money and disappeared. After three months, no one on the Gulf Coast believed that he was dead. His name came off the letterhead as the debts piled up.

The remaining partners in the law firm were still together, attached unwillingly at the hip by the bondage of mortgages and the bank notes, back when they were rolling and on the verge of serious wealth. They had been joint defendants in several unwinnable lawsuits; thus the bankruptcy. Since Patrick's departure, they had tried every possible way to divorce one another, but nothing would work. Two were raging alcoholics who drank at the office behind locked doors, but nevertogether. The other two were in recovery, still teetering on the brink of sobriety.

He took their money. Their millions. Money they had already spent long before it arrived, as only lawyers can do. Money for their richly renovated office building in downtown Biloxi. Money for new homes, yachts, condos in the Caribbean. The money was on the way, approved, the papers signed, orders entered; they could see it, almost touch it when their dead partner-Patrick-snatched it at the last possible second.

He was dead. They buried him on February 11, 1992. They had consoled the widow and put his rotten name on their handsome letterhead. Yet six weeks later, he somehow stole their money.

They had brawled over who was to blame. Charles Bogan, the firm’s senior partner and its iron hand, had insisted the money be wired from its source into a new account offshore, and this made sense after some discussion. It was ninety million bucks, a third of which the firm would keep, and it would be impossible to hide that kind of money in Biloxi, population fifty thousand. Someone at the bank would talk. Soon everyone would know. All four vowed secrecy, even as they made plans to display as much of their new wealth as possible. There had even been talk of a firm jet, a six-seater.

So Bogan took his share of the blame. At forty-nine, he was the oldest of the four, and, at the moment, the most stable. He was also responsible for hiring Patrick nine years earlier, and for this he had received no small amount of grief.

Doug Vitrano, the litigator, had made the fateful decision to recommend Patrick as the fifth partner. The other three had agreed, and when Patrick Lanigan was added to the firm name, he had access to virtually every file in the office. Bogan, Rapley, Vitrano, Havarac, and Lanigan, Attorneys and Counselors-at-Law. A large ad in the yellow pages claimed “Specialists in Offshore Injuries.” Specialists or not, like most firms they would take almost anything if the fees were lucrative. Lots of secretaries and paralegals. Big overhead, and the strongest political connections on the Coast.

They were all in their mid-to late forties. Havarac had been raised by his father on a shrimp boat. His hands were still proudly calloused, and he dreamed of choking Patrick until his neck snapped. Rapley was severely depressed and seldom left his home, where he wrote briefs in a dark office in the attic.

**2009**

**200901**

We had been wanting to expand our children’s horizons by taking them to a place that was unlike anything we’d been exposed to during our travels in Europe and the United States. In thinking about what was possible from Geneva, where we are based, we decided on a trip to Istanbul, a two-hour plane ride from Zurich.

We envisioned the trip as a prelude to more exotic ones, perhaps to New Delhi or Bangkok later this year, but thought our 11-and 13-year-olds needed a first step away from manicured boulevards and pristine monuments.

What we didn’t foresee was the reaction of friends, who warned that we were putting our children “in danger,” referring vaguely, and most incorrectly, to disease, terrorism or just the unknown. To help us get acquainted with the peculiarities of Istanbul and to give our children a chance to choose what they were particularly interested in seeing, we bought an excellent guidebook and read it thoroughly before leaving.

Friendly warnings didn’t change our planning, although we might have more prudently checked with the U.S. State Department’s list of troublespots. We didn’t see a lot of children among the foreign visitors during our six-day stay in Istanbul, but we found the tourist areas quite safe, very interesting and varied enough even to suit our son, whose oft-repeated request is that we not see “every single” church and museum in a given city.

Vaccinations weren’t needed for the city, but we were concerned about adapting to the water for a short stay. So we used bottled water for drinking and brushing our teeth, a precaution that may seem excessive, but we all stayed healthy.

Taking the advice of a friend, we booked a hotel a 20-minute walk from most of Istanbul’s major tourist sites. This not only got us some morning exercise, strolling over the Karakoy Bridge, but took us past a colorful assortment of fishermen, vendors and shoe shiners.

From a teenager and pre-teen’s view, Istanbul street life is fascinating since almost everything can be bought outdoors. They were at a good age to spend time wandering the labyrinth of the Spice Bazaar, where shops display mounds of pungent herbs in sacks. Doing this with younger children would be harder simply because the streets are so packed with people; it would be easy to get lost.

For our two, whose buying experience consisted of department stores and shopping mall boutiques, it was amazing to discover that you could bargain over price and perhaps end up with two of something for the price of one. They also learned to figure out the relative value of the Turkish lira, not a small matter with its many zeros.

Being exposed to Islam was an important part of our trip. Visiting the mosques, especially the enormous Blue Mosque, was our first glimpse into how this major religion is practiced. Our children’s curiosity already had been piqued by the five daily calls to prayer over loudspeakers in every corner of the city, and the scarves covering the heads of many women.

Navigating meals can be troublesome with children, but a kebab, bought on the street or in restaurants, was unfailingly popular. Since we had decided this trip was not for gourmets, kebabs spared us the agony of trying to find a restaurant each day that would suit the adults’ desire to try something new amid children’s insistence that the food be served immediately. Gradually, we branched out to try some other Turkish specialties.

Although our son had studied Islam briefly, it is impossible to be prepared for every awkward question that might come up, such as during our visits to the Topkapi Sarayi, the Ottoman Sultans’ palace. No guides were available so it was do-it-yourself, using our guidebook,which cheated us of a lot of interesting history and anecdotes that a professional guide could provide. Next time, we resolved to make such arrangements in advance.

On this trip, we wandered through the magnificent complex, with its imperial treasures, its courtyards and its harem. The last required a bit of explanation that we would have happily left to a learned third party.

**200902**

Last month the first baby-boomers turned 60. The bulky generation born between 1946 and 1964 is heading towards retirement. The looming “demographic cliff” will see vast numbers of skilled workers dispatched from the labour force.

The workforce is ageing across the rich world. Within the EU the number of workers aged between 50 and 64 will increase by 25% over the next two decades, while those aged 20-29 will decrease by 20%. In Japan almost 20% of the population is already over 65, the highest share in the world. And in the United States the number of workers aged 55-64 will have increased by more than half in this decade, at the same time as the 35- to 44-year-olds decline by 10%.

Given that most societies are geared to retirement at around 65, companies have a looming problem of knowledge management, of making sure that the boomers do not leave before they have handed over their expertise along with the office keys and their e-mail address. A survey of human-resources directors by IBM last year concluded: “When the baby-boomer generation retires, many companies will find out too late that a career’s worth of experience has walked out the door, leaving insufficient talent to fill in the void.”

Some also face a shortage of expertise. In aerospace and defence, for example, as much as 40% of the workforce in some companies will be eligible to retire within the next five years. At the same time, the number of engineering graduates in developed countries is in steep decline.

A few companies are so squeezed that they are already taking exceptional measures. Earlier this year the Los Angeles Times interviewed an enterprising Australian who was staying in Beverly Hills while he tried to persuade locals to emigrate to Toowoomba, Queensland, to work for his engineering company there. Toowoomba today; the rest of the developed world tomorrow.

If you look hard enough, you can find companies that have begun to adapt the workplace to older workers. The AARP, an American association for the over-50s, produces an annual list of the best employers of its members. Health-care firms invariably come near the top because they are one of the industries most in need of skilled labour. Other sectors similarly affected, says the Conference Board, include oil, gas, energy and government.

Near the top of the AARP’s latest list comes Deere & Company, a no-nonsense industrial-equipment manufacturer based in Illinois; about 35% of Deere’s 46,000 employees are over 50 and a number of them are in their 70s. The tools it uses to achieve that – flexible working, telecommuting, and so forth - also coincidentally help older workers to extend their working lives. The company spends “a lot of time” on the ergonomics of its factories, making jobs there less tiring, which enables older workers to stay at them for longer.

Likewise, for more than a decade, Toyota, arguably the world’s most advanced manufacturer, has adapted its workstations to older workers. The shortage of skilled labour available to the automotive industry has made it unusually keen to recruit older workers. BMW recently set up a factory in Leipzig that expressly set out to employ people over the age of 45. Needs must when the devil drives.

Other firms are polishing their alumni networks. IBM uses its network to recruit retired people for particular projects. Ernst & Young, a professional-services firm, has about 30,000 registered alumni, and about 25% of its “experienced” new recruits are former employees who return after an absence.

But such examples are unusual. A survey in America last month by Ernst & Young found that “although corporate America foresees a significant workforce shortage as boomers retire, it is not dealing with the issue.” Almost three-quarters of the 1,400 global companies questioned by Deloitte last year said they expected a shortage of salaried staff over the next three to five years. Yet few of them are looking to older workers to fill that shortage; and even fewer are looking to them to fill another gap that has already appeared. Many firms in Europe and America complain that they struggle to find qualified directors for their boards—this when the pool of retired talent from those very same firms is growing by leaps and bounds.

Why are firms not working harder to keep old employees? Part of the reason is that the crunch has been beyond the horizon of most managers. Nor is hanging on to older workers the only way to cope with a falling supply of labour. The participation of developing countries in the world economy has increased the overall supply—whatever the local effect of demographics in the rich countries. A vast amount of work is being sent offshore to such places as China and India and more will go in future. Some countries, such as Australia, are relaxing their immigration policies to allow much needed skills to come in from abroad. Others will avoid the need for workers by spending money on machinery and automation.

**200903**

The other problem that arises from the employment of women is that of the working wife. It has two aspects: that of the wife who is more of a success than her husband and that of the wife who must rely heavily on her husband for help with domestic tasks. There are various ways in which the impact of the first difficulty can be reduced. Provided that husband and wife are not in the same or directly comparable lines of work, the harsh fact of her greater success can be obscured by a genial conspiracy to reject a purely monetary measure of achievement as intolerably crude. Where there are ranks, it is best if the couple work in different fields so that the husband can find some special reason for the superiority of the lowest figure in his to the most elevated in his wife’s.

A problem that affects a much larger number of working wives is the need to re-allocate domestic tasks if there are children. In The Road to Wigan Pier George Orwell wrote of the unemployed of the Lancashire coalfields: “Practically never ... in a working-class home, will you see the man doing a stroke of the housework. Unemployment has not changed this convention, which on the face of it seems a little unfair. The man is idle from morning to night but the woman is as busy as ever - more so, indeed, because she has to manage with less money. Yet so far as my experience goes the women do not protest. They feel that a man would lose his manhood if, merely because he was out of work, he developed in a ‘Mary Ann’.”

It is over the care of young children that this re-allocation of duties becomes really significant. For this, unlike the cooking of fish fingers or the making of beds, is an inescapably time-consuming occupation, and time is what the fully employed wife has no more to spare of than her husband.

The male initiative in courtship is a pretty indiscriminate affair, something that is tried on with any remotely plausible woman who comes within range and, of course, with all degrees of tentativeness. What decides the issue of whether a genuine courtship is going to get under way is the woman’s response. If she shows interest the engines of persuasion are set in movement. The truth is that in courtship society gives women the real power while pretending to give it to men.

What does seem clear is that the more men and women are together, at work and away from it, the more the comprehensive amorousness of men towards women will have to go, despite all its past evolutionary services. For it is this that makes inferiority at work abrasive and, more indirectly, makes domestic work seem unmanly. If there is to be an equalizing redistribution of economic and domestic tasks between men and women there must be a compensating redistribution of the erotic initiative. If women will no longer let us beat them they must allow us to join them as the blushing recipients of flowers and chocolates.

**200904**

From Namche Bazaar, the Sherpa capital at 12,000 feet, the long line threaded south, dropping 2,000 feet to the valley floor, then trudged down the huge Sola-Khumbu canyon until it opened out to the lush but still daunting foothills of Central Nepal.

It was here at Namche that one man broke rank and leaned north, slowly and arduously climbing the steep walls of the natural amphitheater behind the scatter of stone huts, then past Kunde and Khumjong.

Despite wearing a balaclava on his head, he had been frequently recognized by the Tibetans, and treated with the gravest deference and respect. Even among those who knew nothing about him, expressions of surprise lit up their dark, liquid eyes. He was a man not expected to be there.

Not only was his stature substantially greater than that of the diminutive Tibetans, but it was also obvious from his bearing—and his new broadcloak, which covered a much-too-tight army uniform—that he came from a markedly loftier station in life than did the average Tibetan. Among a people virtually bereft of possessions, he had fewer still, consisting solely of a rounded bundle about a foot in diameter slung securely by a cord over his shoulder. The material the bundle was wrapped in was of a rough Tibetan weave, which did not augur that the content was of any greater value—except for the importance he seemed to ascribe to it, never for a moment releasing his grip.

His objective was a tiny huddle of buildings perched halfway up an enormous valley wall across from him, atop a great wooded spur jutting out from the lower lap of the 22,493-foot Ama Dablum, one of the most majestic mountains on earth. There was situated Tengboche, the most famous Buddhist monastery in the Himalayas, its setting unsurpassed for magnificence anywhere on the planet.

From the top of the spur, one’s eyes sweep 12 miles up the stupendous Dudh Kosi canyon to the six-mile-long granite wall of cliff of Nuptse at its head. If Ama Dablum is the Gatekeeper,then the sheer cliff of Nuptse, never less than four miles high, is the Final Protector of the highest and mightiest of them all: Chomolongma, the Mother Goddess of the World, to the Tibetans; Sagarmatha, the Head of the Seas, to the Nepalese; and Everest to the rest of us. And over the great barrier of Nuptse She demurely peaks.

It was late in the afternoon—when the great shadows cast by the colossal mountains were descending into the deep valley floors—before he reached the crest of the spur and shuffled to a stop just past Tengboche’s entrance gompa. His chest heaving in the rarefied air, he removed his hand from the bundle—the first time he had done so—and wiped grimy rivulets of sweat from around his eyes with the fingers of his mitted hand.

His narrowed eyes took in the open sweep of the quiet grounds, the pagoda-like monastery itself, and the stone buildings that tumbled down around it like a protective skirt. In the distance the magic light of the magic hour lit up the plume flying off Chomolongma’s 29,029-foot-high crest like a bright, welcoming banner.

His breathing calmed, he slowly, stiffly struggled forward and up the rough stone steps to the monastery entrance. There he was greeted with a respectful nameste— “I recognize the divine in you”— from a tall, slim monk of about 35 years, who hastily set aside a twig broom he had been using to sweep the flagstones of the inner courtyard. While he did so, the visitor noticed that the monk was missing the small finger on his left hand. The stranger spoke a few formal words in Tibetan, and then the two disappeared inside.

Early the next morning the emissary — lightened of his load — appeared at the monastery entrance, accompanied by the same monk and the elderly abbot. After a bow of his head, which was returned much more deeply by the two ocher-robed residents, he took his leave. The two solemn monks watched, motionless, until he dipped over the ridge on which the monastery sat, and out of sight.

Then, without a word, they turned and went back inside the monastery.

**2010**

**201001**

Among the great cities of the world, Kolkata (formerly spelt as Calcutta), the capital of India’s West Bengal, and the home of nearly 15 million people, is often mentioned as the only one that still has a large fleet of hand-pulled rickshaws.

Rickshaws are not there to haul around tourists. It’s the people in the lanes who most regularly use rickshaws—not the poor but people who are just a notch above the poor. They are people who tend to travel short distances, through lanes that are sometimes inaccessible to even the most daring taxi driver. An older woman with marketing to do, for instance, can arrive in a rickshaw, have the rickshaw puller wait until she comes back from various stalls to load her purchases, and then be taken home. People in the lanes use rickshaws as a 24-hour ambulance service. Proprietors of cafés or corner stores send rickshaws to collect their supplies. The rickshaw pullers told me their steadiest customers are schoolchildren. Middle-class families contract with a puller to take a child to school and pick him up; the puller essentially becomes a family retainer.

From June to September Kolkata can get torrential rains. During my stay it once rained for about 48 hours. Entire neighborhoods couldn’t be reached by motorized vehicles, and the newspapers showed pictures of rickshaws being pulled through water that was up to the pullers’ waists. When it’s raining, the normal customer base for rickshaw pullers expands greatly, as does the price of a journey. A writer in Kolkata told me, “When it rains, even the governor takes rickshaws.”

While I was in Kolkata, a magazine called India Today published its annual ranking of Indian states, according to such measurements as prosperity and infrastructure. Among India’s 20 largest states, Bihar finished dead last, as it has for four of the past five years. Bihar, a couple hundred miles north of Kolkata, is where the vast majority of rickshaw pullers come from. Once in Kolkata, they sleep on the street or in their rickshaws or in a dera—a combination garage and repair shop and dormitory managed by someone called a sardar. For sleeping privileges in a dera, pullers pay 100 rupees (about $2.50) a month, which sounds like a pretty good deal until you’ve visited a dera. They gross between 100 and 150 rupees a day, out of which they have to pay 20 rupees for the use of the rickshaw and an occasional 75 or more for a payoff if a policeman stops them for, say, crossing a street where rickshaws are prohibited. A 2003 study found that rickshaw pullers are near the bottom of Kolkata occupations in income, doing better than only the beggars. For someone without land or education, that still beats trying to make a living in Bihar.

There are people in Kolkata, particularly educated and politically aware people, who will not ride in a rickshaw, because they are offended by the idea of being pulled by another human being or because they consider it not the sort of thing people of their station do or because they regard the hand-pulled rickshaw as a relic of colonialism. Ironically, some of those people are not enthusiastic about banning rickshaws. The editor of the editorial pages of Kolkata’s Telegraph—Rudrangshu Mukherjee, a former academic who still writes history books—told me, for instance, that he sees humanitarian considerations as coming down on the side of keeping hand-pulled rickshaws on the road. “I refuse to be carried by another human being myself,” he said, “but I question whether we have the right to take away their livelihood.” Rickshaw supporters point out that when it comes to demeaning occupations, rickshaw pullers are hardly unique in Kolkata.

When I asked one rickshaw puller if he thought the government’s plan to rid the city of rickshaws was based on a genuine interest in his welfare, he smiled, with a quick shake of his head—a gesture I interpreted to mean, “If you are so naive as to ask such a question, I will answer it, but it is not worth wasting words on.” Some rickshaw pullers I met were resigned to the imminent end of their livelihood and pin their hopes on being offered something in its place. As migrant workers, they don’t have the political clout enjoyed by, say, Kolkata’s sidewalk hawkers, who, after supposedly being scaled back at the beginning of the modernization drive, still clog the sidewalks, selling absolutely everything—or, as I found during the 48 hours of rain, absolutely everything but umbrellas. “The government was the government of the poor people,” one sardar told me. “Now they shake hands with the capitalists and try to get rid of poor people.”

But others in Kolkata believe that rickshaws will simply be confined more strictly to certain neighborhoods, out of the view of World Bank traffic consultants and California investment delegations—or that they will be allowed to die out naturally as they’re supplanted by more modern conveyances. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, after all, is not the first high West Bengal official to say that rickshaws would be off the streets of Kolkata in a matter of months. Similar statements have been made as far back as 1976. The ban decreed by Bhattacharjee has been delayed by a court case and by a widely held belief that some retraining or social security settlement ought to be offered to rickshaw drivers. It may also have been delayed by a quiet reluctance to give up something that has been part of the fabric of the city for more than a century. Kolkata, a resident told me, “has difficulty letting go.” One day a city official handed me a report from the municipal government laying out options for how rickshaw pullers might be rehabilitated.

“Which option has been chosen?” I asked, noting that the report was dated almost exactly a year before my visit.

“That hasn’t been decided,” he said. “When will it be decided?”

“That hasn’t been decided,” he said.

**201002**

Depending on whom you believe, the average American will, over a lifetime, wait in lines for two years (says National Public Radio) or five years (according to customer-loyalty experts).

The crucial word is average, as wealthy Americans routinely avoid lines altogether. Once the most democratic of institutions, lines are rapidly becoming the exclusive province of suckers(people who still believe in and practice waiting in lines). Poor suckers, mostly.

Airports resemble France before the Revolution: first-class passengers enjoy “élite” security lines and priority boarding, and disembark before the unwashed in coach, held at bay by a flight attendant, are allowed to foul the Jet-way.

At amusement parks, too, you can now buy your way out of line. This summer I haplessly watched kids use a $52 Gold Flash Pass to jump the lines at Six Flags New England, and similar systems are in use in most major American theme parks, from Universal Orlando to Walt Disney World, where the haves get to watch the have-mores breeze past on their way to their seats.

Flash Pass teaches children a valuable lesson in real-world economics: that the rich are more important than you, especially when it comes to waiting. An NBA player once said to me, with a bemused chuckle of disbelief, that when playing in Canada—get this— “we have to wait in the same customs line as everybody else.”

Almost every line can be breached for a price. In several U.S. cities this summer, early arrivers among the early adopters waiting to buy iPhones offered to sell their spots in the lines. On Craigslist, prospective iPhone purchasers offered to pay “waiters” or “placeholders” to wait in line for them outside Apple stores.

Inevitably, some semi-populist politicians have seen the value of sort-of waiting in lines with the ordinary people. This summer Philadelphia mayor John Street waited outside an AT&T store from 3:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. before a stand-in from his office literally stood in for the mayor while he conducted official business. And billionaire New York mayor Michael Bloomberg often waits for the subway with his fellow citizens, though he’s first driven by motorcade past the stop nearest his house to a station 22 blocks away, where the wait, or at least the ride, is shorter.

As early as elementary school, we’re told that jumping the line is an unethical act, which is why so many U.S. lawmakers have framed the immigration debate as a kind of fundamental sin of the school lunch line. Alabama Senator Richard Shelby, to cite just one legislator, said amnesty would allow illegal immigrants “to cut in line ahead of millions of people.”

Nothing annoys a national lawmaker more than a person who will not wait in line, unless that line is in front of an elevator at the U.S. Capitol, where Senators and Representatives use private elevators, lest they have to queue with their constituents.

But compromising the integrity of the line is not just antidemocratic, it’s out-of-date. There was something about the orderly boarding of Noah’s Ark, two by two, that seemed to restore not just civilization but civility during the Great Flood.

How civil was your last flight? Southwest Airlines has first-come, first-served festival seating. But for $5 per flight, an unaffiliated company called BoardFirst. com will secure you a coveted “A” boarding pass when that airline opens for online check-in 24 hours before departure. Thus, the savvy traveler doesn’t even wait in line when he or she is online.

Some cultures are not renowned for lining up. Then again, some cultures are too adept at lining up: a citizen of the former Soviet Union would join a queue just so he could get to the head of that queue and see what everyone was queuing for.

And then there is the U.S., where society seems to be cleaving into two groups: Very Important Persons, who don’t wait, and Very Impatient Persons, who do--unhappily.

For those of us in the latter group — consigned to coach, bereft of Flash Pass, too poor or proper to pay a placeholder — what do we do? We do what Vladimir and Estragon did in Waiting for Godot: “We wait. We are bored.”

**201003**

A bus took him to the West End, where, among the crazy coloured fountains of illumination, shattering the blue dusk with green and crimson fire, he found the café of his choice, a tea-shop that had gone mad and turned. Babylonian, a while palace with ten thousand lights. It towered above the other building like a citadel, which indeed it was, the outpost of a new age, perhaps a new civilization, perhaps a new barbarism; and behind the thin marble front were concrete and steel, just as behind the careless profusion of luxury were millions of pence, balanced to the last halfpenny. Somewhere in the background, hidden away, behind the ten thousand lights and acres of white napery and bewildering glittering rows of teapots, behind the thousand waitresses and cash-box girls and black-coated floor managers and temperamental long-haired violinists, behind the mounds of cauldrons of stewed steak, the vanloads of ices, were a few men who went to work juggling with fractions of a farming, who knew how many units of electricity it took to finish a steak-and-kidney pudding and how many minutes and seconds a waitress( five feet four in height and in average health) would need to carry a tray of given weight from the kitchen life to the table in the far corner. In short, there was a warm, sensuous, vulgar life flowering in the upper storeys, and a cold science working in the basement. Such as the gigantic tea-shop into which Turgis marched, in search not of mere refreshment but of all the enchantment of unfamiliar luxury. Perhaps he knew in his heart that men have conquered half the known world, looted whole kingdoms, and never arrived in such luxury. The place was built for him.

It was built for a great many other people too, and, as usual, they were all there. It seemed with humanity. The marble entrance hall, piled dizzily with bonbons and cakes, was as crowded and bustling as a railway station. The gloom and grime of the streets, the raw air, all November, were at once left behind, forgotten: the atmosphere inside was golden, tropical, belonging to some high mid-summer of confectionery. Disdaining the lifts, Turgis, once more excited by the sight, sound, and smell of it all, climbed the wide staircase until he reached his favourite floor, where an orchestra, led by a young Jewish violinist with wandering lustrous eyes and a passion for tremolo effects, acted as a magnet to a thousand girls. The door was swung open for him by a page; there burst, scented air, the sensuous clamour of the strings, and, as he stood hesitating a moment, half dazed, there came, bowing, s sleek grave man, older than he was and far more distinguished than he could ever hope to be, who murmured deferentially: “ For one, sir? This way, please,” Shyly, yet proudly, Turgis followed him.

**201004**

Now elsewhere in the world, Iceland may be spoken of, somewhat breathlessly, as western Europe’s last pristine wilderness. But the environmental awareness that is sweeping the world had bypassed the majority of Icelanders. Certainly they were connected to their land, the way one is complicatedly connected to, or encumbered by, family one can’t do anything about. But the truth is, once you’re off the beat-en paths of the low-lying coastal areas where everyone lives, the roads are few, and they’re all bad, so Iceland’s natural wonders have been out of reach and unknown even to its own inhabitants. For them the land has always just been there, something that had to be dealt with and, if possible, exploited—the mind-set being one of land as commodity rather than land as, well, priceless art on the scale of the “Mona Lisa.”

When the opportunity arose in 2003 for the national power company to enter into a 40-year contract with the American aluminum company Alcoa to supply hydroelectric power for a new smelter, those who had been dreaming of something like this for decades jumped at it and never looked back. Iceland may at the moment be one of the world’s richest countries, with a 99 percent literacy rate and long life expectancy. But the project’s advocates, some of them getting on in years, were more emotionally attuned to the country’s century upon century of want, hardship, and colonial servitude to Denmark, which officially had ended only in 1944 and whose psychological imprint remained relatively fresh. For the longest time, life here had meant little more than a sod hut, dark all winter, cold, no hope, children dying left and right, earthquakes, plagues, starvation, volcanoes erupting and destroying all vegetation and livestock, all spirit—a world revolving almost entirely around the welfare of one’s sheep and, later, on how good the cod catch was. In the outlying regions, it still largely does.

Ostensibly, the Alcoa project was intended to save one of these dying regions—the remote and sparsely populated east—where the way of life had steadily declined to a point of desperation and gloom. After fishing quotas were imposed in the early 1980s to protect fish stocks, many individual boat owners sold their allotments or gave them away, fishing rights ended up mostly in the hands of a few companies, and small fishermen were virtually wiped out. Technological advances drained away even more jobs previously done by human hands, and the people were seeing everything they had worked for all their lives turn up worthless and their children move away. With the old way of life doomed, aluminum projects like this one had come to be perceived, wisely or not, as a last chance. “Smelter or death.”

The contract with Alcoa would infuse the region with foreign capital, an estimated 400 jobs, and spin-off service industries. It also was a way for Iceland to develop expertise that potentially could be sold to the rest of the world; diversify an economy historically dependent on fish; and, in an appealing display of Icelandic can-do verve, perhaps even protect all of Iceland, once and for all, from the unpredictability of life itself.

“We have to live,” Halldor Asgrimsson. Halldor, a former prime minister and longtime member of parliament from the region, was a driving force behind the project. “We have a right to live.”

**2011**

**201101**

Whenever we could, Joan and I took refuge in the streets of Gibraltar. The Englishman’s home is his castle because he has no much choice. There is nowhere to sit in the streets of England, not even, after twilight, in the public gardens. The climate, very often, does not even permit him to walk outside. Naturally, he stays indoors and creates a cocoon of comfort. That was the way we lived in Leeds.

These southern people, on the other hand, look outwards. The Gibraltarian home is, typically, a small and crowded apartment up several flights of dark and dirty stairs. In it, one, two or even three old people share a few ill-lit rooms with the young family. Once he has eaten, changed his clothes, embraced his wife, kissed his children and his parents, there is nothing to keep the southern man at home. He hurries out, taking even his breakfast coffee at his local bar. He comes home late for his afternoon meal after an appetitive hour at his café. He sleeps for an hour, dresses, goes out again and stays out until late at night. His wife does not miss him, for she is out, too — at the market in the morning and in the afternoon sitting with other mothers, baby-minding in the sun.

The usual Gibraltarian home has no sitting-room, living-room or lounge. The parlour of our working-class houses would be an intolerable waste of space. Easy-chairs, sofas and such-like furniture are unknown. There are no bookshelves, because there are no books. Talking and drinking, as well as eating, are done on hard chairs round the dining-table, between a sideboard decorated with the best glasses and an inevitable display cabinet full of family treasures, photographs and souvenirs. The elaborate chandelier over this table proclaims it as the hub of the household and of the family. “Hearth and home” makes very little sense in Gibraltar. One’s home is one’s town or village, and one’s hearth is the sunshine.

Our northern towns are dormitories with cubicles, by comparison. When we congregate — in the churches it used to be, now in the cinema, say, impersonally, or at public meetings, formally — we are scarcely ever man to man. Only in our pubs can you find the truly gregarious and communal spirit surviving, and in England even the pubs are divided along class lines.

Along this Mediterranean coast, home is only a refuge and a retreat. The people live together in the open air—in the street, market-place. Down here, there is a far stronger feeling of community than we had ever known. In crowded and circumscribed Gibraltar, with its complicated inter-marriages, its identity of interests, its surviving sense of siege, one can see and feel an integrated society.

To live in a tiny town with all the organization of a state, with Viceroy, Premier, Parliament, Press and Pentagon, all in miniature, all within arm’s reach, is an intensive course in civics. In such an environment, nothing can be hidden, for better or for worse. One’s successes are seen and recognized; one’s failures are immediately exposed. Social consciousness is at its strongest, with the result that there is a constant and firm pressure towards good social behaviour, towards courtesy and kindness. Gibraltar, with all its faults, is the friendliest and most tolerant of places. Straight from the cynical anonymity of a big city, we luxuriated in its happy personalism. We look back on it, like all its exiled sons and daughters, with true affection.

**201002**

For office innovators, the unrealized dream of the “paperless” office is a classic example of high-tech hubris. Today’s office drone is drowning in more paper than ever before.

But after decades of hype, American offices may finally be losing their paper obsession. The demand for paper used to outstrip the growth of the US economy, but the past two or three years have seen a marked slowdown in sales — despite a healthy economic scene.

Analysts attribute the decline to such factors as advances in digital databases and communication systems.

Escaping our craving for paper, however, will be anything but an easy affair.

“Old habits are hard to break,” says Merilyn Dunn, a communications supplies director. “There are some functions that paper serves where a screen display doesn’t work. Those functions are both its strength and its weakness.”

In the early to mid-’90s, a booming economy and improved desktop printers helped boost paper sales by 6 to 7 percent each year. The convenience of desktop printing allowed office workers to indulge in printing anything and everything at very little effort or cost.

But now, the growth rate of paper sales in the United States is flattening by about half a percent each year. Between 2004 and 2005, Ms. Dunn says, plain white office paper will see less than a 4 percent growth rate, despite the strong overall economy. A primary reason for the change, says Dunn, is that for the first time ever, some 47 percent of the workforce entered the job market after computers had already been introduced to offices.

“We’re finally seeing a reduction in the amount of paper being used per worker in the workplace,” says John Maine, vice president of a pulp and paper economic consulting firm. “More information is being transmitted electronically, and more and more people are comfortable with the information residing only in electronic form without printing multiple backups.”

In addition, Mr. Maine points to the lackluster employment market for white-collar workers — the primary driver of office paper consumption—for the shift in paper usage.

The real paradigm shift may be in the way paper is used. Since the advent of advanced and reliable office-network systems, data storage has moved away from paper archives. The secretarial art of “filing” is disappearing from job descriptions. Much of today’s data may never leave its original digital format.

The changing attitudes toward paper have finally caught the attention of paper companies, says Richard Harper, a researcher at Microsoft. “All of a sudden, the paper industry has started thinking, ‘We need to learn more about the behavioural aspects of paper use,’” he says. “They had never asked, they’d just assumed that 70 million sheets would be bought per year as a literal function of economic growth.”

To reduce paper use, some companies are working to combine digital and paper capabilities. For example, Xerox Corp. is developing electronic paper: thin digital displays that respond to a stylus, like a pen on paper. Notations can be erased or saved digitally.

Another idea, intelligent paper, comes from Anoto Group. It would allow notations made with a stylus on a page printed with a special magnetic ink to simultaneously appear on a computer screen.

Even with such technological advances, the improved capabilities of digital storage continue to act against “paperlessness,” argues Paul Saffo, a technology forecaster. In his prophetic and metaphorical 1989 essay, “The Electronic Pi?ata,” he suggests that the increasing amounts of electronic data necessarily require more paper.

“The information industry today is like a huge electronic pi?ata, composed of a thin paper crust surrounding an electronic core,” Mr. Saffo wrote. The growing paper crust “is most noticeable, but the hidden electronic core that produces the crust is far larger — and growing more rapidly. The result is that we are becoming paperless, but we hardly notice at all."

In the same way that digital innovations have increased paper consumption, Saffo says, so has video conferencing — with its promise of fewer in-person meetings — boosting business travel.

“That’s one of the great ironies of the information age,” Saffo says. “It’s just common sense that the more you talk to someone by phone or computer, it inevitably leads to a face-to-face meeting. The best thing for the aviation industry was the Internet.”

**201003**

When George Orwell wrote in 1941 that England was “the most class-ridden country under the sun”, he was only partly right. Societies have always had their hierarchies, with some group perched at the top. In the Indian state of Bihar the Ranveer Sena, an upper-caste private army, even killed to stay there.

By that measure class in Britain hardly seems entrenched. But in another way Orwell was right, and continues to be. As a new YouGov poll shows, Britons are surprisingly alert to class — both their own and that of others. And they still think class is sticky. According to the poll, 48% of people aged 30 or over say they expect to end up better off than their parents. But only 28% expect to end up in a different class. More than two-thirds think neither they nor their children will leave the class they were born into.

What does this thing that people cannot escape consist of these days? And what do people look at when decoding which class someone belongs to? The most useful identifying markers, according to the poll, are occupation, address, accent and income, in that order. The fact that income comes fourth is revealing: though some of the habits and attitudes that class used to define are more widely spread than they were, class still indicates something less blunt than mere wealth.

Occupation is the most trusted guide to class, but changes in the labour market have made that harder to read than when Orwell was writing. Manual workers have shrunk along with farming and heavy industry as a proportion of the workforce, while the number of people in white-collar jobs has surged. Despite this striking change, when they were asked to place themselves in a class, Brits in 2006 huddled in much the same categories as they did when they were asked in 1949. So, jobs, which were once a fairly reliable guide to class, have become misleading.

A survey conducted earlier this year by Expertian shows how this convergence on similar types of work has blurred class boundaries. Expertian asked people in a number of different jobs to place themselves in the working class or the middle class. Secretaries, waiters and journalists were significantly more likely to think themselves middle-class than accountants, computer programmers or civil servants. Many new white-collar jobs offer no more autonomy or better prospects than old blue-collar ones. Yet despite the muddle over what the markers of class are these days, 71% of those polled by YouGov still said they found it very or fairly easy to figure out which class others belong to.

In addition to changes in the labour market, two other things have smudged the borders on the class map. First, since 1945 Britain has received large numbers of immigrants who do not fit easily into existing notions of class and may have their own pyramids to scramble up. The flow of new arrivals has increased since the late 1990s, multiplying this effect.

Second, barriers to fame have been lowered. Britain’s fast-growing ranks of celebrities — like David Beckham and his wife Victoria — form a kind of parallel aristocracy open to talent, or at least to those who are uninhibited enough to meet the requests of television producers. This too has made definitions more complicated.

But many Brits, given the choice, still prefer to identify with the class they were born into rather than that which their jobs or income would suggest. This often entails pretending to be more humble than is actually the case: 22% of white-collar workers told YouGov that they consider themselves working class. Likewise, the Expertian survey found that one in ten adults who call themselves working class are among the richest asset-owners, and that over half a million households which earn more than $191,000 a year say they are working class. Pretending to be grander than income and occupation suggest is rarer, though it happens too.

If class no longer describes a clear social, economic or even political status, is it worth paying any attention to? Possibly, yes. It is still in most cases closely correlated with educational attainment and career expectations.

**201004**

The train was whirling onward with such dignity of motion that a glance from the window seemed simply to prove that plains of Texas were pouring eastward. Vast flats of green grass, dull-hued spaces of mesquite and cactus, little groups of frame houses, woods of light and tender trees, all were sweeping into the east, sweeping over the horizon, a precipice.

A newly married pair had boarded this coach at San Antonio. The man’s face was reddened from many days in the wind and sun, and a direct result of his new black clothes was that his brick-coloured hands were constantly performing in a most conscious fashion. From time to time he looked down respectfully at his attire. He sat with a hand on each knee, like a man waiting in a barber’s shop. The glances he devoted to other passengers were furtive and shy.

The bride was not pretty, nor was she very young. She wore a dress of blue cashmere, with small reservations of velvet here and there, and with steel buttons abounding. She continually twisted her head to regard her puff sleeves, very stiff, and high. They embarrassed her. It was quite apparent that she had cooked, and that she expected to cook, dutifully. The blushes caused by the careless scrutiny of some passengers as she had entered the car were strange to see upon this plain, under-class countenance, which was drawn in placid, almost emotionless lines.

They were evidently very happy. “Ever been in a parlor-car before?” he asked, smiling with delight. “No,” she answered; “I never was. It’s fine, ain’t it?”

“Great! And then after a while we’ll go forward to the dinner, and get a big lay-out. Fresh meal in the world.

Charge a dollar.”

“Oh, do they?” cried the bride. “Charge a dollar? Why, that’s too much — for us — ain’t it, Jack?” “Nor this trip, anyhow,” he answered bravely. “We’re going to go the whole thing.”

Later he explained to her about the trains. “You see, it’s a thousand miles from one end of Texas to the other; and this runs right across it, and never stops but four times.” He had the pride of an owner. He pointed out to her the dazzling fittings of the coach; and in truth her eyes opened wider and she contemplated the sea-green figured velvet, the shining brass, silver, and glass, the wood that gleamed as darkly brilliant as the surface of a pool of oil. At one end a bronze figure sturdily held a support for a separated chamber, and at convenient places on the ceiling were frescos in olive and silver.

To the minds of the pair, their surroundings reflected the glory of their marriage that morning in San Antonio; this was the environment of their new estate; and the man’s face in particular beamed with an elation that made him appear ridiculous to the Negro porter. This individual at times surveyed them from afar with an amused and superior grin. On other occasions he bullied them with skill in ways that did not make it exactly plain to them that they were being bullied. He subtly used all the manners of the most unconquerable kind of snobbery. He oppressed them. But of this oppression they had small knowledge, and they speedily forgot that infrequently a number of travelers covered them with stares of derisive enjoyment. Historically there was supposed to be something infinitely humorous in their situation.

“We are due in Yellow Sky at 3:42,” he said, looking tenderly into her eyes.

“Oh, are we?” she said, as if she had not been aware of it. To evince surprise at her husband’s statement was part of her wifely amiability. She took from a pocket a little silver watch; and as she held it before her, and stared at it with a frown of attention, the new husband's face shone.

“I bought it in San Anton’ from a friend of mine,” he told her gleefully.

“It’s seventeen minutes past twelve,” she said, looking up at him with a kind of shy and clumsy coquetry. A passenger, noting this play, grew excessively sardonic, and winked at himself in one of the numerous mirrors.

At last they went to the dining-car. Two rows of Negro waiters, in glowing white suits, surveyed their entrance with the interest, and also the equanimity, of men who had been forewarned. The pair fell to the lot of a waiter who happened to feel pleasure in steering them through their meal. He viewed them with the manner of a fatherly pilot, his countenance radiant with benevolence. The patronage, entwined with the ordinary deference, was not plain to them. And yet, as they returned to their coach, they showed in their faces a sense of escape.

**2012**

**201201**

I used to look at my closet and see clothes. These days, whenever I cast my eyes upon the stacks of shoes and hangers of shirts, sweaters and jackets, I see water.

It takes 569 gallons to manufacture a T-shirt, from its start in the cotton fields to its appearance on store shelves. A pair of running shoes? 1,247 gallons.

Until last fall, I’d been oblivious to my “water footprint”, which is defined as the total volume of freshwater that is used to produce goods and services, according to the Water Footprint Network. The Dutch nonprofit has been working to raise awareness of freshwater scarcity since 2008, but it was through the “Green Blue Book” by Thomas M. Kostigen that I was able to see how my own actions factored in.

I’ve installed gray-water systems to reuse the wastewater from my laundry, machine and bathtub and reroute it to my landscape—systems that save, on average, 50 gallons of water per day. I’ve set up rain barrels and infiltration pits to collect thousands of gallons of storm water cascading from my roof. I’ve even entered the last bastion of greendom—installing a composting toilet.

Suffice to say, I’ve been feeling pretty satisfied with myself for all the drinking water I’ve saved with these big-ticket projects.

Now I realize that my daily consumption choices could have an even larger effect—not only on the local water supply but also globally: 1.1 billion people have no access to freshwater, and, in the future, those who do have access will have less of it.

To see how much virtual water I was using, I logged on to the “Green Blue Book” website and used its water footprint calculator, entering my daily consumption habits. Tallying up the water footprint of my breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks, as well as my daily dose of over-the-counter uppers and downers—coffee, wine and beer—I’m using 512 gallons of virtual water each day just to feed myself.

In a word: alarming.

Even more alarming was how much hidden water I was using to get dressed. I’m hardly a clotheshorse, but the few new items I buy once again trumped the amount of water flowing from my faucets each day. If I’m serious about saving water, I realized I could make some simple lifestyle shifts. Looking more closely at the areas in my life that use the most virtual water, it was food and clothes, specifically meat, coffee and, oddly, blue jeans and leather jackets.

Being a motorcyclist, I own an unusually large amount of leather - boots and jackets in particular. All of it is enormously water intensive. It takes 7,996 gallons to make a leather.jacket, leather being a byproduct of beef. It takes 2,866 gallons of water to make a single pair of blue jeans, because they’re made from water-hogging cotton.

Crunching the numbers for the amount of clothes I buy every year, it looks a lot like my friend’s swimming pool. My entire closet is borderline Olympic.

Gulp.

My late resolution is to buy some items used. Underwear and socks are, of course, exempt from this strategy, but I have no problem shopping less and also shopping at Goodwill. In fact, I’d been doing that for the past year to save money. My clothes’ outrageous water footprint just feinforced it for me.

More conscious living and substitution, rather than sacrifice, are the prevailing ideas with the water footprint. It’s one I’m trying, and that’s had an unusual upside. I had a hamburger recently, and I enjoyed it a lot more since it is now an occasional treat rather than a weekly habit. (One gallon =3.8 litres)

**201202**

In her novel of “Reunion, American Style”, Rona Jaffe suggests that a class reunion “is more than a sentimental journey. It is also a way of answering the question that lies at the back of nearly all our minds. Did they do better than I?”

Jaffe’s observation may be misplaced but not completely lost. According to a study conducted by social psychologist Jack Sparacino, the overwhelming majority who attend reunions aren’t there invidiously to compare their recent accomplishments with those of their former classmates. Instead, they hope, primarily, to relive their earlier successes.

Certainly, a few return to show their former classmates how well they have done; others enjoy observing the changes that have occurred in their classmates (not always in themselves, of course). But the majority who attend their class reunions do so to relive the good times they remember having when they were younger. In his study, Sparacino found that, as high school students, attendees had been more popular, more often regarded as attractive, and more involved in extracurricular activities than those classmates who chose not to attend. For those who turned up at their reunions, then, the old times were also the good times!

It would appear that Americans have a special fondness for reunions, judging by their prevalence. Major league baseball players, fraternity members, veterans groups, high school and college graduates, and former Boy Scouts all hold reunions on a regular basis. In addition, family reunions frequently attract blood relatives from faraway places who spend considerable money and time to reunite.

Actually, in their affection for reuniting with friends, family or colleagues, Americans are probably no different from any other people, except that Americans have created a mind-boggling number and variety of institutionalized forms of gatherings to facilitate the satisfaction of this desire. Indeed, reunions have increasingly become formal events that are organized on a regular basis and, in the process, they have also become big business.

Shell Norris of Class Reunion, Inc., says that Chicago alone has 1,500 high school reunions each year. A conservative estimate on the national level would be 10,000 annually. At one time, all high school reunions were organized by volunteers, usually female homemakers. In the last few years, however, as more and more women have entered the labour force, alumni reunions are increasingly being planned by specialized companies rather than by part-time volunteers.

The first college reunion was held by the alumni of Yale University in 1792. Graduates of Pennsylvania, Princeton, Stanford, and Brown followed suit. And by the end of the 19th century, most 4-year institutions were holding alumni reunions.

The variety of college reunions is impressive. At Princeton, alumni parade through the town wearing their class uniforms and singing their alma mater. At Marietta College, they gather for a dinner-dance on a steamship cruising the Ohio River.

Clearly, the thought of cruising on a steamship or marching through the streets is usually not, by itself, sufficient reason for large numbers of alumni to return to campus. Alumni who decide to attend their reunions share a common identity based on the years they spent together as undergraduates. For this reason, universities that somehow establish a common bond – for example, because they are relatively small or especially prestigious—tend to draw substantial numbers of their alumni to reunions. In an effort to enhance this common identity, larger colleges and universities frequently build their class reunions on participation in smaller units, such as departments or schools. Or they encourage “affinity reunions” for groups of former cheerleaders, editors, fraternity members, musicians, members of military organizations on campus, and the like.

Of course, not every alumnus is fond of his or her alma mater. Students who graduated during the late 1960s may be especially reluctant to get involved in alumni events. They were part of the generation that conducted sit-ins and teach-ins directed at university administrators, protested military recruitment on campus and marched against “establishment politics.” If this generation has a common identity, it may fall outside of their university ties— or even be hostile to them. Even as they enter their middle years, alumni who continue to hold unpleasant memories of college during this period may not wish to attend class reunions.

**201203**

One time while on his walk George met Mr. Cattanzara coming home very late from work. He wondered if he was drunk but then could tell he wasn’t. Mr. Cattanzara, a stocky, bald-headed man who worked in a change booth on an IRT station, lived on the next block after George’s, above a shoe repair store. Nights, during the hot weather, he sat on his stoop in an undershirt, reading the New York Times in the light of the shoemaker’s window. He read it from the first page to the last, then went up to sleep. And all the time he was reading the paper, his wife, a fat woman with a white face, leaned out of the window, gazing into the street, her thick white arms folded under her loose breast, on the window ledge.

Once in a while Mr. Cattanzara came home drunk, but it was a quiet drunk. He never made any trouble, only walked stiffly up the street and slowly climbed the stairs into the hall. Though drunk he looked the same as always, except for his tight walk, the quietness, and that his eyes were wet. George liked Mr. Cattanzara because he remembered him giving him nickels to buy lemon ice with when he was a squirt. Mr. Cattanzara was a different type than those in the neighbourhood. He asked different questions than the others when he met you, and he seemed to know what went on in all the newspapers. He read them, as his fat sick wife watched from the window.

“What are you doing with yourself this summer, George?” Mr. Cattanzara asked. “I see you walkin’ around at night.”

George felt embarrassed. “I like to walk.” “What are you doin’ in the day now?”

“Nothing much just now. I’m waiting for a job.” Since it shamed him to admit that he wasn’t working, George said, “I’m reading a lot to pick up my education.”

“What are you readin’?”

George hesitated, then said, “I got a list of books in the library once and now I’m gonna read them this summer.” He felt strange and a little unhappy saying this, but he wanted Mr. Cattanzara to respect him.

“How many books are there on it?”

“I never counted them. Maybe around a hundred.” Mr. Cattanzara whistled through his teeth.

“I figure if I did that,” George went on earnestly, “it would help me in my education. I don’t mean the kind they give you in high school. I want to know different things than they learn there, if you know what I mean.”

The change maker nodded. “Still and all, one hundred books is a pretty big load for one summer.” “It might take longer.”

“After you’re finished with some, maybe you and I can shoot the breeze about them?” said Mr. Cattanzara. “When I’m finished,” George answered.

Mr. Cattanzara went home and George continued on his walk. After that, though he had the urge to, George did nothing different from usual. He still took his walks at night, ending up in the little park. But one evening the shoemaker on the next block stopped George to say he was a good boy, and George figured that Mr. Cattanzara had told him all about the books he was reading. From the shoemaker it must have gone down the street, because George saw a couple of people smiling kindly at him, though nobody spoke to him personally. He felt a little better around the neighbourhood and liked it more, though not so much he would want to live in it forever. He had never exactly disliked the people in it, yet he had never liked them very much either. It was the fault of the neighbourhood. To his surprise, George found out that his father and his sister Sophie knew about his reading too. His father was too shy to say anything about it—he was never much of a talker in his whole life—but Sophie was softer to George, and she showed him in other ways she was proud of him.

**201204**

Abraham Lincoln turns 200 this year, and he’s beginning to show his age. When his birthday arrives, on February 12, Congress will hold a special joint session in the Capitol’s National Statuary Hall, a wreath will be laid at the great memorial in Washington, and a webcast will link school classrooms for a “teach-in” honouring his memory.

Admirable as they are, though, the events will strike many of us Lincoln fans as inadequate, even halfhearted— and another sign that our appreciation for the 16th president and his towering achievements is slipping away. And you don’t have to be a Lincoln enthusiast to believe that this is something we cant afford to lose.

Compare this year’s celebration with the Lincoln centennial, in 1909. That year, Lincolns likeness made its debut on the penny, thanks to approval from the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury. Communities and civic associations in every comer of the country erupted in parades, concerts, balls, lectures, and military displays. We still feel the effects today: The momentum unloosed in 1909 led to the Lincoln Memorial, opened in 1922, and the Lincoln Highway, the first paved transcontinental thoroughfare.

The celebrants in 1909 had a few inspirations we lack today. Lincoln’s presidency was still a living memory for countless Americans. In 2009 we are farther in time from the end of the Second World War than they were from the Civil War; families still felt the loss of loved ones from that awful national trauma.

But Americans in 1909 had something more: an unembarrassed appreciation for heroes and an acute sense of the way that even long-dead historical figures press in on the present and make us who we are.

One story will illustrate what I’m talking about.

In 2003 a group of local citizens arranged to place a statue of Lincoln in Richmond, Virginia, former capital of the Confederacy. The idea touched off a firestorm of controversy. The Sons of Confederate Veterans held a public conference of carefully selected scholars to “reassess” the legacy of Lincoln. The verdict — no surprise — was negative: Lincoln was labeled everything from a racist totalitarian to a teller of dirty jokes.

I covered the conference as a reporter, but what really unnerved me was a counter-conference of scholars to refute the earlier one. These scholars drew a picture of Lincoln that only our touchy-feely age could conjure up. The man who oversaw the most savage war in our history was described — by his admirers, remember — as “nonjudgmental,” “unmoralistic,” “comfortable with ambiguity.”

I felt the way a friend of mine felt as we later watched the unveiling of the Richmond statue in a subdued ceremony: “But hes so small!”

The statue in Richmond was indeed small; like nearly every Lincoln statue put up in the past half century, it was life-size and was placed at ground level, a conscious rejection of the heroic— approachable and human, yes, but not something to look up to.

The Richmond episode taught me that Americans have lost the language to explain Lincoln’s greatness even to ourselves. Earlier generations said they wanted their children to be like Lincoln: principled, kind, compassionate, resolute. Today we want Lincoln to be like us.

This helps to explain the long string of recent books in which writers have presented a Lincoln made after their own image. We’ve had Lincoln as humorist and Lincoln as manic-depressive, Lincoln the business sage, the conservative Lincoln and the liberal Lincoln, the emancipator and the racist, the stoic philosopher, the Christian, the atheist—Lincoln over easy and Lincoln scrambled.

What’s often missing,, though, is the timeless Lincoln, the Lincoln whom all generations, our own no less than that of 1909, can lay claim to. Lucky for us, those memorializers from a century ago—and, through them, Lincoln himself— have left us a hint of where to find him. The Lincoln Memorial is the most visited of our presidential monuments. Here is where we find the Lincoln who endures: in the words he left us, defining the country we’ve inherited. Here is the Lincoln who can be endlessly renewed and who, 200 years after his birth, retains the power to renew us.

**2013**

**201301**

Three hundred years ago news travelled by word of mouth or letter, and circulated in taverns and coffee houses in the form of pamphlets and newsletters. “The coffee houses particularly are very roomy for a free conversation, and for reading at an easier rate all manner of printed news,” noted one observer. Everything changed in 1833 when the first mass-audience newspaper, The New York Sun, pioneered the use of advertising to reduce the cost of news, thus giving advertisers access to a wider audience. The penny press, followed by radio and television, turned news from a two-way conversation into a one-way broadcast, with a relatively small number of firms controlling the media.

Now, the news industry is returning to something closer to the coffee house. The internet is making news more participatory, social and diverse, reviving the discursive characteristics of the era before the mass media. That will have profound effects on society and politics. In much of the world, the mass media are flourishing. Newspaper circulation rose globally by 6% between 2005 and 2009. But those global figures mask a sharp decline in readership in rich countries.

Over the past decade, throughout the Western world, people have been giving up newspapers and TV news and keeping up with events in profoundly different ways. Most strikingly, ordinary people are increasingly involved in compiling, sharing, filtering, discussing and distributing news. Twitter lets people anywhere, report what they are seeing. Classified documents are published in their thousands online. Mobile-phone footage of Arab uprisings and American tornadoes is posted on social-networking sites and shown on television newscasts. Social-networking sites help people find, discuss and share news with their friends.

And it is not just readers who are challenging the media elite. Technology firms including Google, Facebook and Twitter have become important conduits of news. Celebrities and world leaders publish updates directly via social networks; many countries now make raw data available through “open government” initiatives. The Internet lets people read newspapers or watch television channels from around the world. The web has allowed new providers of news, from individual bloggers to sites, to rise to prominence in a very short space of time. And it has made possible entirely new approaches to journalism, such as that practiced by WikiLeaks, which provides an anonymous way for whistleblowers to publish documents. The news agenda is no longer controlled by a few press barons and state outlets.

In principle, every liberal should celebrate this. A more participatory and social news environment, with a remarkable diversity and range of news sources, is a good thing. The transformation of the news business is unstoppable, and attempts to reverse it are doomed to failure. As producers of new journalism, individuals can be scrupulous with facts and transparent with their sources. As consumers, they can be general in their tastes and demanding in their standards. And although this transformation does raise concerns, there is much to celebrate in the noisy, diverse, vociferous, argumentative and stridently alive environment of the news business in the ages of the internet. The coffee house is buck. Enjoy it.

**201302**

Paris is like pornography. You respond even if you don’t want to. You turn a corner and see a vista, and your imagination bolts away. Suddenly you are thinking about what it would be like to live in Paris, and then you think about all the lives you have not lived. Sometimes, though, when you are lucky, you only think about how many pleasures the day ahead holds. Then, you feel privileged.

The lobby of the hotel is decorated in red and gold. It gives off a whiff of 19th-century decadence. Probably as much as any hotel in Paris, this hotel is sexy. I was standing facing the revolving doors and the driveway beyond. A car with a woman in the back seat—a woman in a short skirt and black-leather jacket—pulled up before the hotel door. She swung off and she was wearing high heels. Normally, my mind would have leaped and imagined a story for this woman. Now it didn’t. I stood there and told myself. Cheer up. You’re in Paris.

In many ways, Paris is best visited in winter. The tourist crowds are at a minimum, and one is not being jammed off the narrow sidewalks along the Rue Dauphine. More than this, Paris is like many other European cities in that the season of blockbuster cultural events tends to begin in mid-to late fall and so, by the time of winter, most of the cultural treasures of the city are laid out to be admired.

The other great reason why Paris in winter is so much better than Paris in spring and fall is that after the end of the August holidays and the return of chic Parisian women to their city, the restaurant-opening season truly begins hopping. By winter, many of the new restaurants have worked out their kinks and, once the hype has died down, it is possible to see which restaurants are actually good and which are merely noisy and crowded.

Most people are about as happy as they set their mind to being, Lincoln said. In Paris it doesn’t take much to be happy. Outside the hotel, the sky was pale and felt very high up. I walked the few blocks to the Seine and began running along the blue-green river toward the Eiffel Tower. The tower in the distance was black, and felt strange and beautiful the way that many things built for the joy of building do. As I ran toward it, because of its lattice structure, the tower seemed obviously delicate. Seeing it, I felt a sense of protectiveness.

I think it was this moment of protectiveness that marked the change in my mood and my slowly becoming thrilled with being in Paris.

During winter evenings, Paris’s streetlamps have a halo and resemble dandelions. In winter, when one leaves the Paris street and enters a cafe or restaurant, the light and temperature change suddenly and dramatically, there is the sense of having discovered something secret. In winter, because the days are short, there is an urgency to the choices one makes. There is the sense that life is short and so let us decide on what matters.

**201303**

If you want to know why Denmark is the world’s leader in wind power, start with a three-hour car trip from the capital Copenhagen—mind the bicyclists—to the small town of Lem on the far west coast of Jutland. You’ll feel it as you cross the 6.8 kin-long Great Belt Bridge: Denmark’s bountiful wind, so fierce even on a calm summer’s day that it threatens to shove your car into the waves below. But wind itself is only part of the reason. In Lem, workers in factories the size of aircraft hangars build the wind turbines sold by Vestas, the Danish company that has emerged as the industry’s top manufacturer around the globe. The work is both gross and fine; employees weld together massive curved sheets of steel to make central shafts as tall as a 14-story building, and assemble engine housings that hold some 18,000 separate parts. Most impressive are the turbine’s blades, which scoop the wind with each sweeping revolution. As smooth as an Olympic swimsuit and honed to aerodynamic perfection, each blade weighs in at 7,000 kg, and they’re what help make Vestas’ turbines the best in the world. “The blade is where the secret is,” says Erik Therkelsen, a Vestas executive. “If we can make a turbine, it’s sold.”

But technology, Like the wind itself, is just one more part of the reason for Denmark’s dominance. In the end, it happened because Denmark had the political and public will to decide that it wanted to be a leader — and to follow through. Beginning in 1979, the government began a determined programme of subsidies and loan guarantees to build up its wind industry. Copenhagen covered 30% of investment costs, and guaranteed loans for large turbine exporters such as Vestas. It also mandated that utilities purchase wind energy at a preferential price—thus guaranteeing investors a customer base. Energy taxes were channeled into research centres, where engineers crafted designs that would eventually produce cutting-edge giants like Vestas’ 3-megawatt (MW) V90 turbine.

As a result, wind turbines now dot Denmark. The country, gets more than 19% of its electricity from the breeze (Spain and Portugal, the next highest countries, get about 10%) and Danish companies control one-third of the global wind market, earning billions in exports and creating a national champion from scratch. “They were out early in driving renewables, and that gave them the chance to be a technology leader and a job-creation leader,” says Jake Schmidt, international climate policy director for the New York City-based Natural Resources Defense Council. “They have always been one or two steps ahead of others.”

The challenge now for Denmark is to help the rest of the world catch up. Beyond wind, the country (pop. 5.5 million) is a world leader in energy efficiency, getting more GDP per watt than any other member of the E.U. Carbon emissions are down 13.3% from 1990 levels and total energy consumption has barely moved, even as Denmark’s economy continued to grow at a healthy clip. With Copenhagen set to host all- important U.N. climate change talks in December — where the world hopes for a successor to the expiring Kyoto Protocol—and the global recession beginning to hit environmental plans in capitals everywhere, Denmark’s example couldn’t be more timely. “We’ll try to make Denmark a showroom,” says Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen. “You can reduce energy use and carbon emissions, and achieve economic growth.”

It’s tempting to assume that Denmark is innately green, with the kind of Scandinavian good conscience that has made it such a pleasant global citizen since, oh, the whole Viking thing. But the country’s policies were actually born from a different emotion, one now in common currency: fear. When the 1973 oil crisis hit, 90% of Denmark’s energy came from petroleum, almost all of it imported. Buffeted by the same supply shocks that hit the rest of the developed world, Denmark launched a rapid drive for energy conservation, to the point of introducing car-free Sundays and asking businesses to switch off tights during closing hours. Eventually the Mideast oil started flowing again, and the Danes themselves began enjoying the benefits of the petroleum and natural gas in their slice of the North Sea. It was enough to make them more than self-sufficient. But unlike most other countries, Denmark never forgot the lessons of 1973, and kept driving for greater energy efficiency and a more diversified energy supply. The Danish parliament raised taxes on energy to encourage conservation and established subsidies and standards to support more efficient buildings. “It all started out without any regard for the climate or the environment,” says Svend Auken, the former head of Denmark’s opposition Social Democrat Party and the architect of the country’s environmental policies in the 1990s. “But today there’s a consensus that we need to build renewable power.”

To the rest of the world, Denmark has the power of its example, showing that you can stay rich and grow green at the same time. “Denmark has proven that acting on climate can be a positive experience, not just painful,” says NRDC’s Schmidt. The real pain could come from failing to follow in their footsteps.

**201304**

The first clue came when I got my hair cut. The stylist offered not just the usual coffee or tea but a complimentary nail-polish change while I waited for my hair to dry. Maybe she hoped this little amenity would slow the growing inclination of women to stretch each haircut to last four months while nursing our hair back to whatever natural color we long ago forgot.

Then there was the appliance salesman who offered to carry my bags as we toured the microwave aisle. When I called my husband to ask him to check some specs online, the salesman offered a preemptive discount, lest the surfing turn up the same model cheaper in another store. That night, for the first time, I saw the Hyundai ad promising shoppers that if they buy a car and then lose their job in the next year, they can return it.

Suddenly everything’s on sale. The upside to the economic downturn is the immense incentive it gives retailers to treat you like a queen for a day. During the flush times, salespeople were surly, waiters snobby. But now the customer rules, just for showing up. There’s more room to stretch out on the flight, even in a coach. The malls have that serene aura of undisturbed wilderness, with scarcely a shopper in sight. Every conversation with anyone selling anything is a pantomime of pain and bluff. Finger the scarf, then start to walk away, and its price floats silkily downward. When the mechanic calls to tell you that brakes and a timing belt and other services will run close to $2,000, it’s time to break out the newly perfected art of the considered pause. You really don’t even have to say anything pitiful before he’ll offer to knock a few hundred dollars off.

Restaurants are also caught in a fit of ardent hospitality, especially around Wail Street: Trinity Place offers $3 drinks at happy hour any day the market goes down, with the slogan “Market tanked? Get tanked! “ —which ensures a lively crowd for the closing bell. The “21” Club has decided that men no longer need to wear ties, so long as they bring their wallets. Food itself is friendlier: you notice more comfort food, a truce between chef and patron that is easier to enjoy now that you can get a table practically anywhere. New York Times restaurant critic Frank Bruni characterizes the new restaurant demeanor as “extreme solicitousness tinged with outright desperation.” “You need to hug the customer,” one owner told him.

There’s a chance that eventually we’ll return all this kindness with the extravagant spending that was once decried but now everyone is hoping will restart the economy. But human nature is funny that way. In dangerous times, we clench and squint at the deal that looks too good to miss, suspecting that it must be too good to be true. Is the store with the supercheap flat screens going to go bust and thus not be there to honour the “free” extended warranty? Is there something wrong with that free cheese? Store owners will tell you horror stories about shoppers with attitude, who walk in demanding discounts and flaunt their new power at every turn. These store owners wince as they sense bad habits forming: Will people expect discounts forever? Will their hard-won brand luster be forever cheapened, especially for items whose allure depends on their being ridiculously priced?

There will surely come a day when things go back to “normal”; retail sales even inched up in January after sinking for the previous six months. But I wonder what it will take for us to see those $545 Sigerson Morrison studded toe-ring sandals as reasonable? Bargain-hunting can be addictive regardless of the state of the markets, and haggling is a low-risk, high-value contact sport. Trauma digs deep into habit, like my 85- year-old mother still calling her canned-goods cabinet “the bomb shelter.” The children of the First Depression were saving string and preaching sacrifice long after the skies cleared. They came to be called the “greatest generation.” As we learn to be decent stewards of our resources, who knows what might come of it? We have lived in an age of wanton waste, and there is value in practicing conservation that goes far beyond our own bottom line.

**2014**

**201401**

My class at Harvard Business School helps students understand what good management theory is and how it is built. In each session, we look at one company through the lenses of different theories, using them to explain how the company got into its situation and to examine what action will yield the needed results. On the last day of class, I asked my class to turn those theoretical lenses on themselves to find answers to two questions: First, How can I be sure I’ll be happy in my career? Second, How can I be sure my relationships with my spouse and my family will become an enduring source of happiness? Here are some management tools that can be used to help you lead a purposeful life.

1.USE YOUR RESOURCES WISELY. Your decisions about allocating your personal time, energy, and talent shape your life’s strategy. I have a bunch of businesses that compete for these resources: I’m trying to have a rewarding relationship with my wife, raise great kids, contribute to my community, succeed in my career, and contribute to my church. And I have exactly the same problem that a corporation does. I have a limited amount of time, energy and talent. How much do I devote to each of these pursuits?

Allocation choices can make your life turn out to be very different from what you intended. Sometimes that’s good: Opportunities that you never planned for emerge. But if you don’t invest your resources wisely, the outcome can be bad. As I think about people who inadvertently invested in lives of hollow unhappiness, I can’t help believing that their troubles related right back to a short-term perspective.

When people with a high need for achievement have an extra half hour of time or an extra ounce of energy, they’ll unconsciously allocate it to activities that yield the most tangible accomplishments. Our careers provide the most concrete evidence that we’re moving forward. You ship a product, finish a design, complete a presentation, close a sale, teach a class, publish a paper, get paid, get promoted. In contrast, investing time and energy in your relationships with your spouse and children typically doesn’t offer that same immediate sense of achievement. Kids misbehave every day. It’s really not until 20 years down the road that you can say, I raised a good son or a good daughter. You can neglect your relationship with your spouse and on a daily basis it doesn’t seem as if thing are deteriorating. People who are driven to excel have this unconscious propensity to underinvest in their families and overinvest in their careers, even though intimate and loving family relationships are the most powerful and enduring source of happiness.

If you study the root causes of business disasters, over and over you’ll find this predisposition toward endeavors that offer immediate gratification. If you look at personal lives through that lens, you’ll see that same stunning and sobering pattern: people allocating fewer and fewer resources to the things they would have once said mattered most.

2.CREATE A FAMILY CULTURE. It’s one thing to see into the foggy future with a acuity and chart the course corrections a company must make. But it’s quite another to persuade employees to line up and work cooperatively to take the company in that new direction.

When there is little agreement, you have to use power tools—coercion, threats, punishments and so on, to secure cooperation. But if employee’s ways of working together succeed over and over, consensus begins to form. Ultimately, people don’t even think about whether their way yields success. They embrace priorities and follow procedures by instinct and assumption rather than by explicit decision, which means that they’ve created a culture. Culture, in compelling but unspoken ways, dictates the proven, acceptable methods by which member s of a group address recurrent problems. And culture defines the priority given to different types of problems. It can be a powerful management tool.

I use this model to address the question, How can I be my family becomes an enduring source of happiness? My students quickly see that the simplest way parents can elicit cooperation from children is to wield power tools. But there comes a point during the teen years when power tools no longer work. At that point, parents start wishing they had begun working with their children at a very young age to build a culture in which children instinctively behave respectfully toward one another, obey their parents, and choose the right thing to do. Families have cultures, just a companies do. Those cultures can be built consciously.

If you want your kids to have strong self-esteem and the confidence that they can solve hard problems, those qualities won’t magically materialize in high school. You have to design them into family’s culture, and you have to think about this very early on. Like employees, children build self-esteem by doing things that are hard and learning what works.

**201402**

It was nearly bedtime and when they awoke next morning land would be in sight. Dr. Macphail lit his pipe and, leaning over the rail, searched the heavens for the Southern Cross. After two years at the front and a wound that had taken longer to heal than it should, he was glad to settle down quietly at Apia for twelve months at least, and he felt already better for the journey. Since some of the passengers were leaving the ship next day at Pago-Pago they had had a little dance that evening and in his ears hammered still the harsh notes of the mechanical piano. But the deck was quiet at last. A little way off he saw his wife in a long chair talking with the Davidsons, and he strolled over to her. When he sat down under the light and took his hat you saw that he had very red hair, with a bald patch on the crown, and the red, freckled skin which accompanies red hair; he was a man of forty, thin, with a pinched face, precise and rather pedantic; and he spoke with a Scots accent in a very low, quiet voice.

Between the Macphails and the Davidsons, who were missionaries, there had arisen the intimacy of shipboard, which is due to proximity rather than to any community of taste. Their chief tie was the disapproval they shared of the men who spent their days and nights in the smoking-room playing poker or bridge and drinking. Mrs. Macphail was not a little flattered to think that she and her husband were the only people on board with whom the Davidsons were willing to associate, and even the doctor, shy but no fool, half unconsciously acknowledged the compliment. It was only because he was of an argumentative mind that in their cabin at night he permitted himself to carp.

“Mrs. Davidson was saying she didn’t know how they’d have got through the journey if it hadn’t been for us,” said Mrs. Macphail, as she neatly brushed out her transformation. “She said we were really the only people on the ship they cared to know.”

“I shouldn’t have thought a missionary was such a big bug that he could afford to put on frills.”

“It’s not frills. I quite understand what she means. It wouldn’t have been very nice for the Davidsons to have to mix with all that rough lot in the smoking-room.”

The founder of their religion wasn’t so exclusive, said Dr. Macphail with a chuckle.

I’ve asked you over and over again not to joke about religion, answered his wife. I shouldn’t like to have a nature like yours, Alec. You never look for the best in people.

He gave her a sidelong glance with his pale, blue eyes, but did not reply. After many years of married life he had learned that it was more conducive to peace to leave his wife with the last word. He was undressed before she was, and climbing into the upper bunk he settled down to read himself to sleep.

When he came on deck next morning they were close to land. He looked at it with greedy eyes. There was a thin strip of silver beach rising quickly to hills covered to the top with luxuriant vegetation. The coconut trees, thick and green, came nearly to the water’s edge, and among them you saw the grass houses of the Samoans; and here and there, gleaming white, a little church. Mrs. Davidson came and stood beside him. She was dressed in black and wore round her neck a gold chain, from which dangled a cross. She was a little woman, with brown, dull hair very elaborately arranged, and she had prominent blue eyes behind invisible pince-nez. Her face was long, like a sheep’s, but she gave no impression of foolishness, rather of extreme alertness; she had the quick movements of a bird. The most remarkable thing about her was her voice, high, metallic, and without inflection; it fell on the ear with a hard monotony, irritating to the nerves like the pitiless clamour of the pneumatic drill.

This must seem like home to you, said Dr. Macphail, with his thin, difficult smile.

Ours are low islands, you know, not like these. Coral. These are volcanic. We’ve got another ten days’ journey to reach them.

In these parts that’s almost like being in the next street at home, said Dr. Macphail facetiously.

Well, that’s rather an exaggerated way of putting it, but one does look at distances differently in the J South Seas. So far you are right.

Dr. Macphail sighed faintly.

**201403**

Today we make room for a remarkably narrow range of personality styles. We’re told that to be great is to be bold, to be happy is to be sociable. We see ourselves as a nation of extroverts-which means that we’ve lost sight of who we really are. One-third to one-half of Americans are introverts-in the other words, one out of every two or three people you know. If you’re not an introvert yourself, you are surely raising, managing, married to, or coupled with one.

If these statistics surprise you, that’s probably because so many people pretend to be extroverts. Closet introverts pass undetected on playgrounds, in high school locker rooms, and in the corridors of corporate America. Some fool even themselves, until some life event-a layoff, an empty nest, an inheritance that frees them to spend time as they like-jolts them into taking stock of their true natures. You have only to raise this subject with your friends and acquaintances to find that the most unlikely people consider themselves introverts.

It makes sense that so many introverts hide even from themselves. We live with a value system that I call the Extrovert Ideal-the omnipresent belief that the ideal self is gregarious, alpha comfortable in the spotlight. The archetypal extrovert prefers action to contemplation, risk-taking to heed-taking, certainty to doubt. He favors quick decisions, even at the risk of being wrong. She works well in teams and socializes in groups. We like to think that we value individuality, but all too often we admire one type of individual-the kind who’s comfortable “putting himself out there.” Sure, we allow technologically gifted loners who launch companies in garages to have any personality they please, but they are the exceptions, not the rule, and our tolerance extends mainly to those who get fabulously wealthy or hold the promise of doing so.

Introversion-along with its cousins sensitivity, seriousness, and shyness-is now a second-class personality trait, somewhere between a disappointment and a pathology. Introverts living under the Extrovert Ideal are like women in a man’s world, discounted because of a trait that goes to the core of who they are. Extroversion is an enormously appealing personality style, but we’ve turned it into an oppressive standard to which most of us feel we must conform.

The Extrovert Ideal has been documented in many studies, though this research has never been grouped under a single name. Talkative people, for example, are rated as smarter, better-looking, more interesting, and more desirable as friends. Velocity of speech counts as well as volume: we rank fast talkers as more competent and likable than slow ones. Even the word introvert is stigmatized-one informal study, by psychologist Laurie Helgoe, found that introverts described their own physical appearance in vivid language, but when asked to describe generic introverts they drew a bland and distasteful picture.

But we make a grave mistake to embrace the Extrovert Ideal so unthinkingly. Some of our greatest ideas, art, and inventions-from the theory of evolution to van Gogh’s sunflowers to the personal computer-came from quiet and cerebral people who knew how to tune in to their inner worlds and the treasures to be found there.

**201404**

Speaking two languages rather than just one has obvious practical benefits in an increasingly globalized world. But in recent years, scientists have begun to show that the advantages of bilingualism are even more fundamental than being able to converse with a wider range of people. Being bilingual, it turns out, makes you smarter. It can have a profound effect on your brain, improving cognitive skills not related to language and even shielding against dementia in old age.

This view of bilingualism is remarkably different from the understanding of bilingualism through much of the 20th century. Researchers, educators and policy makers long considered a second language to be an interference, cognitively speaking, that hindered a child’s academic and intellectual development.

They were not wrong about the interference: there is ample evidence that in a bilingual’s brain both language systems are active even when he is using only one language, thus creating situations in which one system obstructs the other. But this interference, researchers are finding out, isn’t so much a handicap as a blessing in disguise. It forces the brain to resolve internal conflict, giving the mind a workout that strengthens its cognitive muscles.

The collective evidence from a number of such studies suggests that the bilingual experience improves the brain’s so-called executive function — a command system that directs the attention processes that we use for planning, solving problems and performing various other mentally demanding tasks. These processes include ignoring distractions to stay focused, switching attention willfully from one thing to another and holding information in mind—like remembering a sequence of directions while driving.

Why does the tussle between two simultaneously active language systems improve these aspects of cognition? Until recently, researchers thought the bilingual advantage stemmed primarily from an ability for inhibition that was honed by the exercise of suppressing one language system: this suppression, it was thought, would help train the bilingual mind to ignore distractions in other contexts. But that explanation increasingly appears to be inadequate, since studies have shown that bilinguals perform better than monolinguals even at tasks that do not require inhibition, like threading a line through an ascending series of numbers scattered randomly on a page.

The key difference between bilinguals and monolinguals may be more basic: a heightened ability to monitor the environment. Bilinguals have to switch languages quite often — you may talk to your father in one language and to your mother in another language, says Albert Costa, a researcher at the University of Pompea Fabra in

Spain. It requires keeping track of changes around you in the same way that we monitor our surroundings when driving. In a study comparing German-Italian bilinguals with Italian monolinguals in completing monitoring tasks, Mr. Costa and his colleagues found that the bilingual subjects not only performed better, but they also did so with less activity in parts of the brain involved in monitoring, indicating that they were efficient at it.

The bilingual experience appears to influence the brain from infancy to old age, and there is reason to believe that it may also apply to those who learn a second language later in life.

**2015**

**201501**

In 2011, many shoppers opted to avoid the frantic crowds and do their holiday shopping from the comfort of their computer. Sales at online retailers gained by more than 15%, making it the biggest season ever. But people are also returning those purchases at record rates, up 8% from last year.

What went wrong? Is the lingering shadow of the global financial crisis making it harder to accept extravagant indulgences? Or that people shop more impulsively — and therefore make bad decisions — when online? Both arguments are plausible. However, there is a third factor: a question of touch. We can love the look but, in an online environment, we cannot feel the quality of a texture, the shape of the fit, the fall of a fold or the weight of an earring. And physically interacting with an object makes you more committed to your purchase.

When my most recent book Brandwashed was released, I teamed up with a local bookstore to conduct an experiment about the differences between the online and offline shopping. I carefully instructed a group of volunteers to promote my book in two different ways. The first was a fairly hands-off approach. Whenever a customer would inquire about my book, the volunteer would take them over to the shelf and point to it. Out of 20 such requests, six customers proceeded with the purchase.

The second option also involved going over to the shelf but, this time, removing the book and then subtly holding onto it for just an extra moment before placing it in the customer's hands. Of the 20 people who were handed the book. 13 ended up buying it. Just physically passing the book showed a big difference in sales. Why? We feel something similar to a sense of ownership when we hold things in our hand. That’s why we establish or reestablish connection by greeting strangers and friends with a handshake. In this case, having to then let go of the book after holding it might generate a subtle sense of loss, and motivate us to make the purchase even more.

A recent study conducted by Bangor University together with the United Kingdom’s Royal Mail service also revealed the power of touch, in this case when it came to snail mail. A deeper and longer-lasting impression of a message was formed when delivered in a letter, as opposed to receiving the same message online. FMRLs showed that, on touching the paper, the emotional center of the brain was activated, thus forming a stronger bond. The study also indicated that once touch becomes part of the process, it could translate into a sense of possession. In other words, we simply feel more committed to possess and thus buy an item when we’ve first touched it. This sense of ownership is simply not part of the equation in the online shopping experience.

As the rituals of purchase in the lead-up to Christmas change, not only do we give less thought to the type of gifts we buy for our loved ones but, through our own digital wish lists, we increasingly control what they buy for us. The reality, however, is that no matter how convinced we all are that digital is the way to go, finding real satisfaction will probably take more than a few simple clicks.

**201502**

My professor brother and I have an argument about head and heart, about whether he overvalues IQ while I learn more toward EQ. We typically have this debate about people—can you be friends with a really smart jerk?—but there’s corollary to animals as well. I’d love it if our dog could fetch the morning paper and then read it to me over coffee, but I actually care much more about her loyal and innocent heart. There’s already enough thinking going on is our house, and we probably spend too much time in our heads. Where we need some role modeling is in instinct, and that’s where a dog is a roving revelation.

I did not grow up with dogs, which meant that my older daughter’s respectful but unyielding determination to get one required some adjustment on my part. I often felt she was training me: from ages of 6 to 9, she gently schooled me in various breeds and their personalities, whispered to the dogs we encountered so they would charm and persuade me, demonstrated by her self-discipline that she was ready for the responsibility. And thus came our dog Twist, whom I sometimes mistake for a third daughter.

At first I thought the challenge would be to train her to sit, to heel, to walk calmly beside us and not go wildly chasing the neighbourhood rabbits. But I soon discovered how much more we had to learn from her than she from us.

If it is true, for example, that the secret to a child’s success is less rare genius than raw persistence, Twist’s ability to stay on task is a model for us all, especially if the task is trying to capture the sunbeam that flicks around the living room as the wind blows through the branches outside. She never succeeds, and she never gives up. This includes when she runs square into walls.

Then there is her unfailing patience, which breaks down only when she senses that dinnertime was 15 minutes ago and we have somehow failed to notice. Even then she is more eager than indignant, and her refusal to whine shows a restraint of which I’m not always capable when hungry.

But the lesson I value most is the one in forgiveness, and Twist first offered this when she was still very young. When she was about 7 months old, we took her to the vet to be sprayed. We turned her over to a stranger, who proceeded to perform a procedure that was probably not pleasant. But when the vet returned her to us, limp and tender, there was no recrimination，no How could you do that to me? It was as though she really knew that we could not intentionally cause her pain, and while she did not understand, she forgave and curled up with her head on my daughter’s lap.

I suppose we could have concluded that she was just blindly loyal and docile. But eventually we knew better. She is entirely capable of disobedience, as she has proved many times. She will ignore us when there are more interesting things to look at, rebuke us when we are careless, bark into the twilight when she has urgent messages to send. But her patience with our failings and fickleness and her willingness to give us a second chance are a daily lesson in gratitude.

My friends who grew up with dogs tell me how when they were teenagers and trusted no one in the world, they could tell their dog all their secrets. It was the one friend who would not gossip or betray, could provide in the middle of the night the soft, unbegrudging comfort and peace that adolescence conspires to disrupt. An age that is all about growth and risk needs some anchors and weights, a model of steadfastness when all else is in flux.

Sometimes I think Twist’s devotion keeps my girls on a benevolent lash, one that hangs quietly at their side as they trot along but occasionally yanks them back to safety and solid ground.

We’ve weighed so many decisions so carefully in raising our daughters—what school to send them to and what church to attend, when to give them cell phones and with what precautions. But when it comes to what really shapes their character and binds our family, I never would have thought we would owe so much to its smallest member.

**201503**

Most West African lorries ate not in what one would call the first flush of youth, and I had learnt by bitter experience not to expect anything very much of them. But the lorry that arrived to take me up to the mountains was worse than anything I had seen before: it tottered on the borders of senile decay. It stood there on buckled wheels, wheezing and gasping with exhaustion from having to climb up the gentle slope to the camp, and I consigned myself and my loads to it with some fear. The driver, who was a cheerful fellow, pointed out that he would require my assistance in two very necessary operations: first, I had to keep the hand brake pressed down when travelling downhill, for unless it was held thus almost level with the floor it sullenly refused to function. Secondly, I had to keep a stern eye on the clutch, a wilful piece of mechanism that seized every chance to leap out of its socket with a noise like a strangling leopard. As it was obvious that not even a West African lorry-driver could be successful in driving while crouched under the dashboard, I had to take over control of these instruments if I valued my life. So, while I ducked at intervals to put on the brake, amid the rich smell of burning rubber, our noble lorry jerked its way towards the mountains at a steady twenty miles per hour; sometimes, when a downward slope favoured it, it threw caution to the winds and careered along in a madcap fashion at twenty-five.

For the first thirty miles the red earth road wound its way through the lowland forest, the giant trees standing in solid ranks alongside and their branches entwined in an archway of leaves above us. Slowly and almost imperceptibly the road started to climb upwards, looping its way in languid curves round the forested hills. In the back of the lorry the boys lifted up their voices in song:

Home again, home again, When shall I see ma home?

The driver hummed the refrain softly to himself glancing at me to see if I would object. To his surprise I joined in and so while the lorry rolled onwards, the boys in the back maintained the chorus while the driver and I harmonized and sang complicated twiddly bits.

Breaks in the forest became more frequent the higher we climbed, and presently a new type of undergrowth began to appear: massive tree-ferns standing at the roadside on their thick, squat, hairy trunks. These ferns were the guardians of a new world, for suddenly, as though the hills had shrugged themselves free of a cloak, the forest disappeared. It lay behind us in the valley, while above us the hillside rose majestically, covered in a coat of waist-high grass. The lorry crept higher and higher, the engine gasping and shuddering with this unaccustomed activity. I began to think that we should have to push the wretched thing up the last two or three hundred feet, but to everyone’s surprise we made it, and the lorry crept on to the brow of the hill, trembling with fatigue, spouting steam from its radiator like a dying whale. We crawled to a standstill and the driver switched off the engine.

“We must wait small-time, engine get hot,” he explained, pointing to the forequarters of the lorry, which were by now completely invisible under a cloud of steam. Thankfully I descended from the red-hot inside of the cab and strolled down to where the road dipped into the next valley. From this vantage point I could see the country we had travelled through and the country we were about to enter.

**201504**

Have you ever noticed a certain similarity in public parks and back gardens in the cities of the West? A ubiquitous woodland mix of lawn grasses and trees has found its way throughout Europe and the United States, and it’s now spread to other cities around the world. As ecologist Peter Groffman has noted, it’s increasingly difficult to tell one suburb apart from another, even when they’re located in vastly different climates such as Phoenix, Arizona, or Boston in the much chillier north-east of the US. And why do parks in New Zealand often feature the same species of trees that grow on the other side of the world in the UK?

Inspired by the English and New England countrysides, early landscape architects of the 19th century created an aesthetic for urban public and private open space that persists to this day. But in the 21st century, urban green space is tasked with doing far more than simply providing aesthetic appeal. From natural systems to deal with surface water run-off and pollution to green corridors to increasing interest in urban food production, the urban parks of the future will be designed and engineered for functionality as well as for beauty.

Imagine travelling among the cities of the mid-21st century and finding a unique set of urban landscapes that capture local beauty, natural and cultural history, and the environmental context. They are tuned to their locality, and diverse within as well as across cities. There are patches that provide shade and cooling, places of local food production, and corridors that connect both residents and wildlife to the surrounding native environment. Their functions are measured and monitored to meet the unique needs of each city for food production, water use, nutrient recycling, and habitat. No two green spaces are quite the same.

Planners are already starting to work towards this vision. And if this movement has a buzzword it is “hyperfunctionality” – designs which provide multiple uses in a confined space. At the moment, urban landscapes are highly managed and limited in their spatial extent. Even the “green” cities of the future will contain extensive areas of buildings, roads, railways, and other built structures. These future cities are likely to contain a higher proportion of green cover than the cities of today, with an increasing focus on planting on roofs, vertical walls, and surfaces like car parks. But built environments will still be ever-present in dense megacities. We can greatly enhance the utility of green space through designs that provide a range of different uses in a confined space. A hyperfunctional planting, for example, might be designed to provide food, shade, wildlife habitat, and pollution removal all in the same garden with the right choice of plants and management practices.

What this means is that we have to maximise the benefits and uses of urban parks, while minimizing the costs of building and maintaining them. Currently, green space and street plantings are relatively similar throughout the Western world, regardless of differences in local climate, geography, and natural history. Even desert cities feature the same sizable street trees and well-watered and well-fertilized lawns that you might see in more temperate climes. The movement to reduce the resources and water requirements of such urban landscapes in these arid areas is called “xeriscaping” – a concept that has so-far received mixed responses in terms of public acceptance. Scott Yabiku and colleagues at the Central Arizona Phoenix project showed that newcomers to the desert embrace xeriscaping more than long-time residents, who are more likely to prefer the well-watered aesthetic. In part, this may be because xeriscaping is justified more by reducing landscaping costs – in this case water costs – than by providing desired benefits like recreation, pollution mitigation, and cultural value. From this perspective, xeriscaping can seem more like a compromise than an asset.

But there are other ways to make our parks and natural spaces do more. Nan Ellin, of the Ecological Planning Center in the US, advocates an asset-based approach to urbanism. Instead of envisioning cities in terms what they can’t have, ecological planners are beginning to frame the discussion of future cities in terms of what they do have—their natural and cultural assets. In Utah’s Salt Lake City, instead of couching environmental planning as an issue of resource scarcity, the future park is described as “mountain urbanism” and the strong association of local residents with the natural environment of the mountain ranges near their home. From this starting point, the local climate, vegetation, patterns of rain and snowfall, and mountain topography are all deemed natural assets that create a new perspective when it comes to creating urban green space. In Cairns, Australia, the local master plan embraces “tropical urbanism” that conveys a sense of place through landscaping features, while also providing important functions such as shading and cooling in this tropical climate.

The globally homogenized landscape aesthetic – which sees parks from Boston to Brisbane looking worryingly similar – will diminish in importance as future urban green space will be attuned to local values and cultural perceptions of beauty. This will lead to a far greater diversity of urban landscape designs than are apparent today. Already, we are seeing new purposes for urban landscaping that are transforming the 20th century woodland park into bioswales – plantings designed to filter stormwater – green roofs, wildlife corridors, and urban food gardens. However, until recently we have been lacking the datasets and science-based specifications for designs that work to serve all of these purposes at once.

In New York City, Thomas Whitlow of Cornell University sends students through tree-lined streets with portable, backpack-mounted air quality monitors. At home in his laboratory, he places tree branches in wind tunnels to measure pollution deposition onto leaves. It turns out that currently, many street tree plantings are ineffective at removing air pollutants, and instead may trap pollutants near the ground. Rather than relying on assumptions about the role of urban vegetation in improving the environment and health, future landscaping designs will be engineered based on empirical data and state of the art of simulations.

New datasets on the performance of urban landscapes are changing our view of what future urban parks will look like and what it will do. With precise measurements of pollutant uptake, water use, plant growth rates, and greenhouse gas emissions, we are better and better able to design landscapes that require less intensive management and are less costly, while providing more social and environmental uses.