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***Langue moderne I : Anglais***

(2<sup>ème</sup> groupe d'épreuves – 1<sup>ère</sup> session 2013-2014)



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## 1) Arms and the man: Despite legislative victories, the NRA is under pressure

Apr 21st 2012 | The Economist



“TAKE a sticker,” urges the woman from Ambush Firearms. “We are giving away two free guns every day to people wearing them.” What your correspondent would do with an semi-automatic rifle, let alone one that also comes in pink, was not obvious. Welcome to the annual convention of the National Rifle Association (NRA)—this year held in St Louis, Missouri. It is a yearly celebration of freedom, the Second Amendment right to bear arms, and, above all else, a festival of guns. Seven acres, to be precise, of guns and gear.

Americans like firearms. According to a report from the Congressional Research Service there were 294m guns in the country in 2007, up from 192m in 1994. More guns might be expected to mean more influence for the NRA, except that the number of households with guns has actually declined fairly consistently since 1973. The people who buy guns, it seems, are usually those who already own them. One probable cause of this decline is a shift to urban living. Moreover, safety-conscious Americans are increasingly aware that, statistically, a gun is a far greater risk to friends and family than it is of potential use in self-defence.

Nonetheless, some Americans hang on to their weapons because they enjoy hunting or target practice, or live in places with too many wild animals or too few policemen. The right to gun ownership is enshrined in the constitution and is regarded by many as an issue of civil liberty—something that Europeans struggle to understand. So even as outrage is sparked over shootings such as that of Trayvon Martin in Florida and former congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords in Arizona, there is little appetite for gun-control legislation.

Quite the opposite. Behind the march of pro-gun laws across America (such as “stand your ground” ordinances that allow for the use of force in self-defence, without any obligation to attempt to retreat first, now in effect in more than half the states) is the NRA and its lobbying arm, the mildly-named Institute for Legislative Action. The NRA's influence on introducing legislation has been remarkable. The debate about guns is no longer over whether assault rifles ought to be banned, but over whether guns should be allowed in bars, churches and colleges.

The NRA also claims to be a potent force in elections; it says it defeated 19 of the 24 congressmen who were on its hit-list back in 1994. But a recent article in *American Prospect* disputes such assertions, arguing that the NRA's impact is marginal these days because it spreads itself thinly and tends to support Republican incumbents.

Although the NRA is ostensibly an organisation seeking to protect the civil rights of its 4m members, critics such as the Violence Policy Centre (VPC), a gun-control group, contend that the level of funding from firearms manufacturers makes it, in effect, just a trade association for the gun industry. Some of the NRA's fund-raising comes directly from gun sales. For example, Sturm, Ruger & Co., firearms manufacturers, donated \$1 for each gun they sold last year and thereby collected \$1.2m for the NRA's lobbying arm.

Looking ahead, the NRA's combative executive vice-president, Wayne LaPierre, says the NRA is “all in” for the fight to defeat Barack Obama. Mr Obama might be supposed to have done little to upset the NRA, having meekly signed legislation that allows guns to be brought into national parks and on to trains. But his quiet first term is, say many at the convention, actually part of a conspiracy to destroy the Second Amendment during his second term.

There are signs, though, that the NRA is growing out of touch with modern Americans and even with its own members—who, according to surveys, now tend to support restrictions such as mandatory background checks on buyers of weapons at gun shows. The future does not look bright, either. Despite attempts to attract women, most convention-goers in St Louis were white men over the age of 40—a segment of the population on the decline. The classified sections in NRA magazines such as *American Rifleman* feature, besides all the weaponry, advertisements for gardening equipment and Viagra.

## 2) A Colorado hot-spring soak is so much sweeter in private

**By Douglas Brown**

*The Denver Post*



Hot springs? Yes, you swim laps at Glenwood Hot Springs every fall, and barrel down the long slide at Mount Princeton Hot Springs in Nathrop at least once a year. You soak in nature at Strawberry Park Hot Springs in Steamboat Springs, and one time, long ago, you waded au naturel at Orvis Hot Springs in Ridgway.

When it comes to Colorado hot springs, you get it. You've done it.

Yes? No, soaker. Every time you hit the springs, you swim with strangers: kids doing cannonballs into the swimming pools, bleary-eyed partiers slowly melting into the water, couples pinned together in a corner. You close your eyes, you toil to just sink into yourself, but then a Nerf ball bonks you in the head.

The Hortense Cabin and others at Antero Hot Spring Cabins can be rented by the night or by the week.

Here's what you need to do: Rent a place that comes with its own private hot spring. It can be a cabin, or a mountain chalet. It can be a lodge, where the spring isn't entirely yours, but at least your paperback won't get soaked by a rogue bellyflop.

I first discovered the pleasures of the private hot spring during an anniversary weekend with my wife, Annie, seven years ago. We'd heard about Antero Hot Springs, an assortment of cabins beside the Chalk Creek in Nathrop. Each cabin had its own private soaking tub.

"That should be nice," we agreed.

Well, that nice amenity ended up becoming the burning sun around which our fall trip revolved. During the four-day visit, one of them involved about 12 hours in the tub.

Crazy?

Consider: early-20th-century log cabin, with enormous stone fireplace; French doors leading from fireplace den to level-with-the-ground tub, big around as a motel bedroom, lined with

smooth concrete, and containing a bench beneath the surface. The water, rich with minerals and clear as a pane of glass, maintained a constant 104-degree temperature. The Chalk Creek tumbled just beneath the tub — while we bathed, we listened to the water. Deer came up to the pool

The rustic atmosphere is part of the attraction at Antero Hot Spring Cabins in Nathrop. One wintry night while we reveled in the juxtaposition of snow and steam.

We returned months later with the kids, who instantly and intuitively understood the awesomeness of the arrangement.

Then we bade goodbye to private hot springs, for no other reasons than busyness and forgetfulness and foolishness.

**"The thought is sanctuary"** Last fall, however, we decided to stay in Colorado for Thanksgiving and, along with friends in Basalt, thought it would be fun to rent a place somewhere distant from malls and Jiffy Lubes. We all love the Nathrop area and through VRBO.com found Creekside Hot Springs, a big A-frame house with a private spring.

Max Kuehnelt, 9, enjoys the hot spring pool outside of the Hortense Cabin at Antero Hot Springs. Photos by Helen H. Richardson, The Denver Post  
enjoyed the big house, with its deck overlooking Chalk Creek, its out-the-front-door hikes and runs, its huge living room with vaulted ceilings and gigantic windows.

But it's the hot spring we will remember, the hours spent soaking in the tub, perched on a rise just above the river.

"The thought is sanctuary," said John Kreski, who with wife Patty Walters-Kreski owns the property. "These waters are coming from the deep earth, bringing up minerals. Are they magical? They are therapeutic, for sure. There are no chemicals. It is constantly flowing."

"Your body just feels so much more relaxed and comfortable when you get out of the natural hot springs, versus the hot tub in your backyard," said Patty.

The Nathrop area — between Buena Vista and Salida — supports several different cabins-with-hot-springs options. Even Mount Princeton Hot Springs, a resort, has hot springs pools reserved for adults who are renting one of their cabins.

But the springs bubble up in other parts of the state, too. Some, like Conundrum, a spring near Aspen, are wild: You hike to the hot water and go for a free soak.

Others are more civilized (and pricey).

At Dunton Hot Springs in Dolores, south of Telluride, guests gain access to a variety of springs — and a few even get their own private springs — when they check into one of the resort's 12 cabins, or its single opulent tent. Most of the digs are remnants of the ghost town of Dunton, an 1885 gold and silver mining town that was abandoned in 1918. Investors bought

the entire town in the 1990s and took seven years to turn it into a luxe resort, complete with a spa, yoga and meals.

The setting is spectacular, and the place isn't for most of us — lodging starts at \$550 a night, which includes all meals and drinks — but it's the simple springs that "are our biggest draw," said Christy Rossi, the resort's marketing director.

"Our springs are non-sulfurous, so there is no smell," she said. "They have a high magnesium and iron content, and are orange in color."

Bathers, she said, should steer clear of white bathing suits; the minerals may stain the garments. The resort's various springs stay at about 103 degrees.

You may have to share the hot springs at Waunita Hot Springs in Gunnison with people not staying at the lodge — the resort allows day trippers, if there is enough space — but the place is remote enough, too, that chances are you will have some peace.

The lodge, run by the Pringle family since 1962, maintains hot springs that begin with some of the hottest spring water in Colorado, 175 degrees. Fortunately, the water cools enough in the pools — a big swimming pool and a tub — that bathers don't poach.

"It does make our ranch unique, for sure," said Randi Pringle, whose grandparents bought the ranch. "It's nice to go on a horseback ride all day, and go into the hot springs at night to ease your muscles."

Whether you are all alone behind a log cabin at midnight, or sharing a hot pool with a handful of friends (and maybe a few strangers) at dawn, the appeal is straightforward: sinking into yourself. In peace.



### 3) The Fertility Implosion

By DAVID BROOKS

Published: March 12, 2012 , New York Times.

When you look at pictures from the Arab spring, you see these gigantic crowds of young men, and it confirms the impression that the Muslim Middle East has a gigantic youth bulge — hundreds of millions of young people with little to do. But that view is becoming obsolete. As Nicholas Eberstadt and Apoorva Shah of the American Enterprise Institute point out, over the past three decades, the Arab world has undergone a little noticed demographic implosion. Arab adults are having many fewer kids.

Usually, high religious observance and low income go along with high birthrates. But, according to the United States Census Bureau, Iran now has a similar birth rate to New England — which is the least fertile region in the U.S.

The speed of the change is breathtaking. A woman in Oman today has 5.6 fewer babies than a woman in Oman 30 years ago. Morocco, Syria and Saudi Arabia have seen fertility-rate declines of nearly 60 percent, and in Iran it's more than 70 percent. These are among the fastest declines in recorded history.

The Iranian regime is aware of how the rapidly aging population and the lack of young people entering the work force could lead to long-term decline. But there's not much they have been able to do about it. Maybe Iranians are pessimistic about the future. Maybe Iranian parents just want smaller families.

As Eberstadt is careful to note, demographics is not necessarily destiny. You can have fast economic development with low fertility or high fertility (South Korea and Taiwan did it a few decades ago). But, over the long term, it's better to have a growing work force, not one that's shrinking compared with the number of retirees.

If you look around the world, you see many other nations facing demographic headwinds. If the 20th century was the century of the population explosion, the 21st century, as Eberstadt notes, is looking like the century of the fertility implosion.

Already, nearly half the world's population lives in countries with birthrates below the replacement level. According to the Census Bureau, the total increase in global manpower between 2010 and 2030 will be just half the increase we experienced in the two decades that just ended. At the same time, according to work by the International Institute of Applied Systems Analysis, the growth in educational attainment around the world is slowing.

This leads to what the writer Philip Longman has called the gray tsunami — a situation in which huge shares of the population are over 60 and small shares are under 30.

Some countries have it worse than others. Since the end of the Soviet Union, Russia has managed the trick of having low birthrates and high death rates. Russian life expectancy is

basically the same as it was 50 years ago, and the nation's population has declined by roughly six million since 1992.

Rapidly aging Japan has one of the worst demographic profiles, and most European profiles are famously grim. In China, long-term economic growth could face serious demographic restraints. The number of Chinese senior citizens is soaring by 3.7 percent year after year. By 2030, as Eberstadt notes, there will be many more older workers (ages 50-64) than younger workers (15-29). In 2010, there were almost twice as many younger ones. In a culture where there is low social trust outside the family, a generation of only children is giving birth to another generation of only children, which is bound to lead to deep social change.

Even the countries with healthier demographics are facing problems. India, for example, will continue to produce plenty of young workers. By 2030, according to the Vienna Institute of Demography, India will have 100 million relatively educated young men, compared with fewer than 75 million in China.

But India faces a regional challenge. Population growth is high in the northern parts of the country, where people tend to be poorer and less educated. Meanwhile, fertility rates in the southern parts of the country, where people are richer and better educated, are already below replacement levels.

The U.S. has long had higher birthrates than Japan and most European nations. The U.S. population is increasing at every age level, thanks in part to immigration. America is aging, but not as fast as other countries.

But even that is looking fragile. The 2010 census suggested that U.S. population growth is decelerating faster than many expected.

Besides, it's probably wrong to see this as a demographic competition. American living standards will be hurt by an aging and less dynamic world, even if the U.S. does attract young workers.

For decades, people took dynamism and economic growth for granted and saw population growth as a problem. Now we've gone to the other extreme, and it's clear that young people are the scarce resource. In the 21st century, the U.S. could be the slowly aging leader of a rapidly aging world.



#### 4) Can Parents Take Over Schools?

By Andrew J. Rotherham March 08, 2012, Time Magazine



Alex Gallardo / Reuters

Chrissy Guzman speaks in frustration during a Adelanto School District board meeting regarding the parent trigger law, in Adelanto, California, March 6, 2012.

If your child's school is lousy, would you want the option to band together with other parents and take it over? That's the idea behind "parent trigger" legislation that enables parents in low-performing schools to vote to change the governance of their children's school — and remove teachers and the principal if they want to. Although only four states have enacted such a law (California was the first to do so in 2010), legislators in Florida are debating this week whether it should become the fifth, and similar bills are pending in a dozen states.

But so far parents have yet to make a trigger vote stick. Yesterday, parents in Adelanto, Calif., resubmitted a petition to take over a school there after their first petition was rejected by the school board following a frantic campaign by the teachers union to dissuade parents from signing. At a school in Compton last year, parents backed away in the face of pressure so intense a Los Angeles court found their First Amendment rights had been violated. In perhaps the most offensive allegation, teachers union activists have apparently told immigrant parents that supporting the trigger campaign could result in their deportation.

Pretty dramatic stuff. (A fictional version is coming soon, with a parent-trigger themed movie due out this year, starring Maggie Gyllenhaal, Viola Davis, and Holly Hunter.) The controversial parent triggers got a big boost this week from the senior Democrat on the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, California Representative George Miller, who in a statement said, "parents must be empowered to stand up and say the status quo isn't good enough for their children." Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, President Obama's former Chief of Staff, also spoke in favor of parent triggers this week, in support of the Florida legislation. But with all eyes focused on the debate over whether to give parents the right to pull the trigger, is enough attention being paid to what will happen after one is pulled?

In California, a nonprofit organization called Parent Revolution is supporting trigger campaigns in several schools where the support of 51% of parents are needed to force the district to bring in new management.

The people behind Parent Revolution aren't right-wing anti-union types. The group's leader, Ben Austin, a former member of the California Board of Education has led efforts to close low-performing charter schools and worked in the Clinton White House (as did I), and Parent Revolution's lead community organizer cut his teeth with Cesar Chavez's farmworkers. Parent Revolution is trying to change the way districts make education policy decisions, i.e., by school officials making deals with union leaders to the exclusion of parents. "We just want a seat at the table," Austin says. He's right. Before the trigger law, school officials and the unions could and frequently did tell parents, "Thanks for the input. Now go have a bake sale."

Trigger legislation is exposing the hypocrisy of the teachers' unions, which fight furiously in Washington for legislation that would allow teachers at a particular school to vote to unionize using secret ballots and a 51% majority while vehemently opposing the same kind of empowerment for parents. And it shows that much of their rhetoric about empowering low-income parents is a sham. But great political theater is not necessarily great public policy.

Let's say the second time is a charm in Adelanto and that school becomes the first one in the U.S. to be taken over by parents. What happens the day after that? People close to the action say many parents involved in trigger campaigns are understandably skeptical of outside management, so they're reluctant to turn the schools over to others to run. Meanwhile, many of the country's most effective charter operators are leery of trying to turning around existing schools. They're having much more success starting new ones. Let's face it – if it were easy to run great schools, we'd have more of them.

The thinly veiled assumption of many parent-trigger supporters in the policy and political world is that these schools could hardly be worse. Actually, they could. Austin knows this, and that's why Parent Revolution has developed an eight- to 10-week curriculum for people thinking about taking over a school. "We help parents understand how schools are run and the latest research about turning around and transforming failing schools," says Austin.

The potential for chaos is due in part to the requirement that only 51% of parents are needed to drive radical changes, a simple majority that could breed factionalism and ongoing instability especially if buyer's remorse sets in. Schools should teach about the French Revolution, not have their parents act it out. That's why Adam Emerson, a school-choice analyst at The Fordham Institute who is more bullish on parental empowerment than most in the education world, has suggested that a supermajority or two-thirds benchmark makes more sense as a way to ensure there is a core consensus at a school. The initial signatures at Adelanto would have met a supermajority threshold.

Too much disruption and not enough improvement will validate critics' claims that the reform movement is more interested in destruction than creation. That's why Austin cautions parents that with this "power comes a profound responsibility about how to use it."

The parent trigger is not the first parental empowerment effort in education. For decades school decentralization efforts included provisions designed to let parents help make decisions about personnel and curriculum. (One such effort propelled legendary American Federation of Teachers leader Al Shaker to national prominence in 1968 after community run schools fired white teachers without cause and sparked a legendary teacher strike in New York City.) Overall, the record of this sort of parent involvement is decidedly mixed.

As the father of school-aged children, it's hard for me to oppose the parent trigger, and I don't. But I do see school choice as a more sustainable way to give parents options and control in the long run. If my own children's school was failing, my wife and I would pull them out and send them somewhere else. But too few families have that ability, and the resulting desperation many parents – particularly poor parents – are experiencing is a national travesty. However, as an analyst, I'm cautious about what we can expect once parents pull that trigger. When it comes to handling real firearms, there are some age-old axioms: never point a gun at anything you don't intend to shoot, and never fire unless you know where the round is going to end up. In this case these rules apply to schools as well.



## 5) Chug! Chug! Chug! Why More Women Are Binge Drinking

By Alexandra Sifferlin Jan. 10, 2013, Time Magazine

It's not just fraternity brothers who are guzzling one beer too many. Women and high school girls are equally likely to drink too much.

According to the latest survey from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), nearly 14 million U.S. women binge drink about three times a month, downing about six beverages per binge. The survey defined binge drinking as consuming five or more drinks in one sitting for men and four or more for women.

It's not unusual for young women ages 18 to 34, as well as high schoolers, to overindulge; 1 in 8 women and 1 in 5 high school girls report drinking to excess. But binge drinking accounts for about 23,000 deaths among women and girls in the U.S. each year.

Long bouts of drinking typical of binges can lead to unpleasant, not to mention potentially dangerous, consequences for both men and women. In her award-winning photography project "Keg Stand Queens," photographer Amanda Berg documented her friends' drinking habits during parties at the Rochester Institute of Technology. The collection includes images of underage girls in sexually compromising positions, passed out on lawns and leaning over toilet seats.

"The project began a conversation for me on things that I was guilty of, perhaps uncomfortable with, but would still do," says Berg. "I think there is something inherent about the community [binge drinking] builds, and the way it lubricates an individuals' social interactions. While I was doing the project, my social life changed because I wasn't participating while I was taking photos, and it really made me separate from everyone else."

According to the latest CDC report, women who binge-drink may be putting themselves at increased risk for breast cancer, sexually transmitted diseases, heart disease and unintended pregnancy. Pregnant women who binge-drink expose their unborn child to a high risk of fetal-alcohol spectrum disorders and sudden-infant-death syndrome.

Amanda Berg

Drinking games at a birthday party in Henrietta, N.Y.

"If it is true there really is a modern increase [in female binge drinking], then I think there are specific things that women have to consider and people need to talk about, but I don't think that [only] women should be blamed for the negative side effects of it. But [those risks] should be on the table. There is almost a social taboo of bringing it up, and it is a little controversial, but I think people should get comfortable talking about it."

In describing her work, Berg argues that the danger of binge drinking among women is that women's bodies, which are typically smaller than men's, cannot handle the same amounts of

alcohol, so attempting to keep up can be dangerous. And when the worst does happen, she writes in her blog post about the project, there is a tendency to try to justify it:

After a night of excessive drinking sexual assault can be redefined as a “hook up.” The loss of memory due to inebriation can proudly be termed “blacking out.” Words like “apparently” preface the stories told of the prior night. With this, women abdicate responsibility and give themselves permission to repeat the same behavior.

Although the CDC report does not speculate why women are binge drinking, Dr. David Jernigan, director of the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth, says that female-friendly alcohol-marketing strategies that emerged 10 years ago — including flavored vodkas, alcopops, Smirnoff Ice, Bacardi Silver and Mike’s Hard Lemonade — may be playing a role.

“All of these were clearly oriented to women. The data showed these products were most popular among females of every age group and were most popular among young drinkers. Those of us involved in alcohol prevention called alcopops ‘beer with training wheels,’” says Jernigan. “Women traditionally drank less than men — and still do — but there has been a very intentional effort to increase it, and this has started exposing young women to products and marketing at high rates. The numbers are not surprising to us and are of great concern.”

The CDC researchers, however, are hopeful that the trend will reverse. “The good news is that the same scientifically proven strategies for communities and clinical settings that we know can prevent binge drinking in the overall population can also work to prevent binge drinking among women and girls,” Dr. Robert Brewer of the alcohol program at CDC said in a statement.

Jernigan says tighter standards on alcohol marketing, higher alcohol taxes and reduced availability are some potential ways to decrease binge drinking. “There ought to be places the [alcohol] industry agrees not to advertise. They are very active in the digital space, and it’s easy to gain access if you’re underage. You might have to do some math to put in a birth date, but otherwise all you have to do to get in a website is click yes or no. It’s not an effective deterrent,” says Jernigan.

While the CDC researchers recognize that binge drinking is a problem for both genders, highlighting the growing problem among women may lead to more targeted strategies and put pressure on targeted marketing campaigns. “It is a big service that the CDC is now presenting alcohol abuse as a woman’s issue. We only wish that it had come sooner, because the marketing is 10 years ahead of it,” says Jernigan.

## 6) Generation Debt: Child's Education, but Parents' Crushing Loans

*The New York Times, November 11, 2012, Tamar Lewin*

When Michele Fitzgerald and her daughter, Jenni, go out for dinner, Jenni pays. When they get haircuts, Jenni pays. When they buy groceries, Jenni pays.

Parents have a number of options when trying to borrow money to pay for their children's undergraduate education. None of them is perfect, alas.



Debt forced Michele Fitzgerald to rely on her daughter in Hingham, Mass., for support.

It has been six years since Ms. Fitzgerald — broke, unemployed and in default on the \$18,000 in loans she took out for Jenni's college education — became a boomerang mom, moving into her daughter's townhouse apartment in Hingham, Mass.

Jenni pays the rent.

For Jenni, 35, the student loans and the education they bought have worked out: she has a good job in public relations and is paying down the loans in her name. But for her mother, 60, the parental debt has been disastrous.

"It's not easy," Ms. Fitzgerald said. "Jenni feels the guilt and I feel the burden."

There are record numbers of student borrowers in financial distress, according to federal data. But millions of parents who have taken out loans to pay for their children's college education make up a less visible generation in debt. For the most part, these parents did well enough through midlife to take on sizable loans, but some have since fallen on tough times because of the recession, health problems, job loss or lives that took a sudden hard turn.

And unlike the angry students who have recently taken to the streets to protest their indebtedness, most of these parents are too ashamed to draw attention to themselves.

"You don't want your children, much less your neighbors and friends, knowing that even though you're living in a nice house, and you've been able to hold onto your job, your retirement money's gone, you can't pay your debts," said a woman in Connecticut who took out \$57,000 in federal loans. Between tough times at work and a divorce, she is now teetering on default.

In the first three months of this year, the number of borrowers of student loans age 60 and older was 2.2 million, a figure that has tripled since 2005. That makes them the fastest-growing age group for college debt. All told, those borrowers owed \$43 billion, up from \$8 billion seven years ago, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of New York.

Almost 10 percent of the borrowers over 60 were at least 90 days delinquent on their payments during the first quarter of 2012, compared with 6 percent in 2005. And more and more of those with unpaid federal student debt are losing a portion of their Social Security benefits to the government — nearly 119,000 through September, compared with 60,000 for all of 2007 and 23,996 in 2001, according to the Treasury Department's Financial Management Service.

The federal government does not track how many of these older borrowers were taking out loans for their own education rather than for that of their children. But financial analysts say that loans for children are the likely source of almost all the debt. Even adjusted for inflation, so-called Parent PLUS loans — one piece of the pie for parents of all ages — have more than doubled to \$10.4 billion since 2000. Colleges often encourage parents to get Parent PLUS loans, to make it possible for their children to enroll. But many borrow more than they can afford to pay back — and discover, too late, that the flexibility of income-based repayment is available only to student borrowers.

Many families with good credit turn to private student loans, with parents co-signing for their children. But those private loans also offer little flexibility in repayment.

The consequences of such debt can be dire because borrowers over 60 have less time — and fewer opportunities — than younger borrowers to get their financial lives back on track. Some, like Ms. Fitzgerald, are forced to move in with their children. Others face an unexpectedly pinched retirement. Still others have gone into bankruptcy, after using all their assets to try to pay the student debt, which is difficult to discharge under any circumstances.

The anguish over college debt has put a severe strain on many family relationships. Parents and students alike say parental debt can be the uncomfortable, unmentionable elephant in the room. Many parents feel they have not fulfilled a basic obligation, while others quietly resent that their children's education has landed the family in such difficult territory.

Soon after borrowing the money for Jenni's education, Ms. Fitzgerald divorced and lost her corporate job. She worked part-time jobs and subsisted on food stamps and public assistance.

"I don't really feel guilt, but I do know that this is all because of a loan taken out on my behalf," said Jenni, who has a different last name and agreed to be interviewed only if it would not be disclosed. "I asked my mother to move in with me, because I couldn't stand it that she was living in a place with no heat and a basement that kept flooding."

The unusual arrangements, and strained family dynamics, can be awkward. Like Jenni, many with student debt problems agreed to be interviewed only on the condition that they not be identified because they did not want to expose their financial troubles.

"It makes you feel like a failure as a parent, to be unable to help your children and to have all your hard work end in a pile of debt," said one New Jersey man, who took out a second mortgage of \$280,000 to help cover his children's college costs. "I sent my older kids to



private colleges, and I was happy to do it because it's how you help them get started off. But I can't do it for the youngest, and I haven't even been able to start the conversation with him."

Ms. Fitzgerald said she had little hope of a comfortable old age. She has no health insurance. She knows that the odds of finding a good job in her 60s, with no college degree, are slim — and she knows that the government will take part of her Social Security, in payment of her debt, which she said had now ballooned to about \$40,000 because of penalties for nonpayment. At one point, she said, the Internal Revenue Service seized a \$2.43 tax refund.

Jenni has volunteered to take on her mother's debt, but Ms. Fitzgerald has refused, saying it is her legal and moral obligation, and anyway, Jenni has her own loans to pay off — about \$220 a month — and not much discretionary income. The very suggestion that Jenni might take on her debt annoys her.

"Don't you think she is doing enough for me now by supporting me a hundred percent, financially, by my living with her and her extending her resources?" Ms. Fitzgerald asked. "The whole idea was for her to get a college education so she can succeed in life; it is hard enough just to do that without being burdened with her mother's welfare, like I was her child."

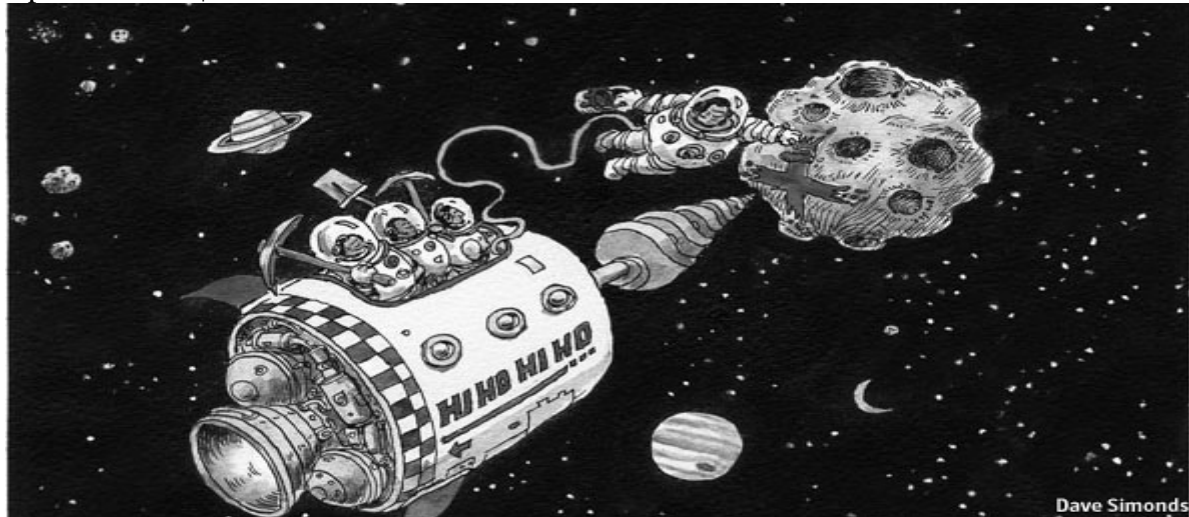
Jenni occasionally jumped in with explanations or clarifications, as she and her mother sat in the living room discussing their situation. When Ms. Fitzgerald talked of being depressed last year, so overwhelmed by the cartons of documents and dunning letters that she threw them all out, Jenni said gently, in an almost maternal tone, "But you're doing much better now."



## 7) Going platinum

# Mining metals from asteroids seems a bonkers idea. But could it work?

Apr 28th 2012 | The Economist



CAN reality trump art? That was the question hovering over the launch on April 24th, at the Museum of Flight in Seattle, of a plan by a firm called Planetary Resources to mine metals from asteroids and bring them back to Earth.

It sounds like the plot of a film by James Cameron—and, appropriately, Mr Cameron is indeed one of the company's backers. The team behind the firm, however, claim they are not joking. The company's founders are Peter Diamandis, instigator of the X Prize, awarded in 2004 to Paul Allen and Burt Rutan for the first private space flight, and Eric Anderson, another of whose companies, Space Adventures, has already shot seven tourists into orbit. Larry Page and Eric Schmidt, respectively the chief executive and the chairman of Google, are also involved. So, too, is Charles Symonyi, the engineer who oversaw the creation of Microsoft's Office software (and who has been into space twice courtesy of Mr Anderson's firm). With a cast-list like that, it is at least polite to take them seriously.

As pies in the sky go, some asteroids do look pretty tasty. A lot are unconsolidated piles of rubble left over from the beginning of the solar system. Many, though, are pieces of small planets that bashed into each other over the past few billion years. These, in particular, will be high on Planetary Resources' shopping list because the planet-forming processes of mineral-melting and subsequent stratification into core, mantle and crust will have sorted their contents in ways that can concentrate valuable materials into exploitable ores. On Earth, for example, platinum and its allied elements, though rare at the surface, are reckoned more common in the planet's metal-rich core. The same was probably true of the planets shattered to make asteroids. Indeed, the discovery of a layer of iridium-rich rock (iridium being one of platinum's relatives) was the first sign geologists found of the asteroid impact that is believed to have killed the dinosaurs.

Most asteroids dwell between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter. But enough of them, known as near-Earth asteroids, or NEAs, come within interplanetary spitting distance of humanity for it to be worth investigating them as sources of minerals—if, of course, that can be done economically.

### **First catch your hare**

The first thing is to locate a likely prospect. At the moment, about 9,000 NEAs are known, most of them courtesy of ground-based programmes looking for bodies that might one day hit Earth. That catalogue is a good start, but Planetary Resources plans to go further. In 2014 it intends to launch, at a cost of a few million dollars, a set of small space telescopes whose purpose will be to seek out asteroids which are easy to get to and whose orbits return them to the vicinity of Earth often enough for the accumulated spoils of a mining operation to be downloaded at frequent intervals.

That bit should not be too difficult. But the next phase will be tougher. In just over a decade, when a set of suitable targets has been identified, the firm plans to send a second wave of spacecraft out to take a closer look at what has been found. This is a significantly bigger challenge than getting a few telescopes into orbit. It is still, though, conceivable using existing technology. It is after this that the handwaving really starts.

Broadly, there are two ways to get the goodies back to Earth. The first is to attempt to mine a large NEA in its existing orbit, dropping off a payload every time it passes by. That is the reason for the search for asteroids with appropriate orbits. This approach will, however, require intelligent robots which can work by themselves for years, digging and processing the desirable material. The other way of doing things is for the company to retrieve smaller asteroids, put them into orbit around Earth or the moon, and then dissect them at its leisure. But that limits the value of the haul and risks a catastrophic impact if something goes wrong while the asteroid is being manoeuvred.

Either way, the expense involved promises to be out of this world. A recent feasibility study for the Keck Institute for Space Studies reckoned that the retrieval of a single 500-tonne asteroid to the moon would cost more than \$2.5 billion. Earlier research suggested that, to have any chance of success, an asteroid-mining venture would need to be capitalised to the tune of \$100 billion. Moreover, a host of new technologies will be required, including more-powerful solar panels, electric-ion engines, extraterrestrial mining equipment and robotic refineries.

All of which can, no doubt, be done if enough money and ingenuity are applied to the project. But the real doubt over this sort of enterprise is not the supply, but the demand. Platinum, iridium and the rest are expensive precisely because they are rare. Make them common, by digging them out of the heart of a shattered planet, and they will become cheap. The most important members of the team, then, may not be the entrepreneurs and venture capitalists who put up the drive and the money, nor the engineers who build the hardware that makes it all possible, but the economists who try to work out the effect on the price of platinum when a mountain of the stuff arrives from outer space.

8) Och aye the No, Oct 20th 2012, The Economist

## Scotland ponders whether independence and separation are the same thing



SHOULD Scotland be an independent country or not? In negotiations concluded on October 15th, David Cameron secured the single in-or-out question that he wanted. But the choice facing Scottish voters in 2014, and the campaigns to influence them, will not be nearly as simple as the words on the ballot suggest.

John Curtice, a psephologist at Strathclyde University, says that Scots divide into three roughly equally-sized camps. The first lot want independence. The second prefer the status quo. A final group, accounting for about 30% of those polled, would like to stay in the union but also want more powers for Scotland. In effect, they are the swing voters. With two years to go until the referendum, the campaigns are already converging on them.

The separatist Scottish National Party (SNP) will try to woo them by making independence seem trivial. The party has already underlined its enthusiasm for the queen, the BBC, the pound, the Bank of England's interest rates and British opt-outs from irksome European Union rules. Its leader, Alex Salmond, talks of a "social union" between England and a newly-independent Scotland. But he will have a hard time convincing Scots he can deliver these things. Independent Scottish participation in sterling, EU opt-outs and the BBC are not, and will never be, in his gift.

Unionists, meanwhile, are trying to convince Scots that voting "no" would result in a hefty dose of new powers. On signing the referendum agreement, Mr Cameron called on Scots in favour of more devolution to vote to stay in the United Kingdom. Labour has launched a commission to draw up a new devolution package, which will report next year and advance a final set of proposals in 2014. The Liberal Democrats have already proposed far-reaching changes, including a new federal structure for the entire union. Under their plan, Scotland would raise about two thirds of the money it spends.

Jeremy Purvis, of the pressure group Devo Plus, hopes that the unionist parties' schemes will coalesce in the run-up to the referendum. He claims this will present voters with a clear set of commitments, to feature in all three main parties' manifestos for the 2015 election, showing that a vote against separation is not a vote for the status quo.

If that happens, much of the wind will be taken out of Mr Salmond's sails. He may be a romantic Caledonian nationalist but many SNP voters (and even some party members) would be perfectly satisfied with the advanced devolution proposed by the unionist parties. Nationalist hopes that a busy Scottish cultural calendar in 2014 and participation by 16- and 17-year-old voters will significantly boost the separatist turnout are optimistic at best.

So the referendum is forcing the SNP to make concessions to the union, while pushing unionists towards further devolution. The gap between the visions set forth by the two sides, while roomy, is shrinking. It now concerns questions of identity—citizenship, flags, titles, membership of international organisations—more than retail politics. Can Scotland be sufficiently independent within the UK? Unless Mr Salmond can persuade the average voter that it cannot, the union is safe.

## 9) How People Change

By DAVID BROOKS

Published: November 26, 2012, the New York Times

Nick Crews was, by his own admission, a middling father. He enjoyed cuddling with his three kids, but he was frequently away on naval deployments and didn't stay in touch with them once they went off to boarding school.

Over the years, Crews has watched his children (the oldest is now 40) make a series of terrible decisions. "I bought into the fashionable philosophy of not interfering; letting the children find themselves," he told Cristina Odone of The Telegraph of London.

Finally, in February, Crews decided he'd had enough. He sent his offspring an e-mail message, which is now known in Britain as the Crews Missile.

"Dear All Three," he wrote. "With last evening's crop of whinges and tidings of more rotten news for which you seem to treat your mother like a cess-pit, I feel it is time to come off my perch.

"It is obvious that none of you has the faintest notion of the bitter disappointment each of you has in your own way dished out to us. We are seeing the miserable death throes of the fourth of your collective marriages at the same time we see the advent of a fifth."

Crews continued: "I wonder if you realise how we feel — we have nothing to say which reflects any credit on you or us. Fulfilling careers based on your educations would have helped — but as yet none of you is what I would confidently term properly self-supporting."

Then he turned to his grandchildren. "So we witness the introduction to this life of six beautiful children — soon to be seven — none of whose parents have had the maturity and sound judgment to make a reasonable fist at making essential threshold decisions. ...

"The predictable result has been a decade of deep unhappiness over the fates of our grandchildren. If it wasn't for them, Mum and I would not be too concerned, as each of you consciously, and with eyes wide open, crashes from one cock-up to the next. It makes us weak that so many of these events are copulation-driven, and then helplessly to see these lovely little people being woefully let down by you, their parents."

Crews then finished his e-mail. "I want to hear no more from any of you until, if you feel inclined, you have a success or an achievement or a REALISTIC plan for the support and happiness of your children to tell me about."

He signed the e-mail, "I am bitterly, bitterly disappointed. Dad."

That e-mail, released by one of his daughters hoping to get publicity for a book she is translating, has made Crews a hugely popular folk hero in Britain. Many parents are apparently delighted that someone finally had the gumption to give at least one set of overprivileged slackers a well-deserved kick in the pants.

The problem, of course, is that no matter how emotionally satisfying these tirades may be, they don't really work. You can tell people that they are fat and that they shouldn't eat more French fries, but that doesn't mean they will stop. You can make all sorts of New Year's resolutions, earnestly deciding to behave better, but that doesn't mean you will.

People don't behave badly because they lack information about their shortcomings. They behave badly because they've fallen into patterns of destructive behavior from which they're unable to escape.

Human behavior flows from hidden springs and calls for constant and crafty prodding more than blunt hectoring. The way to get someone out of a negative cascade is not with a ferocious e-mail trying to attack their bad behavior. It's to go on offense and try to maximize some alternative good behavior. There's a trove of research suggesting that it's best to tackle negative behaviors obliquely, by redirecting attention toward different, positive ones.

It's foolish to imperiously withdraw and say, come back to me when you have a plan. It's better to pick one area of life at a time (most people don't have the willpower to change their whole lives all at once) and help a person lay down a pre-emptive set of concrete rules and rewards. Pick out a small goal and lay out measurable steps toward it.

It's foolhardy to try to persuade people to see the profound errors of their ways in the hope that mental change will lead to behavioral change. Instead, try to change superficial behavior first and hope that, if they act differently, they'll eventually think differently. Lure people toward success with the promise of admiration instead of trying to punish failure with criticism. Positive rewards are more powerful.

I happen to cover a field — politics — in which people are perpetually bellowing at each other to be better. They're always issuing the political version of the Crews Missile.

It's a lousy leadership model. Don't try to bludgeon bad behavior. Change the underlying context. Change the behavior triggers. Displace bad behavior with different good behavior. Be oblique. Redirect.



## 10) Why Kids Should Learn Cursive (and Math Facts and Word Roots)

By Annie Murphy Paul Nov. 08, 2012, in Time



Paul Burns / Getty Images

When Suzanne Kail, an English teacher at a public high school in Magnolia, Ohio, was told that she would be required to teach her students Latin and Greek word roots, she groaned and rolled her eyes. Kail believes in a progressive approach to education, in which active engagement in meaningful learning is paramount. In an account of her experience in the *English Journal*, she wrote, “asking students to do rote memorization was the antithesis of what I believed in most.” Still, her department head insisted on it, so Kail went forward with the attitude, “I’ll do it, but I won’t like it.” She was sure her students wouldn’t like it, either.

Kail was in for a surprise — as is anyone who takes a look at a raft of recent studies supporting the effectiveness of “old school” methods like memorizing math facts, reading aloud, practicing handwriting and teaching argumentation (activities that once went by the names *drill*, *recitation*, *penmanship* and *rhetoric*). While the education world is all abuzz about so-called 21st century skills like collaboration, problem solving and critical thinking, this research suggests that we might do well to add a strong dose of the 19th century to our children’s schooling.

Kail’s experience is instructive. As soon as she began teaching her students the Greek and Latin origins of many English terms — that the root *sta* means “put in place or stand,” for example, and that *cess* means “to move or withdraw” — they eagerly began identifying familiar words that incorporated the roots, like *statue* and *recess*. Her three classes competed against one another to come up with the longest list of words derived from the roots they were learning. Kail’s students started using these terms in their writing, and many of them told her that their study of word roots helped them answer questions on the SAT and on Ohio’s state graduation exam. (Research confirms that instruction in word roots allows students to learn new vocabulary and figure out the meaning of words in context more easily.) For her part, Kail reports that she no longer sees rote memorization as “inherently evil.” Although committing the word roots to memory was a necessary first step, she notes, “the key was taking that old-school method and encouraging students to use their knowledge to practice higher-level thinking skills.”

That’s also true of another old-fashioned method: drilling math facts, like the multiplication table. Although many progressive educators decry what they call “drill and kill” (kill students’ love of learning, that is), rapid mental retrieval of basic facts is a prerequisite for

doing more complex, and more interesting, kinds of math. The only way to achieve this “automaticity,” so far as anyone has been able to determine, is to practice. And practice. Indeed, many experts who have observed the wide gap between the math scores of American and Chinese students on international tests attribute the Asian students’ advantage to their schools’ relentless focus on memorizing math facts. Failure to do so can effectively close off the higher realms of mathematics: a study published in the journal *Mathematical Cognition* found that most errors made by students working on complex math problems were due to a lack of automaticity in basic math facts.

Here are a few other old-school skills that are still worth cultivating:

- **Handwriting**

Research shows that forming letters by hand, as opposed to typing them into a computer, not only helps young children develop their fine motor skills but also improves their ability to recognize letters — a capacity that, in turn, predicts reading ability at age 5. But many schools are now emphasizing typing over writing. Last year, for example, the Indiana Department of Education announced that the state’s public schools no longer had to teach cursive writing and they should ensure that students were “proficient in keyboard use” instead.

- **Argumentation**

In a public sphere filled with vehemently expressed opinion, the ability to make a reasoned argument is more important than ever. Educational research on argumentation demonstrates that it helps students learn better too. A study published in the *Journal of Research in Science Teaching* in 2010, for example, found that 10th-graders who were taught how to construct an argument as part of their lessons on genetics not only had better arguments but also demonstrated a better understanding of the material.

- **Reading Aloud**

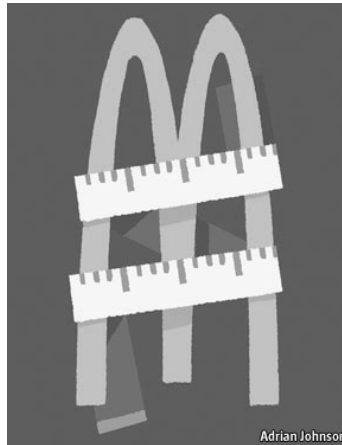
Many studies have shown that when students are read to frequently by a teacher, their vocabulary and their grasp of syntax and sentence structure improves. Educator Doug Lemov, author of *Teach like a Champion* and a co-author of the new book *Practice Perfect*, explains why: “Children who are read to become familiar with the sound and rhythm and complexity of language long before they can produce it themselves. By virtue of being exposed to a wide variety of writing types and styles, they come to understand that the use of language involves intentional choices made by the author and is representative of the author’s time and place.”

Stories are especially powerful when narrated by a good reader, says Lemov, “someone who brings the story to life, models expressive reading and shows kids what a book ‘sounds like’ in the voice of someone who reads with passion.” But reading aloud, he adds, is a “dying art.” Maybe we adults should brush up on our old-school skills too.

## 11) The Big Mac index

# The burger company may be a barometer for the industry

Dec 15th 2012 , The Economist



MCDONALD'S GOLDEN ARCHES may have marched into 119 countries, but the quintessentially American company still resides in a quintessentially American suburb. At its headquarters in Oak Brook, Illinois, low brick buildings are linked by bucolic trails. In Hamburger University managers learn McDonald's lore and way of doing business. Hallways are named after items on the menu; you may find yourself in McNugget Aisle 2. Even French masterpieces have been Mac-ified. In a reproduction of Georges Seurat's "Grande Jatte", the woman in the foreground holds not just a parasol but a McDonald's take-away bag.

No company has so embodied the shift in America's diet as McDonald's, and no company has been more vilified by health advocates, yet until recently no fast-food company has done better. Last year McDonald's was America's leading fast-food restaurant, with sales of \$34.2 billion—more than those of Subway, Starbucks and Wendy's combined. But in November the company reported the first dip in monthly sales for nine years, and soon afterwards it announced it was replacing its American president. The new boss, Jeff Stratton, has a delicate task ahead.

McDonald's is used to being attacked. In 2004 "Super Size Me", a documentary, recorded the sickening result of eating solely at McDonald's for a month. (McDonald's has since scrapped its super-sized fries and sodas.) In January the company said it had stopped using ammonia-treated beef, also known as "pink slime". It has been the target of a number of lawsuits. Most recently it was sued over the seductive use of toys in Happy Meals, the McDonald's meal pack for children. A judge dismissed the suit in April. Yet despite the hoo-ha 25m Americans visit a McDonald's each day.

Even so, the company has made a big push to give itself a healthier image. It has cut levels of sodium in its offerings by 11% since last year. In March it announced that it would offer apples and smaller fries in its Happy Meals. It has also introduced other healthy items, such as its Fruit & Maple Oatmeal. Cindy Goody, the company's nutritionist, boasts that this accounts

for two servings of whole grains (the government recommends at least three a day). In September the company said it would begin posting calorie counts on its menus, earlier than required by a new law introduced by Barack Obama.

But will consumers buy the healthier meals they claim to want? There is the cautionary tale of the McLean Deluxe, a less fatty burger that tested well in the 1990s but failed miserably in the market. “They said they wanted it, we gave it to them and they didn’t eat it,” says Greg Watson, McDonald’s vice-president for menu innovation. Consumers still love the core McDonald’s menu. When executives went on a listening tour earlier this year to hear consumers’ thoughts, many mothers asked McDonald’s to improve nutrition but also told the company not to change the recipes for favourite foods such as Big Macs or French fries. “Some items just need to be left alone,” says Mr Watson.

Today McDonald’s introduces new items cautiously, trying them in just a few restaurants or markets for a limited period. An experiment to add blueberries to its oatmeal will not be repeated next year. Dan Coudreaut, the head chef, is more optimistic about an egg-white sandwich on a wholegrain bun. One benefit of healthier items, explains Mr Watson, is that they make customers feel better about the McDonald’s brand. Some of them will order the healthier food and some will still order their favourite burger but be happier about it, in the knowledge that the company also does salads.

Other changes are being introduced, slowly. Ms Goody says the company may reduce the size of its biggest soda from 32 ounces to 30 ounces. In the past year Mr Coudreaut’s kitchen tested a newer, better veggie burger. “It was delicious,” says Mr Watson, “but there is no way our customer would order that today.” The burger never made it out of the test kitchen.

At the McDonald’s staff restaurant, the head chef proudly points to a new burger being launched in the American market. The Cheddar Bacon Onion Angus Third Pounder weighs in at 41g of fat, or 62% of an adult’s recommended daily fat intake.

## 12) India's sacred City of Widows

### COLUMN ONE

#### **Abused or banished by in-laws after the deaths of their husbands, nearly 15,000 women seek shelter in Vrindavan.**

October 16, 2012, Mark Magnier, Los Angeles Times

VRINDAVAN, INDIA — Lalita Goswami was married only a few years when her husband, a Hindu priest who beat her and abused drugs, died of an apparent overdose. She was left with three young children.

Still, she said, being married was better than being a widow.

That ordeal has lasted for decades. After her husband died, the brother-in-law who took her in kicked her out, forcing her back to her parents' home in Kolkata. Her brother saw her as a financial burden and neighbors ostracized her. In a bid to keep peace, her mother exiled her and her two youngest children to Vrindavan in central India, a sacred town known as the City of Widows.

Today, nearly 15,000 widows live in Vrindavan, where the Hindu god Krishna is said to have grown up. Although it is believed they were first drawn for religious reasons centuries ago, many widows now come to this city of 4,000 temples to escape abuse in their home villages -- or are banished by their husbands' families so they won't inherit property.

Goswami spends her time at Mahila Ashray Sadan, one of several widow ashrams supported by charities here.

"What else could I do?" said Goswami, a solicitous woman who strokes visitors' faces and touches their feet in a traditional sign of respect. She lives in a 30-bed dormitory laced with the widows' meager possessions.

Goswami recently lost her appetite and suffers from chronic diarrhea and nausea. The ashram gives her one meal a day and a \$6-a-month allowance. Healthcare is scarce. "I'm 70, maybe 80," she said. "All I know is, my children have children."

For centuries, Indian widows would throw themselves on their husbands' funeral pyres, reflecting the view that they were of little social worth without their protector and breadwinner. Although that practice, known as sati, has been outlawed, widows are still traditionally considered inauspicious, particularly in Bengali culture, their presence at weddings and festivals shunned and even their shadows seen as bad luck.

Until a few decades ago, widows were often accused of causing their husbands' deaths -- the mother-in-law in older Hindi films would accuse the new widow of "eating her son" alive. Even now, "unlucky" widows are scorned for remarrying, views reformers attribute more to India's male-dominated society than religious tenets.

"Widows are treated like untouchables," said Bindeshwar Pathak, head of the civic group Sulabh International. "Indian tradition is very full of heritage and knowledge, but some of our traditions are beyond humanity."

In August, an outraged Supreme Court ordered government and civic agencies to improve the lives of women in Vrindavan after local media reported abandoned corpses being put in sacks and tossed into the river, a charge officials deny. The government of West Bengal state, where most widows who live here come from, has since promised to provide them with government housing and a stipend exceeding what they'd receive in Vrindavan, which is in Uttar Pradesh state.

But social workers, pointing to similar past initiatives, say follow-through is often lacking. Nor is it clear that the widows want to leave Vrindavan, said Yashoda Verma, who manages the 160-resident Mahila ashram.

According to centuries-old Hindu laws, a widow hoping to obtain enlightenment should renounce luxuries and showy clothes, pray, eat a simple vegetarian diet (no onions, garlic or other "heating" foods that inflame sexual passions) and devote herself to her husband's memory.

At least, that's the idea.

"Very rarely do you see people go to Vrindavan because they're devoted to the cause," said Rosinka Chaudhuri, a fellow at the Center for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta. "Sometimes it's blackmail, or if you're not loved enough, you take yourself up. But the numbers are staggering."

Guddi, a resident in her 70s with a square face and a nose ring, said she came to Vrindavan after being abused by her daughter-in-law, a common complaint.

"What's the point if they feed me two rotis [flatbread] but beat me with a shoe?" said Guddi, who uses one name. "If I'd been born a man, life would've been better. There isn't much respect for women in India."

But social and generational changes are also evident. Even as prejudices linger in rural areas, a growing number of widows in urban areas or those from less-restrictive families remarry -- sometimes to a brother-in-law -- maintain careers and share the inheritance.

All widows over 60 are eligible for a \$16 monthly government pension and food allowance. But up to 80% are illiterate and unable to navigate India's labyrinthine bureaucracy. Even those who do succeed complain that inefficiency and corruption siphon off some of their money.

Many supplement their income by chanting up to five hours a day at local temples -- essentially singing for their supper -- in return for 10 cents and a bowl of rice. Goswami gave that up when her health deteriorated.

### 13) Scientists Adopt Tiny Island as a Warming Bellwether



Matthew Ryan Williams for The New York Times

Published: October 6, 2012 , The New York Times, by Stacey Solie

TATOOSH ISLAND, Wash. — From a stretch of rocky shoreline on this tiny island, one can, on any given morning, watch otters floating on their backs, elephant seals hauling out of the water and a bald eagle flying past murrelets huddled along a cliff face. The startled birds perform a synchronized dive into the sea, their ovoid black-and-white bodies resembling miniature penguins.

Murrelets and gulls perched along a cliff face on Tatoosh Island, off the coast of Washington State. Researchers who have studied the island for decades have noticed that the historically hardy populations of the birds are now only half what they were 10 years ago.

Sophie McCoy, a graduate student at the University of Chicago, conducting field research.

It appears as if the island's wildlife is thriving at this remote outpost, which is also a former Coast Guard station crowned by a decommissioned lighthouse. It was also once a whaling base for the Makah tribe, who maintain treaty rights to the land.

But for over four decades, with the blessing of Makah leaders, Tatoosh has been the object of intense biological scrutiny, and scientists say they are seeing disturbing declines across species — changes that could prove a bellwether for oceanic change globally.

Cathy Pfister and Timothy Wootton, both biology professors at the University of Chicago, have been trekking to the island since the 1980s, often accompanying their former graduate adviser, Robert T. Paine, a nominally retired zoology professor from the University of Washington. At 79, Dr. Paine still returns to Tatoosh several times a year to continue the ecological research he began in the 1960s.

Dr. Pfister and Dr. Wootton met and fell in love while studying the island's species with Dr. Paine. Now married, they often bring their two children on research trips, where the family

sleeps in bunk beds in a one-room cabin, a former Coast Guard facility affectionately dubbed the “Winter Palace.”

On their frequent visits to the island, usually lasting several days each, the researchers haul duffel bags of clothing and equipment up a steep path cut into the rock until the landscape plateaus into a field of salmonberry bramble. It is no quiet retreat. The dull roar of the surf, the screeching gulls, the groaning seals and a distant foghorn all layer into a cacophony on the island. Even the mussel beds creak and crackle.

Among the declines the researchers are noticing: historically hardy populations of gulls and murre are only half what they were 10 years ago, and only a few chicks hatched this spring. Mussel shells are notably thinner, and recently the mussels seem to be detaching from rocks more easily and with greater frequency.

Goose barnacles are also suffering, and so are the hard, splotchy, wine-colored coralline algae, which appear like graffiti along rocky shorelines.

While not entirely understood, the declines are not entirely mysterious. Biologists suspect that the shifts are related to huge declines in the water’s pH, a shift attributed to the absorption of excess carbon dioxide being released into the atmosphere in ever-greater amounts by the burning of fossil fuels for energy.

As the carbon dioxide is absorbed, it alters the oceanic water chemistry, turning it increasingly acidic. Barnacles, oysters and mussels find it more difficult to survive, which can cause chain reactions among the animals that eat those species, like birds and people.

During a research trip in 2000, Dr. Pfister and Dr. Wootton first began testing the pH of water samples. They found the pH level of the water around Tatoosh and along nearby coastlines was declining at a rate 10 times faster than what accepted climate change models were predicting. Even after collecting seven years of data, when they published their findings in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences in 2008, their data were met with skepticism.

“People think we just don’t know how to use the instrument — I still hear that,” Dr. Pfister said. “Luckily for our reputations, I guess, this has been corroborated by a lot of other people.” It was on this island and a nearby mainland shore that Dr. Paine developed his keystone species hypothesis, which describes how top predators dominate an ecosystem, often to the benefit of species diversity.

Now, the island species are once again helping to solve important biological questions. Mussels appear to be succumbing more easily to crashing waves, with barren patches on the rocks growing larger and appearing with greater frequency, said Dr. Wootton, who carefully documents patch sizes at various island sites.

“We all agree, it just looks different,” Dr. Pfister said, pointing to a weedy-looking barren area near where Dr. Paine conducted his studies. More research needs to be done to definitively explain what is happening, she added.



# For Occupy Wall Street, a movement to relief

**MAIN DANS LA MAIN.** Occupy Wall Street, le mouvement de contestation pacifique dénonçant les abus du capitalisme financier lancé le 17 septembre 2011 dans le quartier de la bourse à New York et expulsé mi-novembre de la même année, n'a pas disparu. Toujours très actif sur les réseaux sociaux, il a mis son savoir-faire au service des plus démunis après le passage de l'ouragan Sandy.

THE NEW YORK TIMES

BY ALAN FEUER



**For Occupy Wall Street,  
a movement to relief**  
Le mouvement Occupy  
Wall Street vient en aide  
aux victimes de l'ouragan Sandy

**fierce** violent / **nor'easter** (= northeaster) vents violents, tempête hivernale frappant le nord-est des États-Unis / **to bear, bore, borne down** fondre, s'abattre (sur) / **weather-beaten** ravagé par les intempéries / **relief** (de) secours, intervention d'urgence / **noticeable** remarquable, visible / **battered** meurtri, délabré, dévasté / **Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)** Agence fédérale des situations d'urgence / **sanitation** hygiène publique, voirie / **do-it-yourself** bricolage, ici **do-it-yourself** outfit mouvement citoyen d'entraide qui s'est organisé de manière autonome et spontanée.

**2. stretch** étendue, partie / **Dresden** Dresde (réf. au bombardement de la ville pendant la Seconde guerre mondiale) / **ragged** en haillons / **figure** silhouette / **to shuffle** avancer en traînant les pieds / **trash** débris / **heap** monceau, tas / **power** électricité / **parking lot** (US) = **car park** (GB) parking / **to be awash with** être submergé par, rempli de / **to pick up** reprendre / **to huddle** se blottir, se rassembler / **storefront** devanture d'un magasin (couverte et débordant sur le trottoir) / **amid** au (beau) milieu de / **to hand out** distribuer / **supplies** provisions, vivres et matériel / **storm** tempête / **safe** à l'abri, en sécurité.

**3. candle** bougie / **dull-eyed** au regard éteint, abattu / **we're out** nous n'en avons plus / **field** sur le terrain / **battery** pile / **flashlight** lampe, torche électrique.

**4. firehouse** caserne de pompiers / **firefighter** pompier / **to hurry** ici déplacer en toute hâte / **rig** camion (ici de pompier) / **crazy** fou.

**5. encampment** campement, occupation / **trope** figure par laquelle un mot ou une expression prennent une signification autre que leur sens propre, métaphore / **to wander** errer, s'aventurer / **health care** soins, santé / **hurricane** ouragan / **to conspire** conspirer, concourir (à) / **to deliver** fournir, ici créer / **to call upon** faire appel à / **to cater to** s'adresser à, fournir, ici mobiliser / **strength** force.

**N**EW YORK – On Wednesday night, as a fierce nor'easter bore down on the weather-beaten Rockaways, the relief groups with a noticeable presence on the battered Queens peninsula were these: the National Guard, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Police and Sanitation departments – and Occupy Sandy, a do-it-yourself outfit recently established by Occupy Wall Street.

**2.** This stretch of the coast remained apocalyptic, with buildings burned like Dresden and ragged figures shuffling past the trash heaps. There was still no power, and parking lots were awash with ruined cars. On Wednesday morning, as the winds picked up and FEMA closed its office “due to weather,” an enclave of Occupiers was huddled in a storefront amid the devastation, handing out supplies and trying to make sure that those bombarded by last month's storm stayed safe and warm and dry this time.

**3.** “Candles?” asked a dull-eyed woman arriving at the door. “I'm sorry, but we're out,” said Sofia Gallisa, a field coordinator who had been there for a week. Gallisa escorted the woman in, and someone gave her batteries for her flashlight.

**4.** As she walked away, word arrived that a firehouse nearby was closing for the night; the firefighters there were hurrying their rigs to higher ground. “It's crazy,” Gallisa later said of the official response. “For a long time, we were the only people out here doing relief work.”

## Change

**5.** After its encampment in Zuccotti Park in Manhattan, which changed the public discourse about economic inequality and introduced the nation to the trope of the 1 percent, the Occupy movement has wandered in a desert of more intellectual, less visible projects, like farming, fighting debt and theorizing on banking. While several nouns have been occupied – from summer camp to health care – it is only with Hurricane Sandy that the times have conspired to deliver an event that fully calls upon the movement's talents and caters to its strengths.

**Occupy Sandy was initially the work of a half-dozen veterans of Zuccotti Park.**

**6.** Maligned for months for its purported ineffectiveness, Occupy Wall Street has managed through its storm-related efforts not only to renew the impromptu passions of Zuccotti, but also to tap into an unfulfilled desire among the residents of the city to assist in the recovery. This altruistic urge was initially unmet by larger, more established charity groups, which seemed slow to deliver aid and turned away potential volunteers in





droves during the early days of the disaster.

**7.** In the past two weeks, Occupy Sandy has set up distribution sites at a pair of Brooklyn churches where hundreds of New Yorkers muster daily to cook hot meals for the afflicted and to sort through a medieval marketplace of donated blankets, clothes and food. There is an Occupy motor pool of borrowed cars and pickup trucks that ferries volunteers to ravaged areas. An Occupy weatherman sits at his computer and issues regular forecasts. Occupy construction teams and medical committees have been formed.

### Connected

**8.** Managing it all is an ad hoc group of tech-savvy Occupy members who spend their days with laptops on their knees, creating Google documents with action points and flow charts, and posting notes on Facebook that range from the sober ("Adobo Medical Center in Red Hook needs an 8,000 watt generator AS SOON AS POSSIBLE") to the endearingly hilarious ("We will be treating anyone affected by Sandy, FREE of charge, with ear acupuncture this Monday").

**9.** While the local tech team sleeps, a shadow corps in London works off-hours to update the Twitter feed and to maintain the intranet. Some enterprising Occupiers have even set up a wedding registry on Ama-

zon.com, with a wish list of necessities for victims of the storm; so far, items totaling more than \$100,000 – water pumps and Sawzall saw kits – have been ordered.

**10.** "It's a laterally organized rapid-response team," said Ethan Gould, a freelance graphic artist and a first-time member of Occupy. Gould's experience illustrates the effort's grass-roots ethos. He joined up on Nov. 3 and by the following afternoon had already been appointed a co-coordinator at one of the "dis-tro" (distribution) sites.

**11.** Occupy Sandy was initially the work of a half-dozen veterans of Zuccotti Park who, on the Tuesday after the storm, made their way to public housing projects in the Rockaways and Red Hook, Brooklyn, delivering flashlights and trays of hot lasagna to residents neglected by the government. They arranged for vans to help some people relocate into shelters. When they returned to civilization, they spent the night with their extra bags of stuff at St. Jacobi Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sunset Park, Brooklyn.

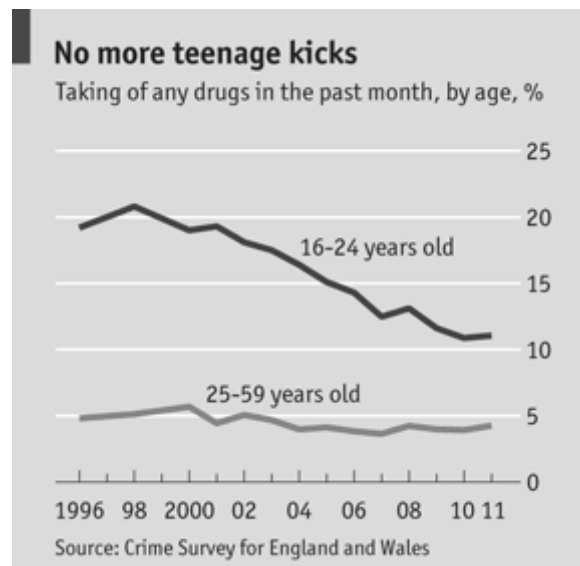
**12.** "They asked if they could crash here," said Juan-Carlos Ruiz, a community organizer there who knew the Occupiers from their previous endeavors. "Those few bags became this enormous organic operation. It's evidence that when official channels fail, other parts of society respond." ●

## 15) The continent generation

# Why young Britons have turned responsible

Oct 27th 2012 , The Economist

“I HOPE I die before I get old”—so sang Roger Daltrey of The Who in 1965. A new concept was then sweeping Britain: the “teenager”. Liberated by high wages and new types of contraception, young people started a sexual and social revolution. Mods and rockers fought at the seaside. Now, it seems, the change they wrought is being undone. Despite the images of teenage looters beamed across the world during last year’s riots, young people in Britain are broadly, and increasingly, well-behaved. Unlike Mr Daltrey, they appear to want to get old before they die.



Youthful continence shows up in all manner of social indicators. In 1998 fully 71% of 16- to 24-year-olds admitted drinking in the previous week. In 2010 just 48% did. The decline in drug-taking is even sharper (see chart). Teenage pregnancies are down by a quarter since 1998, to the lowest level since 1969. School-truancy rates have fallen since 2007, along with levels of youthful criminality. Young people have even become more polite: according to the Offending, Crime and Justice Survey, people born between 1992 and 1996 are less frequently rude and noisy in public places than were previous cohorts at the same age.

In this section

“It’s no longer all sex, drugs and rock and roll,” says Christian Kurz, a vice president at Viacom, which runs MTV, a television network aimed mostly at young audiences. To attract viewers from the “millennial” generation, MTV has replaced the glamour-driven programmes of the past with grittier ones such as “Teen Mom”, which emphasises family and responsibility. Millennials in Britain and elsewhere want reality rather than fantasy, explains Mr Kurz. This extends to what they buy: above all else, brands must appear to be “authentic” if they want to succeed, says Rodney Collins, a director at McCann, an advertising firm.

Whatever has happened to carefree youth? Public-health campaigns, better education and more hands-on parenting have no doubt had some effect. Some young people are probably staying inside watching television and playing video games instead of smoking behind the bike sheds. And Britain's population is changing. The proportion of 15- to 24-year-olds who identify themselves as "white British" has fallen slightly in the past decade, to about 80%. Among the groups filling the gap are British Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, who are less likely to drink or take drugs than their white peers.

Just as important, young people have less money with which to indulge their hedonistic instincts. Far fewer young people work than did ten years ago, because of the economic slump and the expansion of higher education. Many more of them live with their parents. Even those who do have jobs tend to earn less than they used to. Between 1997 and 2011 the average weekly wage earned by 18- to 21-year-olds declined by one-tenth in real terms. It is considerably harder to be rebellious if you have no money and live in your childhood bedroom.

Perhaps most interesting is what has not happened. The collapse in marriage rates and the rise of single-parenthood, both of which continued well into the 1990s when today's young adults were born, might have been expected to unleash a wave of social problems. As it turns out, if there has been an effect, it has been outweighed by bigger, more benevolent forces. For politicians worried about the breakdown of the traditional family model, that ought to be reassuring. For rock music fans, it may be less so.

## 16) New Zealand's Hobbit Trail

By BROOKS BARNES and MICHAEL CIEPLY

Published: October 5, 2012

**THE hill is perfect — steep, shaggy and as green as a radioactive shamrock, like the matching hills around it. The sheep seem pretty idyllic themselves: polite little nibblers who only sometimes block the road.**

As for the oak tree on the hill's crest, it is quite literally perfect. Every flickering leaf was handcrafted, right down to the spidery plastic veins, a tribute to the meticulousness of Sir Peter Jackson, the movie director who staged this place, even creating the pond. (Where better for Paradise Geese to land?)

You are standing in Hobbiton, the place where J. R. R. Tolkien's furry-footed Hobbits came to life in Mr. Jackson's "Lord of the Rings" trilogy and will soon reappear in his "Hobbit" prequels. The sky is dramatic, with sunbeams radiating like spotlights from behind thunderheads. You are woozy from the two-hour car ride from Auckland on a twisting two-lane road (nonstop chatter from Mr. and Mrs. Fanny Pack standing next to you doesn't help), but a few deep gulps of the agrarian air is restorative. And no matter how stubborn, cynical or reluctant you may be (we were all three), this place is most likely casting its spell.

For Mr. Jackson, New Zealand and the millions of fans who spent the last decade tromping this island country in search of "Lord of the Rings" filming locations, the journey is about to begin again. In Wellington, over 100,000 onlookers are expected to turn up on Nov. 28 outside the red-carpet premiere of "The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey," the first of three "Hobbit" films planned for release by 2014. If all goes according to plan, the pictures will also reopen the floodgates of film tourism here.

The "Lord of the Rings" trilogy, which took in over \$3 billion at the global box office between 2001 and 2004, changed the film tourism game entirely. To the surprise of almost everyone, it took possession of an entire country.

When New Line Cinema released the first of the movies in December 2001, tourism officials here hoped the film would, at best, move New Zealand up a notch or two on the list of world travel destinations. After all, Mr. Jackson bulldozed half of his Hobbit village when he had finished filming. Who in their right mind would drive hours into the rural countryside to see it to begin with?

But people came. Since the first film's release, about 266,000 people have visited the half-ruined Hobbiton, according to Tourism New Zealand, with a majority from abroad. Over 50,000 people came in 2004 alone, when "Lord of the Rings" fever peaked following the release of the Oscar-winning third installment. In fact 6 percent of all New Zealand visitors that year, or about 150,000 people, listed the movies as a "main" reason for coming; 11,200 said it was their *only* reason.

New Zealand's travel and hospitality industries, initially caught off guard, raced to meet demand. In Queenstown on the South Island, where Mr. Jackson filmed numerous mountain scenes, 17 tour companies, many of them popping up overnight, started offering movie-

related excursions. Hotels across the country rolled out “Lord of the Rings” promotions and packages, and airport customs officials strung up “Welcome to Middle-earth” banners.

Once you arrive in Matamata you’ll find a few older, no-frills motels and a smattering of bed-and-breakfasts catering to Hobbit visitors, including the new Chestnut Lane Cottage, where the charming owners greeted us with warm scones slathered in orange jam and whipped cream. In terms of restaurants, there is the homey yet stylish Redoubt Bar & Eatery, but this is a fundamentally provincial place. The local newspaper prominently reports soil temperatures, and businesses are practical, like Boltholder Limited, “specialists in bolts and nuts.”

Matamata caught its star, just barely, in 1998, when a farmer named Russell Alexander — jovial, bald and blunt — saw a stranger with binoculars peering across his land. Soon that interloper and his bearded boss, Mr. Jackson, returned with a request to build a “Lord of the Rings” movie set there.

Speaking at his farm in late June, Mr. Alexander recalled his father blurting out: “Lord of the what?” Mr. Alexander said he “kicked him under the table.”

What Mr. Jackson and his associates originally built on a hillside and at the bottom of a deep hollow was a wonderland. Through a camera’s lens or to a casual visitor, it looked like a fairy-tale village and a Hobbit’s Shire, with a munchkin-size mill and dozens of brightly painted Hobbit hole homes, each with a circular front door and most with itty-bitty chimneys and the mossy look of someplace you might stop to rest.

But once the movies had been made, what remained was an unlikely destination for tourists. As Mr. Alexander described it, untreated plywood sat warping in the rain. A bridge constructed from polystyrene “rocks” began to collapse. Sheep grazed through a half-bulldozed Shire that was kept somewhat intact only because Mr. Alexander undertook the cost of basic maintenance and repair. “The movie studio actively discouraged me,” he said. Nevertheless, “People just kept coming.”

So Mr. Alexander, while continuing to graze 10,000 sheep on the property, started to formalize the business, adding restrooms, building a restaurant and buying modern buses to cart people between those amenities and Mr. Jackson’s set, located down a gravel road in the interior of the farm.

Two years ago, when Mr. Jackson returned to Matamata to film his new “Hobbit” prequels, Mr. Alexander persuaded him to kick in a few million dollars to make the restored set permanent. Now a 50-50 venture between the Alexanders and Wingnut Films, which is Mr. Jackson’s production company, Hobbiton recently unveiled the improvements timed to the movie’s release and New Zealand’s summer tourism season, which starts in November. New features include a pub, more Hobbit homes, an electric fence to keep out the sheep and a gift shop offering high-end collectibles (magic cloaks, 900 New Zealand dollars, about \$760 at 1.18 New Zealand dollars to the United States dollar).

But, if a recent visit is any indication, one of Hobbiton’s principal charms remains its lack of polish. Our guide, complete with naturally gnarled teeth and muddy work boots, approached us outside the gift shop (where you buy tour tickets) and herded us into an 11-seat van along with eight other foreign tourists, most of them devouring cookies purchased at Mr. Alexander’s Shire’s Rest cafe. We bumped along, reaching the set after stops to open and

close several farm gates. Storm clouds looked ominous, so everyone grabbed an umbrella from a wooden rack and set forth behind our guide, who warned us to “watch out for rabbit holes.”

Facts were recited: The tiny houses are sized for Hobbits, presumed to measure about 3 feet 6 inches. Pictures were taken: The 44 Hobbit homes are each equipped with fenced yards and windowsills filled with diminutive knickknacks. Orders were given: Do not open those little round doors. (A tour guide snapped when, inevitably, a member of the group did just that. There’s nothing inside anyway. It’s a film set, after all.)

Wandering freely on the vast set, about 12 acres, is not allowed, but we didn’t feel the slightest bit rushed. Treacle is sparse here, which is part of the allure; there are no costumed Hobbits smiling and waving, Disney style. But we did see crews pruning hedges, expanding a parking lot and building that themed pub, in anticipation of the coming crowds.

Near the top of the hill, the fabric leaves of Mr. Jackson’s fake tree fluttered in the breeze, and we gasped at how completely Hobbit Valley enveloped us. While Hobbiton and its sheep farm rival the size of the theme park at Universal Studios in Los Angeles, it is a unique environment — a quiet, spare place where the line between nature and art fades to nothing.