

Century Marks

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A Democratic Jonah: On Sunday mornings you may find Leah Daughtry preaching to her small Pentecostal, African-American church in Southwest Washington, D.C. During the week she serves as chief of staff to Howard Dean, chair of the Democratic National Committee. Dean appointed Daughtry the chief executive of the Democratic Party's convention, which takes place this month, and he backed her plan to reach out to religious voters, especially evangelicals and Catholics, to try to convince them that faith and values are important to the Democratic Party. While Daughtry acknowledges that God has given her the gifts of administration, she still wonders at times why God has put her in this insider role. "It's the story of Jonah," she says. "There's no point running from God. He'll find you" (*New York Times Magazine*, July 20).

Up against a brick wall: Randy Pausch went with his family to Disneyland as a child, and ever since, he had aspirations to work there. Upon getting a doctorate in computer science, he applied for a job with Walt Disney Imagineering. But he was told that the company had no openings that fit his qualifications. Eventually, after he had worked on some virtual reality programming—and with persistent pestering on his part—his employer and Disneyland agreed to let him take a sabbatical to work for Disneyland, a fulfillment of his dream. Pausch came to believe that the brick

walls that obstruct our lives are “not there to keep us out. The brick walls are there to give us a chance to show how badly we want something.” Pausch, who became famous for the last lecture he delivered to his students at Carnegie Mellon after he found out he had terminal cancer, died last month (*The Last Lecture*, Hyperion).

Gas prices driving you buggy? If high fuel prices are tempting you to join the Amish and trade in your car for a horse and buggy, think twice. They’re about as dependent on fuel oil as the rest of us. While most Amish shun the use of modern technology, many of them have turned to microenterprises such as furniture making as a source of income. To run their business equipment, they use generators to produce their own electricity, rather than purchasing it from the power company. Amish who work in the building trades or in factories pay van services to get them to and from work—which is getting more expensive too. And the cost of the grain the Amish feed the horses they keep for field work or to drive their buggies has gone up due to competition from the ethanol industry (*Cleveland Plain Dealer*, July 28).

Deceptive advertising: An ad produced by the American Petroleum Institute claims there is “enough untapped oil in the U.S. to fuel more than 60 million cars for the next 60 years.” While the claim is correct, the problem is that as of 2006, 60 million cars accounted for only a fourth of all registered vehicles in the U.S., according to FactCheck.org.

Familiar refrain: When Peter Hawkins, a professor at Boston University, asked the students in his entry-level course on the Bible if they had ever heard of the 23rd Psalm, about five hands went up. After he recited the text, almost everyone recognized parts of it, even if they didn’t know the source. For one student it was a line in rock group Pink Floyd’s “Sheep,” for another a reference in rapper Coolio’s “Gangsta’s Paradise.” A third student claimed to recognize a refrain in the psalm from *Pulp Fiction*—but there the text is actually Ezekiel 25:17. “My students knew their movies and their lyrics but not the biblical source of ‘the valley of the shadow of death,’” says Hawkins. “They were shocked when I revealed it” (*Reflections*, Spring).

True believers: In a religious knowledge test for Saudi Arabian fourth graders, students are asked a multiple-choice question: “Is belief true in the following instances?” The options given: “(a) A man prays but hates those who are virtuous. (b) A man professes that there is no deity other than God but loves the unbelievers. (c) A man worships God alone, loves the believers, and hates the unbelievers.” The

correct answer, according to the Wahhabi imams who prepared this test, is “c.” American diplomats had suggested to the Saudi government that such sentiments should be eliminated from this and other Saudi textbooks, since these textbooks are distributed by the Saudi government to Muslim schools all over the world. But the Q&A above came from a textbook that the Saudis claim was revised to be less hostile toward other faiths (*Washington Post*, July 22).

Blurred lines: Until the beginning of the 20th century, children were routinely excluded from public libraries so they would be protected from what was then considered morally corrupting literature. Anne Carroll Moore helped to change that by establishing a children’s library, first in Brooklyn, and then later at the New York Public Library. In her role she became acquainted with gifted writers like E. B. White, and she encouraged White to write a book for children. White was inspired to write *Stuart Little*, a book about a humanlike mouse, that became a classic in children’s literature. But when Moore received galley proofs of the book, which had taken White years to complete, she responded, “I never was so disappointed in a book in my life,” and declared that the book “musn’t be published.” Among other complaints, Moore thought *Stuart Little* blurred the lines between reality and fantasy (*New Yorker*, July 21).

Hateful talk: A search of Jim David Adkisson’s house turned up books authored by right-wing talk-show hosts. It included *Liberalism Is a Mental Disorder*, by Michael Savage; *Let Freedom Ring*, by Sean Hannity; and *The O’Reilly Factor*, by Bill O’Reilly. Adkisson, apparently on a rampage against liberals, is accused of entering a Unitarian Universalist church in Knoxville, Tennessee, with a gun and killing two people and wounding six others (*Knoxville News*, July 28; [see news item](#)).

Loaves and fishes: *Charisma* magazine reports that when evangelist Marilyn Hickey conducted meetings recently in Cairo, Egypt, 2,400 Kentucky Fried Chicken meals appeared out of thin air. Boxed lunches had been ordered for 3,500 people. After the crowd swelled to 5,000, more boxes mysteriously appeared twice, leaving a surplus of food and dumbfounded witnesses. “I am fully convinced that this was a supernatural occurrence,” Hickey said.