

# Natural Selections

A NEWSLETTER OF THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

## RU BIKES FOR MS

BRIAN MILLAN

You never know what will happen when you try to change some little thing in your life. I'm Brian. I am a nurse working in the Rockefeller University Hospital Inpatient unit. A while back, I bought a bicycle in an attempt to finally heed the advice of my doctor. He has been telling me, threatening me, and pleading with me for years to lose some weight (done), eat healthier (done), exercise (done), and quit smoking (well, three out of four ain't bad). Not being enamored of riding the subway very much, I started riding back and forth each day from Williamsburg, Brooklyn on my bike. After some initial bouts of respiratory arrest and two or three defibrillations, I actually began to enjoy myself (even in February) and managed to lose seventy pounds in the process.

Biking for me is a means to get in shape as well as get to work. I never thought of it in any other context, including socializing or fundraising. Then, one day I was browsing in the Vitamin Shoppe and came across a flyer for Bike MS NYC Traffic Free. It will take place on Sunday, October 4, 2009, at 7:30 a.m. It is a loop event with 30, 66, and 100 mile options that start and end at Pier 94 on Manhattan's West Side.

My sister and niece suffer from Multiple Sclerosis (MS), and both of them have done MS walks to raise funds for research. MS is an autoimmune disease affecting the central nervous system which leads to demyelination, a process that severely alters the ability of nerve cells to communicate. Typically, the initial clinical presentation involves sensorial or cerebellar deficits. Worst case scenarios involve widespread neurological defects, cognitive impairments and neuropsychiatric disorders.

The Rockefeller University (RU) has a strong connection with MS research. Much work has been done at Rockefeller to understand the process of the disease. Over 35 years ago, Professor Emeritus John Zabriskie studied the autoimmune mechanisms involved in MS patients, focusing on cellular immunity. As recently as this year, Knut Wittkowski, biostatistician at RU's Center for Clinical and Translational Science, performed a statistical analysis which identified an amino acid change in the protein encoded by the gene *HLA-DRB1* as a major risk factor for MS.

Anyway, back to biking. I just wanted to do this for my sister and niece. However, I thought it would be nice to have some company for the ride. Knowing that the RU campus is full of bikes, I put out a note on the RU classifieds asking if anyone would like to join me. To my delight, about 30 individuals replied within the first few days wanting either more information on the ride or how to donate to the cause. It occurred to me that if we had this much interest, RU should have a named team to represent it.

It was quite simple to set up Team Rockefeller through the Bike MS NYC Web page. To date we have twelve registered riders for the event and more are always welcome. As of this writing, Team Rockefeller has raised over \$750.00 for MS research and we still have six



Image provided by the author

weeks to go. My initial contact with all the riders was through email and phone calls, but we now have a Team Rockefeller blog so that information can be conveyed more easily.

I have been thanked by so many people for organizing this event for RU, but the real credit goes to the RU community. The Team Rockefeller effort, as a support for of MS research, was created by the enthusiastic response of the riders. As of now, Team Rockefeller consists of: Cynthia de la Fuente, Markus Grammel, Bregtje Hartendorf-Wallach, Sachin Kadam, Marina Maiuri, Brian Millan, Avi Oren, Deena Oren, Yigal Oren, Peter Selestrin, John Ulmer, and Isaul Vargas. Additionally, the RU Clinical Research Support Office has been helping facilitate this effort with publicity and equipment support.

If you are interested in joining or supporting Team Rockefeller or an individual rider then please log on to: <http://www.bikemsnyc.org> then click on Donate/ePledge and search for "Team Rockefeller University," or your favorite participant's first and last name. You can also visit the Team Rockefeller blog at: <http://rucares.blogspot.com> and click on the "Support Team Rockefeller" link. ☺

# As If Genes Were Painting in Aquarelle

LEAH KELLY

"I do a lot at the same time." This is a massive understatement coming from Devonté Hynes. The twenty-three year old, probably best known as the musical artist Lightspeed Champion, also vents his talents by writing short stories, comics, and other musical side projects, the latest of which is called *Blood Orange*.

Indeed, superficially Dev does do a lot in managing to juggle these creative projects simultaneously, but he also multitasks on a whole other level. He is a synesthete. He sees sounds. Having never talked about his experience before for fear of sounding mental or pretentious, I convinced him to try and describe how synesthesia affects his daily life and how, if at all, it influences his creative process.

He recounts his earliest memory of synesthesia: watching *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* as a small child. "It blew my mind" even though at the time he had no idea what it was about. "It was a brutal assault—but a good one." He also remembers phrases of the song "Walking on Broken Glass" as being imprinted on his mind as the "most beautiful thing." Hynes describes his experiences as "seeing layers" like staring at "moving pictures" with rhythm, pitch, instrument, the spoken voice and volume all having their separate color qualities.

He recently relived that initial experience by watching *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* again. Exactly the same thing happened. So, is this sensory cross-wiring repeatable? Indeed, the same songs evoke the same colors and same images over and over again. Dev claims however that he never gets tired of songs. Depending on the song or even the phrase within a song, the images he sees can evoke feelings ranging from euphoria to discomfort. "I learned to stop talking about it because people think I'm being ironic but I'm not! For instance, the new Mariah Carey song: I like it! I'm going to listen to it—a lot!"

Dev, like other synesthetes, has a phenomenal memory. Having very little formal training in music, he is able to teach himself any instrument. He learns by "trying to get to the color. I can play anything because I see it, because I just recreate it. I don't have to think. I'm just reading it."

Music is such a part of him that he doesn't even view it as a profession or something worth mentioning. "I used to paint but could never really physically get what I wanted. I

can only do it through music. It's so overly natural I almost blank it out. It's not a chore and I find it weird that people are interested. It's like breathing." He writes music visually "doing whatever he can to get the picture" seeing it as layers; "it's almost like painting, mixing colors."

Composing comes so naturally to him that he has begun to impose restrictions and mini-challenges on himself while writing to keep himself interested. For instance, the album he's currently working on, he's trying to incorporate eastern melodies. Usually he likes to layer but this time he's stopping himself by "sprinkling eastern melodies over a base color with a solid color for the vocal: one straight journey with no turns." When talking to his label he describes his albums through color but worries that he sounds pretentious.

He writes and records every day and even on his last day off he thought it would be fun to record an Ike and Tina Turner album. Hynes is often too distracted to eat and the intensity of his dreams means that sleep is limited. "My girlfriend worries that I do too much. I fill myself up with tasks and projects and there are so many—I get them done but it's never enough." It's not only music, but words and even taste that cross the sensory boundaries, "especially when I write myself." He usually has about ten books on the go, dipping in and out of them with ease depending on "what mood I want washed over me."

So would he like to compose soundtracks? "I write essentially in the form of soundtracks. I write in track listings, which is quite unusual. Every album I write has themes that come back. I have such a clear idea of how I want each piece to be. Each piece just works when it's there as a whole. When certain things can't happen it changes the whole pattern. Because I write in track listings, it makes things difficult for everyone else—and me."

So I guess collaborations are impossible? Apparently not. Dev actually likes collaborating because he doesn't know what the end product will be. Three songs on the new album were intended to be col-

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laborations. Dev would compose the skeleton and then this gets "decorated" by another composer. Unfortunately, this finished product did not go down well and Dev was forced to complete the piece himself. Something he's not used to and that he found difficult.

I can't begin to empathize with the sensory bombardment he must have to deal with on a daily basis. "I notice every bit of music in the day. I notice it all. I have to be really selective about what live performances I see. But apparently seeing a live orchestra is always a joy. 'It's like someone writing so many different patterns to create one huge pattern that moves in a pack. It's phenomenal. I'm in awe.'" While talking, Dev frequently uses the phrase "it blows my mind" and I wonder if he realizes how apt this description actually is. ☺

## NATURAL SELECTIONS



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# Copernicus Rediscovered?

ZEENA NACKERDIEN

What are the chances of digging up the remains of the man who revolutionized astronomy in your local church? Doubts have swirled around the 2005 claim of a Polish archaeological team that they had unearthed skeletal remains of the 16th century astronomer, Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543)<sup>1</sup>. A team of forensic experts, including the Central Forensic Laboratory of the Warsaw Police, examined the claims by investigating the bones and teeth of a 60 to 70-year old man found in Frombork Cathedral, Poland.

The task at hand was daunting, as outlined in their recent PNAS article<sup>2</sup>. Copernicus died in 1543 at age 70 and was interred at Frombork Cathedral, which unfortunately has a large percentage of unnamed tombs. Scientists used facial reconstruction and comparisons with paintings, including a self-portrait, to narrow down the list of skeletons to one individual. They struck gold with the discovery of a seeming match. There was a forehead scar and evidence of a broken nose between one cranium and a key portrait. The next step involved DNA analysis. Here, the team was aided by Swedish researchers who retrieved hairs from a book annotated by Copernicus (on exhibit at Museum Gustavianum in Uppsala, Sweden). Genetic detective work enabled them to match two of the hairs to DNA segments from a well-preserved cranial tooth, thereby adding to the notion that the remains of Copernicus had finally been discovered.

Interestingly, the authors point out that Copernicus may have had blue eyes, even though early portraits of the astronomer show him with dark eyes. The authors explain their findings by noting that the painting technique, chalcography, used during the lifetime of Copernicus, does not reflect actual color. Therefore it is possible that science has now corrected an artistic impression reproduced in the ensuing centuries of dark eye color by show-

ing that Copernicus in fact had blue eyes. Commentary on the article has been favorable, with doubts mainly centering on the number of hairs and books tested before zeroing in on the *Calendarium*, which contained the jackpot hairs.

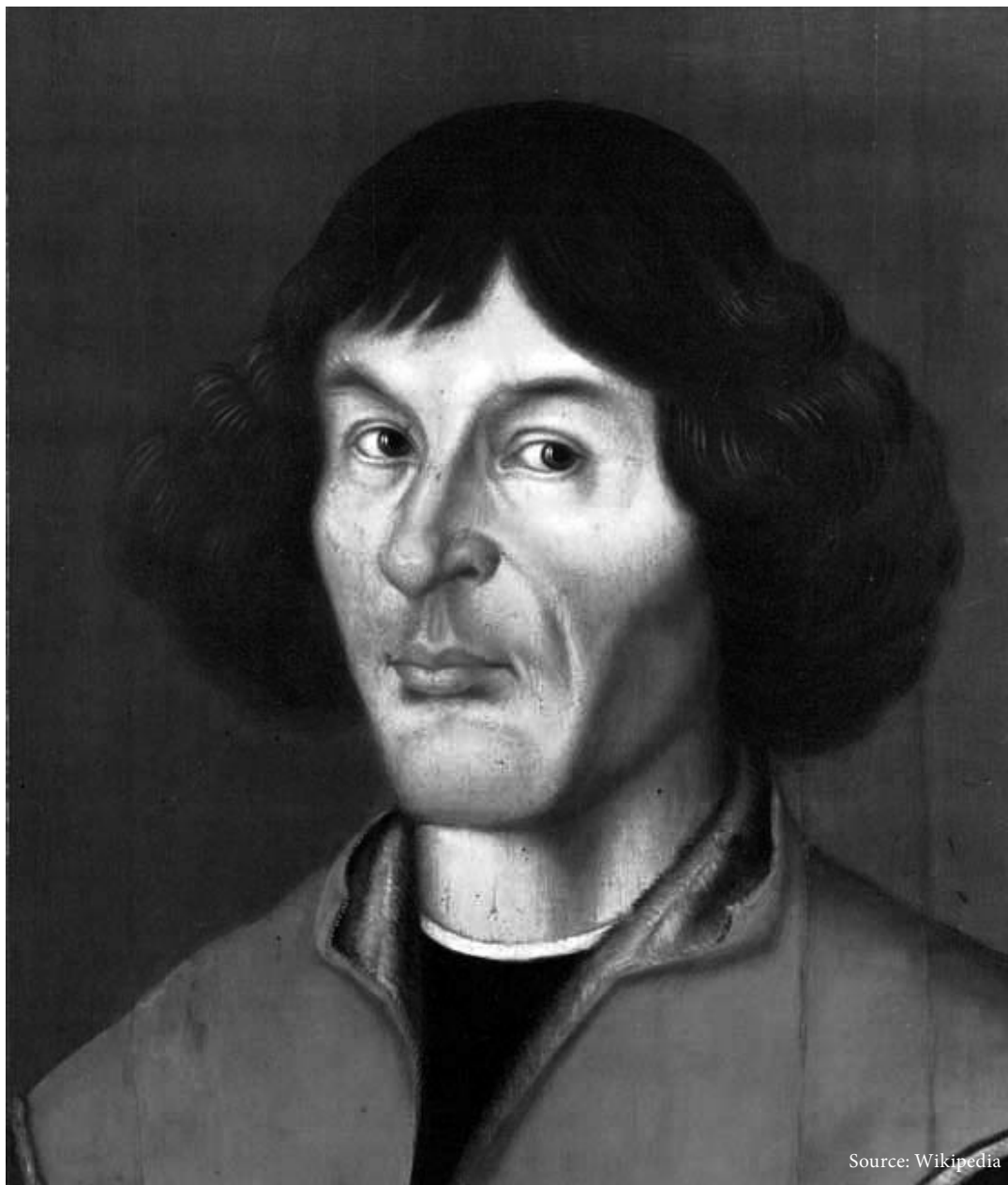
Clearing up the mystery of Copernicus' remains may literally put him to rest, but he remains immortal to all of us. Like Darwin, he ushered in the modern scientific era with the heliocentric theory, i.e. placing the sun at the center of our solar system and relegating the Earth to the position of another planet orbiting the sun. His findings did not endear him to contemporary critics, e.g. Scaliger, who noted the name of Copernicus next to the recom-

mendation that "certain writings should be expunged or their authors whipped"<sup>3</sup>. Nowadays scholars and laymen laud him and reserve their debates for side-issues over his nationality and vocation (see Wikipedia).

The International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry (IUPAC) has recently honored him by accepting Copernicium as the official name for element 112, a new addition to the Periodic Table. ☺

## References

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- 2 Bogdanowicz W, et al. PNAS. 2009 [Epub ahead of print].
- 3 Rosen E. The History of Science Society (Isis). 1958 49(3):319-330.



Source: Wikipedia



# Art Review

BERNARD LANGS

The most important work of art in a permanent collection of a New York City (NYC) museum is certainly not the best work of art. This so-called most important painting that I have in mind, Raphael's *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints* (*Colonna Altarpiece*), crowns the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Met), giving it a major work by one of the big three Renaissance artists: Leonardo, Michelangelo, and Raphael. Since I believe that the Met is the most important place for art in NYC, and that NYC is the most important place in the world, it could be argued (ridiculously) through such logic that the altarpiece is the most important painting in the world.

Despite this, I've been looking at the painting for about twenty-seven years in my constant visits to the museum, and I have always had trouble with it. I want to like it—love it—and I want it to bowl me over, but it just doesn't. I've had trouble with other paintings in the Met over the years, specifically *Venus and the Lute Player* by Titian and Tintoretto's *Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes*, but the difference is, I always liked those paintings and enjoyed them. My struggle with the Titian, which shows a naked Venus staring rapturously into space as a young man plays a lute, was with its landscape background. I came to terms with it about ten years ago, when on one visit, the space of the landscape seemed to unfold before me like the hidden dimensions mentioned by Brian Greene in his book on string theory, *The Elegant Universe*. So now, I can see the Titian and I can love it. The large Tintoretto canvas always looked flat to me, and after twenty years of visits, the many figures took on the appearance of holograms to me, and seem to bend out of the picture plane. The painting is now alive with depth and character, and I can understand its great passion.

But the Raphael...the Raphael. The painting, which features a Madonna with Child, sitting on a throne with the Baptist child at her feet and two male saints in the foreground and two female ones behind, oozes

the essence of Europe and Italy in the days of the Renaissance, and that is what I've always liked best about it—but that's not enough. The figures lack emotional power and the work does not grab the viewer. The faces of the female saints are in the style of Raphael's teacher, Perugino, who was ridiculed in his own day for the repetition of his figures, and is still ridiculed today for the same reason. I've always felt the need to defend Perugino, especially after viewing his beautiful *Crucifixion* down at the National Gallery of Art in Washington. But let's face it: the faces of the female saints in the Raphael are weak.

I was offered some help in my struggle with the Raphael when I came across a reproduction of it in Rona Goffen's wonderful book *Renaissance Rivals*. The painting looked better in a book, as works of art often do, and one is always pleased to see one of one's own paintings in a major book on art history. Goffen notes some problems with the work, but instructs the viewer to see the difference between the female saints and the male saints, and offers that the lessons of Michelangelo and Leonardo incorporated by Raphael bring a certain monumental pose to the male saints. Here was my chance: I rushed to the museum a few days after reading the passage and stood before the Raphael. Ah, I thought: monumentality. We may have something here. Perhaps some time in the

next ten years I'll fully get it. I think I've known it all along on some level, that the monumentality is what led me to believe in its importance in the collection of the museum in the first place.

Author's note: I e-mailed Professor Goffen in late 2004 thanking her for her insight on the Raphael. She sent me an incredibly gracious reply. She passed away just a few months later and will be remembered as a wonderful art historian.

*This is the first in a three-part series on major works of art in NYC museums, focusing on The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Frick Collection, and the Museum of Modern Art. ☉*



Raphael's *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints*

Source: Wikipedia



This month Natural Selections interviews Catherine Bernstein, Comparative Bioscience Center.  
Country of Origin: USA

## New York State of Mind

**How long have you been living in New York?** Pretty much all my life! I was born at Mount Sinai Hospital and grew up in the northeast Bronx near Montefiore Hospital. I went to Boston College for a year and a half and worked at Harvard Medical School for about a year but always ended up back in NYC. My dream was to live in Manhattan.

**Where do you live?** East 84th Street between York and East End Avenues.

**Which is your favorite neighborhood?** I lived in midtown, the East Village (in the early nineties) and the West Village (nine years on Bedford Street). I'd have to say the West Village.

**What do you think is the most overrated thing in the city? And underrated?** Overrated: Entertainment, because I've always found that if you actually live in the heart of the city, you can't afford the big concerts, clubs, going out for drinks, etc. If you can, it's usually too crowded and ends up being more trouble than it's worth. Underrated: The opportunities for health and exercise here. Many for free or very cheap. There's yoga, Pilates, Tai Chi, running, swimming, miles and miles of new biking trails, groups all over the city to inspire you. And the healthy food supermarkets like Trader Joe's, Fairway, Whole Foods (look for the bargains) and the smaller neighborhood markets like HealthNuts and Elm Health.

**What do you miss most when you are out**

**of town?** The New York attitude particular to people here...that witty self-deprecating sarcasm/cynicism unique to people who live here.

**If you could change one thing about NYC, what would that be?** The population explosion. There are over one million more people in NYC than there were fifteen years ago. You really feel it on the subways, buses, walking the streets. It's harder to do activities and just relax. If you watch movies of NYC from the seventies and eighties, it was a lot less crowded.

**Describe a perfect weekend in NYC.** This would be for summer: Running in Central Park in the early morning. Pilates class at Asphalt Green. Brunch at Peter's Restaurant (outdoor dining!) on 1st and 83rd. Hanging out in Carl Schurz Park near the small dog run with a blanket, sunscreen, a good book, and the *Daily News*. A picnic dinner in the park with a bottle of chilled white wine and a large pizza from Pintaile's. Watching the boats go by on the East River as the sun sets. Back home to watch *Dexter*.

**What is the most memorable experience you have had in the NYC?** Back in high school, my friends and I were huge fans of *Late Night with David Letterman* (this is going back to 1986). We had a sleepover one summer weekend and set our alarms for 2 a.m. We took the D train from the Bronx to Rockefeller Center and waited for stand-by tickets all night long. We had to go to a Mc-



Donald's in Times Square for a bathroom! We got into the show that day and waited around for Dave and his band. We met him, Paul Schaeffer, and Chris Elliott and got everyone's autograph. I'll never forget it.

**If you could live anywhere else, where would that be?** Santa Monica, California.

**Do you think of yourself as a New Yorker?**

**Why?** Yes! It's all I know. My grandparents settled in the Upper East Side in the forties and moved to the Bronx where my Mom grew up. She met my Dad right on the same block (DeKalb Ave) that I grew up on. NYC is in my blood! I grew up thinking *Sesame Street* was every kid's life. ☺

## HAKATA TONTON: Putting Pig Feet on a Pedestal

ADRIA LE BOEUF

Just as a preface, I am not into extreme food. If I've heard something is delicious, I'll try it regardless of what it is, but I won't try eye of newt just to say I've tried eye of newt. Hakata Tonton's collagenous feast was decidedly in the former category: delicious.

Hakata Tonton is a pork-inclined Japanese restaurant in the East Village, where they specialize in dishes from Hakata, Japan, more specifically: the wonders of pig's feet or tonsoku. The restaurant has a number of amazing tasting menus for very reasonable prices. I tried the Tonton tasting menu which offers seven glorious courses

for only \$38! The seven courses were plentiful and varied, ranging from salmon carpaccio with a glorious lemon chive sauce, to the dessert of a delicate cheese mousse with berries and black sesame ice cream.

Of the seven, only one dish offers pig feet in the form of pig's feet, but many of the others include pig's feet in stealthier forms. Pig feet have very little meat to them, but in spite of their richness, they also have little fat. The majority of the tissue is collagen which Chef Himi Okajima manages to include lusciously and seamlessly into many dishes. For example, the Hakata Tonton Hot Pot achieves its rich broth from the

collagen of pig feet. Tonsoku is smoothly incorporated into rice balls, gyoza, shumai, salads and is featured on its own in many other ways throughout the menu. Oddly, tonsoku is actually becoming something of a beauty food fad lately because many people want to eat collagen for its oft-touted anti-aging effects on skin. Whether or not this is a rational reason to eat tonsoku, Hakata Tonton is a great place to try it.

What really stood out throughout the meal were the various sauces. Often mixtures of typical Japanese sauces such as ponzu with various atypical or western flavors (and probably also tonsoku colla-



gen), I just found that I never wanted to let the waitress take away my plates because I wanted to keep enjoying the sauces with whatever I could dip into them. The portions were plentiful, and beware that the hot pot is sincerely spicy.

Overall, Hakata Tonton offered an ex-

cellent and varied experience. To top off the quirk of the place, as we left, stuffed to the brim with deliciousness, the waitress pops out the door after us and offers each of us a pez from a little pink, cartoon-headed pez dispenser. Why? It is part of their quirky tradition. Why not? ☺

### Hakata Tonton

61 Grove St, Manhattan  
(bet. Bleecker St. & 7th Ave)  
Mon-Thu 5:55-midnight  
Fri.Sat 5:55-01:00am  
Phone : (212) 242-3699  
<http://tontonnyc.com/>

## New Director of NIH, Francis Collins

AILEEN MARSHALL

Francis Collins was recently confirmed as the new Director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). He was born in 1950 and raised on a small farm in Virginia. He was homeschooled until age eleven. He had a high school chemistry teacher he credits for inspiring his interest in science. This was the first time he learned that science could be about learning how to solve a problem rather than just memorizing facts.

At age sixteen Francis started college at the University of Virginia, majoring in chemistry. There he first heard about DNA, which was a totally new field at the time. From there it was on to Yale University where he got his Ph.D. in chemistry. In 1978 he entered medical school at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He was impressed on seeing patients with genetic disorders. "It was so powerful to see the consequences of a small change in this wonderful molecule called DNA. Just one letter out of place could cause a disease like Sickle Cell Anemia." There, he did a residency in internal medicine. He returned to Yale to do a post-doctoral fellowship in human genetics in 1981. In 1984 he joined the faculty at the University of Michigan where he was an investigator of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. It was there that he developed the technique of positional cloning. This allowed him to identify a number of disease-causing genes. In 1989, he identified a gene associated with cystic fibrosis. Subsequently, he found the gene associated with neurofibromatosis in 1990 and for Huntington's disease in 1993. He always felt that his background in chemistry allowed him to take a more rigorous approach to sequencing DNA. He was excited about the idea that genetic research would allow us to tell people if they will get a disease or not.

From 1993, Dr. Collins became the director of the National Human Genome Research Institute at NIH. There, he led the Human Genome Project to sequence the entire human genome. The project was completed ahead of schedule and under budget. The complete sequencing was finished in 2003 instead of the projected 2005. He had to spend much of his time on ethical and legal problems to ensure the information did not get misused and that people could not get discriminated against if they had a gene for a disease. "We can use that information to try to prevent a disease before it even starts," he said in an interview in 1998.

On his role as leader of that project, he is quoted in the same interview as saying, "I can only weigh in when it comes to scientific facts." In that interview he said, "We spend about one and a half percent of our health care budget on research. No company would dream of only plowing back one and a half percent of their business into research. Yet we seem comfortable doing that with something as important as healthcare. That's frustrating. There are so many things we can do."



There has been some concern as to whether his religious beliefs will interfere with his role as NIH Director. At age twenty-seven, he became religious based on "a series of basically logical explorations into whether or not a belief in God is something that makes sense." He also credits C.S.Lewis's book, *Mere Christianity*. He is founder of the BioLogos Foundation, a group that promotes dialogue between the church and science. He wrote a book, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence of Belief* in 2006. However, he is on record as rejecting intelligent design.

Collins nomination has been lauded by David Baltimore, the American Heart Association and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Collins has been elected to the Institute of Medicine and is a member of the National Academy of Sciences.

He is also known for dabbling in guitar and riding a motorcycle. He formed the band, *The NIH Directors*, which plays at NIH events. ☺

## In Our Good Books

CARLY GELFOND

### *The Lost Art of Walking: The History, Science, Philosophy, and Literature of Pedestrianism*

Geoff Nicholson

Riverhead Books, 2008

I spend a lot of time walking. This is partly because I live in New York City, where you really don't have much choice. But I also walk because I happen to take pleasure in it. Walking is always an adventure here, and there is much to take in. In my neighborhood of Brooklyn, I witness the slow slide of winter into spring as I make my way down pretty blocks lined with towering London Plane trees, the last to gain their leaves. In Manhattan, I buy apples from the bearded fruit man I pass every day on my commute to work, who looks like the Czech writer Milan Kundera. Back in Brooklyn, heading up the street in the evening past rows of stately brownstones, I slow to take in the comforting smells of family dinners that seep from the homes I pass: meatloaves and spaghetti and things made with garlic. Always, always, garlic.

*The Lost Art of Walking*, the latest work by the writer Geoff Nicholson, is a treatise on—and celebration of—pedestrianism. Part of Nicholson's aim is clearly to rally the sedentary among us, to create a new following for an activity often viewed these days as something more to be avoided than pursued. Like horseback riding and sailing, walking—so elemental as to be often overlooked as an activity at all—has had a cultural presence, too.

Nicholson is like the fun schoolteacher you had who structured lessons in a way that almost made you forget you were learning. (Then suddenly, you realized how much you knew about photosynthesis, or Mozart, or the periodic table.) An amusing storyteller and knowledgeable tour guide, Nicholson begins on a scientific note, leading us swiftly through the evolution and physiology of bipedalism. From there, we detour into the arts, encountering walking as a medium for conceptual artists such as the sculptor Richard Long; and as both the subject matter and method of street photographers like Bruce Gilden and Martin Parr.

Walking has served as an influence in the world of music as well, we learn, inspiring the rhythm known as the walking bass line, which occurs not only in blues music, but in pop and jazz as well. In country-western music, walking becomes a symbol, synonymous with the ideals of honesty and plain dealing.

As Nicholson points out, there is no shortage of great movie walking either. Many famous actors throughout history have a trademark stride: Charlie Chaplin, Groucho Marx, Pee-wee Herman, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and John Wayne come to mind.

History has had its share of oddball and eccentric walkers, too, and this is indeed where Nicholson's anecdotes get interesting. We meet naked walkers, mud-covered walkers, walkers cloaked head to toe in leather. There's the career pedestrian and competitive walker, Captain Barclay, who walked a mile in each of a thousand successive hours—a test of endurance and, moreover, sleep deprivation, whose walking Nicholson calls “a [demonstration of] what the human body and the human spirit are capable of.” In the interest of research Nicholson even attempts to do some structured pedestrian feats of his own, such as his stop-and-start “Captain Barclay walks,” so that he might get a “taste of how it might feel to do even a fraction of what Barclay had done.”

Nicholson's tour takes some bizarre turns as well. He leads us into the somewhat offbeat territory of psychogeography, an exploration of the effects of geographical environment on emotions and behavior. There is

an amusing scene in which Nicholson finds himself on a walking tour of parking lots, which happens to be spent mostly in a van, which frequently happens to get stuck in traffic, in the rain, the recorded commentary having ended long before the tour has even arrived at the first lot.

And of course, there is walking in literature. History is abundant with writers who walked and walkers who wrote. William Wordsworth, Nicholson notes, would stride up and down the path of his garden when he was “in the throes of composition. Walking and writing had for him become synonymous.” Indeed, there seems to be some fundamental connection between walking and writing. Both are a vehicle for exploration, an activity that helps us make sense of what's around us. Or, as Nicholson puts it, “writing is one way of making the world our own, and...walking is another.”

*The Lost Art of Walking* has its flaws, too. First impressions are important certainly, but perhaps not as important as last impressions, the latter being what fills one's head on the walk home, so to speak, once the encounter is over. Our last encounter with *The Lost Art of Walking* disappoints, as Nicholson takes the easy road and neatly sums up (one imagines bullet points) where he has taken us.

At times, the book becomes rambling and somewhat unfocused, but Nicholson makes for an amiable narrator, and in the end I stuck with him. Impassioned by his subject matter, and eager to draw in his readers, his greatest point may be his simplest: that “adventures and wonders are to be found wherever we are, if not in our own backyard, then within walking distance of it.”

In some ways, the book might be said to mimic a walk itself. Nicholson once said in an interview that “a walk is never equally fascinating for its whole length. Certain stretches may seem dull or mundane, and then suddenly you see a number of amazing things that make it all worthwhile.” ☉



Cartoon by Rossana Henriques





*Divide-Enclose-Contain* by Adria LeBoeuf



*Santa Fe Living* by Daniel Andor

