

40 Years in the Desert

Volume 7
Number 1

The Further Adventures of Matthew Saroff, Itinerant Engineer

I will start with contact details for the Saroff Brood™. We're still in Texas at 2320 Miriam Lane, Arlington, TX 76010. Our phone is (817)469-7660. My email is msaroff@pobox.com, and Sharon's¹ is sindara@pobox.com. This has not changed.

We aren't going to *Arisia*² this upcoming January.

I apologize for the two year interval since the last *40 Years*. With children in the house, it becomes much more difficult to put this out. Originally, I was going to blame this on visiting the 'rents'³ at the end of 1998, but I've procrastinated⁴ way past that. I've missed the deadline twice, but I'll try not to do that again⁵.

The REALLY BIG News

We've had another baby, Charles Emmanuel Saroff, named after my late father-in-law. He was born 6:38am on Sept. 10, 1999, which was both two weeks early and on *eruv*⁶ Rosh Hashanah. He weighed 7 lbs 12 ounces, and was 21 inches long. It was a remarkably short labor, about 3 hours from water breaking to delivery. It happened so fast, that we delivered at a local hospital, not the one where Sharon's¹ OB/GYN practices.

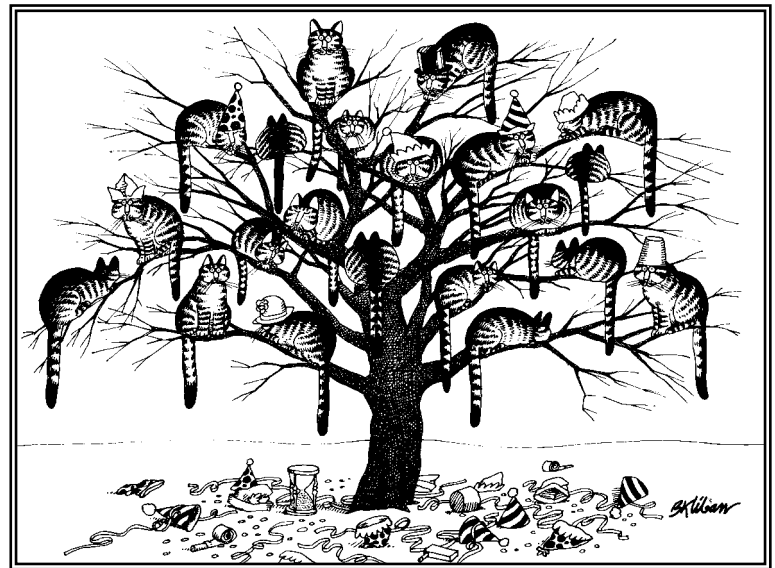
It's good that he was born early. Had he been born on time, he would have weighed 9 ½ pounds⁸.

Sharon¹ was pushing in the car and yelling for paramedics⁹. I didn't have a chance to park at the emergency room. We were in such a hurry that I left the car in the turn around area with the doors open. We got in the door at about 6:05, and when I went back to the parking lot, they hadn't ticketed the car, much less towed it.

The security guard did ask as I walked up, "Boy or Girl?" Apparently the story of the couple who almost delivered in the parking lot made its rounds at the hospital.

This gives another excuse for why *40 Years in the Desert* is a year late. While I was visiting the 'rents'³ at the end of 1998, not only was I not working on this missive, I was conceiving a son¹⁰.

Charlie has been completely different from Natalie since the minute he was born. He has a very different temperament from



Season's Greetings From the Saroff Cats

Natalie, being calmer and much quieter. He even eats differently.

Natalie, has done very well with her brother. She is truly affectionate, and she is genuinely kind to him, though she can be a bit too enthusiastic. Sometimes, she treats him like her dolls, which is a bit rough.

We've had our kids in the right order. As they grow up, they will learn valuable lessons. Charlie will learn what it's like to have a bigger older sister beat up on him, and at between age 12 and 14, Natalie will learn about payback.

Related to all of this, Sharon had a gall bladder attack¹¹ in early of November. This was a scary thing for of us. It was more

painful than labor. She could not stand up, and she went to the hospital on a stretcher. She thought that it might be a heart attack, but the folks in the ER immediately recognized it as a gall bladder problem.

Following her doctor's advice, she had her Gall Bladder out on December 16. The surgery went well, and she's doing fine.

Robert Walpole, Earl of Oxford:

"You will either die on the gallows or of some unspeakable disease!"

William Pitt, Earl of Chatham:

"That, my Lord, depends upon whether I embrace your policies or your mistress."

—A Conversation Outside of Parliament

¹ Love of my life, light of the cosmos, **SHE WHO MUST BE OBEYED**, my wife.

² A science fiction convention held early every year in Boston, MA. That this is my only reference to the convention in *40 years* is a relief to my family, myself, and the reader, who will have some less predictable rants to appreciate.

³ This is an abbreviation of "Parents".

⁴ This of course gets the question, "Why on earth can't you use normal English?". The answer is rather simple, "I am an Engineer". Just be glad that I use silverware, as engineers are really not suitable for polite company.

⁵ I'd form a procrastinators club, but I just can't seem to get around to it.

⁶ Considering that I have a 2-year-old running around the house, and an infant who looks like he'll be walking at about 12 months, this will be no easy thing.

⁷ in this case meaning the morning before. The holiday started at sundown

⁸ Though it's said that it's not the size of the baby, it's the size of the head.

⁹ Sharon¹ didn't notice her water breaking at 3:30am, just her labor starting at 4:30am.

¹⁰ The real miracle of birth is not being able to conceive a child, it's finding the time to conceive a second child when one has a toddler demolishing the house.

¹¹ It's not that uncommon for women to have gall bladder problems following a pregnancy.

Onto the Bris

As per Jewish law, a healthy Jewish boy is circumcised at the age of 8 days¹² in a ceremony called a **Bris Milah**¹³. This was a weekday, and my dad was there, along with a number of friends, but Sharon's¹ mom couldn't make it in, as hurricane Floyd had socked in the airports around New York City.

I got a bit of a surprise during the Bris. The Mohel¹⁴ asked me if I wanted to perform the circumcision¹⁵. After recovering my composure, I said that I was delegating that to him.

After the arrangements were made, my dad was holding the baby as **Sandek**¹⁷, when a golden arc emerged from the baby, striking my father in the shoulder of his (fortunately washable) suit. It was a great tension breaker.

At the age of merely 8 days, my son shows promise as either a stand up comic or a member of Congress.

Adventures in Baby Rearing

These happened with Natalie before the last **40 Years**, but got left out, so I am giving you them now.

Natalie took about 4 months to start sleeping through the night, and Sharon¹ was exhausted¹⁹. It was time to feed Natalie, and Sharon¹ changed her to wake her up. Natalie wouldn't eat, and she just cried. Finally, she leaked through, all over Sharon. When I changed her diaper, I found **no diaper**. In her fatigue induced fog, Sharon¹ had neglected to replace Natalie's diaper, which explained the lack of appetite and crying. At least we know that Natalie is not up to living the Jesse "The Body" Ventura lifestyle²⁰.

Before the next tale, a warning: **don't try this at home**. It causes bruises, lacerations, and acute heavy metal poisoning²¹.

Sharon¹ woke up one morning with her nightgown soaked. She had "leaked" over the night. When she complained, I looked at her and asked, "Got Milk?" I still bear scars from this.

June 1998 **REALLY** Sucked

In June, 1998 I lost my job at Lockheed-Martin Vought Systems²², along with many other Job-Shoppers²³, my father-in-law, Charlie, died, and Sharon¹ lost the baby she was carrying. This fits the generally accepted definition of a really bad month.

Wanderings

Over the past two years, I have wandered quite a bit while staying in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Following my being laid off at Lockheed Martin Vought Systems²², I was off for two weeks, and then I did a three month stint at Montgomery Kone Corporation, one of the two largest manufacturers of elevators in the United States. This was an unpleasant experience. I commuted 53 miles each way²⁴, and the work was **tremendously dull**. I remember why I resolved to stay out of architecture²⁵ and construction related fields.

The company culture was no great shakes. It had been a family owned firm, and they moved to Texas following an **18**

month long strike²⁶. They moved to a right to work state²⁷, so they could be unkind to their shop floor workers.

In September, I was let go. I did a little jig in the parking lot.

A week later, I was at Raytheon Systems Company, packaging a satellite antennae on a HMMWV²⁸, and I discovered yet **another** thrilling tale of modern corporate ethics.

Before its purchase by Raytheon, the division had been the independent firm Electrospace. It was folded into Raytheon E-Systems, which had no interest in integrating it, and used it as

an involuntary organ donor. Equipment was moved to Plano, and when corporate headquarters office mandated layoffs²⁹, they all came from Electrospace, which had ¼ the staff of E-Systems.

After a while of this, someone up top **finally** noticed the implosion at Electrospace, and investigated. Electrospace was moved from E-Systems to Raytheon Systems Company and some "suits" lost their jobs³⁰. This all happened well before I got there, but I saw the aftermath. The office was downright spooky. It was ½ empty and felt like the aftermath of a neutron bomb³¹.

At the end of December, I was finished with my work on the antenna, and I was back out circulating my resume.

After 6 weeks, I got an offer to return to Lockheed Martin Vought Systems²², which has recently been renamed to Lockheed Martin Missiles and Fire Control³².

For 8 months, I was doing engineering "clean up" work on the space station radiators. I incorporated engineering changes into the drawing package and set up spares lists for future needs.

¹² Abraham, the first of the Patriarchs was 99 when he became a Jew and circumcised himself. He and Sarah had Isaac at the ages of 100 and 90 respectively. This is not a religion for wimps.

¹³ This translates to "the covenant of the circumcision". It is pronounced "Briss Mee-lah", and it's called a Bris for short.

¹⁴ The rabbi who performs the circumcision. Mohel rhymes with toil.

¹⁵ It is technically true that the father is responsible for performing the circumcision, and the responsibility is delegated to the Mohel. But among Conservative Jewish circles, it is not a universal custom to ask, so I was rather surprised¹⁶.

¹⁶ I believe that the expression on my face at that moment would have been best described by older brother, Stephen as, "Looking like a cow that just stepped on its own udder."

¹⁷ The Sandek holds the baby during the Bris. The grandfather traditionally does this.

¹⁸ To refresh your memory, he's the one who opened fire at a Jewish daycare center in LA, then later shot and killed a Philippine born mailman. See <http://www.salon.com/people/col/reit/1999/08/13/stone/index.html>.

¹⁹ The best part of naturally nursing a child is that when the baby is hungry at 3:00am, I can say, "I'm sorry honey, I wish that I could help, but I just don't have the equipment."

²⁰ In his autobiography, he reveals that he doesn't wear underwear. And you thought that I over-communicated in *40 Years in the Desert*.

²¹ Your wife may shoot you, but that's only if you are lucky. Otherwise she will implant the bullets **manually**.

²² Formerly **Loral Vought Systems**, formerly the missiles and avionics portions of **LTV Aerospace**, formerly **Chance Vought Aircraft**.

²³ People who are employed through contract technical firms. We're temps, but I prefer the term "**wage whore**". We know what we have to do, how to do it, when our pay check is due, and don't give a **damn** about much else.

²⁴ And that was **AFTER** finding a short cut through DFW airport that shaved 12 miles and 20 minutes off the commute.

²⁵ That, and I just don't like working with architects.

²⁶ Apparently it was a **dysfunctional** family owned firm.

²⁷ Right to work is a misnomer. A more accurate term is anti-union. The states have laws that prevent a union from compelling the employees that it represents to pay dues. This means that the local members have to support the free-loaders, who pay no dues, and the **SCABS**, who cross the picket lines. It makes the dues more expensive, since fewer people are paying for the service, but it makes dues paying members feel like patsies for supporting slackers.

²⁸ **High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle**. It's pronounced HUMM-VEE, and AM General sells a civilian version called the Hummer, that Arnold Schwarzenegger owns 3 or 4 of these extraordinarily ugly vehicles.

²⁹ It's how you make stock price go up, so you can cash in your lucrative stock options.

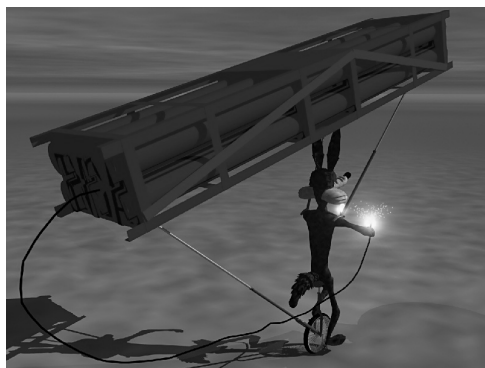
³⁰ A suit getting **FIRE**d for screwing around with the employees and company assets is a rare thing. Normally, they get multimillion dollar bonuses and stock options after screwing up.

³¹ The people were gone, but the building and equipment were still there.

³² If the names at this place change any more, I don't think that I'm going to be able to remember **my own name**.

Recently, I have been working on a more interesting project, a very light weight helicopter mobile rocket launcher³³. This is lots of fun, as is typical when asked to do the impossible, or at least the very difficult.

We are examining many concepts, but the leading one is the Advanced Carriage Missile Erector (ACME³⁵), depicted on this page. This work has its genesis in B.F. Skinner's work using pigeons as a guidance system for missiles in the 1940s and 50s³⁶.



In Which the Author Channels³⁸ Lev Davidovich Bronstein³⁹

I wrote some of the following at the end of 1998. It should be kind of dated, but unfortunately for the American public, it seems that not much has changed. Between the CTBT⁴³ circus and the impeachment, nothing has really changed. Too Many people consistently demonstrate that they hate Bill more than they care for **anything** else. Too much seems to be driven by such a fanatical hatred of Clinton, that all considerations of patriotism and common sense have been left behind. Perhaps their own hate will destroy them⁴⁴, but I'm an optimist.

This doesn't mean that I like Clinton, I don't⁴⁶, and not just because he is a spineless weasel. I loathe him because his economic policy is defined as "whatever benefits fat cat investment bankers is a good thing", so we have a situation where countries are held **hostage** by the whims of currency, securities, and real estate speculators.

The IMF and the World Bank compound this by thinking that losing money on investments that promise **insane** returns will cause economic collapse. If the investment promises a high return, the risk is high. **That is how the bloody system is supposed to work!** Higher return implies higher risk.

The demonstrators in Seattle for the WTO meeting had it right. Free trade is causing a race to the bottom, with "economic growth" being created by ordinary families having to spend themselves further into debt. It's repulsive, and I would like to

I am an engineer. I am not a
"Hampshire College person". I
make weapons that kill people, and
I enjoy doing this.

—Me to Hampshire College, which I
dropped out of in 1982, in a likely vain
attempt to get off the alumni mailing list.

Advanced Carriage Missile Erector (ACME) Concept⁴²

say that, "I commend my comrades on the barricades in Seattle". I can't do that with a **straight face**, so I'll just say, **"You Go Girl!"**

The globalized economy seems to mean that regular people have to bail out speculator **parasites** whose **only** interest is tapping speculative bubbles for huge returns. There is no concern for the consequences, such as **millions** of children not being vaccinated⁴⁷. That's "Slick Willie's" "free market".

When the bubble bursts the international loan sharks, the IMF, go into a "feeding frenzy", and rescue the parasites "for the stability of international capital". The leeches keep the private jets, and healthcare and labor rights get cut in the target country.

It's enough to turn one into a Marxist⁴⁸.

Neat Gadgets, Technology, and Lawbreaking

A few years ago, I came across something in an airline shopping catalog called **Littermaid**[®], an automated litterbox. The **Littermaid**[®] automatically combs through the litter removing "one of a cat's only two material products"⁵⁰.

I was dubious, but the price dropped, and it became available through retail, which simplifies returns and refunds⁵¹, so I gave it a go.

My experience is good. The **Littermaid**[®] is not quite up to the "output" of our four cats⁵⁵, but with the addition of a manual cat box, one gets by with about ¼ the effort of a manual system.

³³ That's all I can give you. I searched public sources, and I don't think that the proposal is public information, so I have to keep the details to a minimum³⁴.

³⁴ This should be a refreshing change from the more usual problem of the author's incoherence.

³⁵ It took me about 2 days to come up with that acronym.

³⁶ No, I'm not joking about this. The military bankrolled BF Skinner to see if pigeons could be used to accurately guide missiles in the early days of military rocketry, but I'm not working on such mishugas³⁷.

³⁷ This is Yiddish for crazy. One of about a dozen words in Yiddish for crazy. Societies frequently have multiple words with subtle graduations of meaning for concepts that they deem important.

³⁸ This best translates to, "Matthew is going to have to have yet **another** of those rants which have become a staple of **40 Years in the Desert**."

³⁹ I am not referring to the Bolshevik notable Leon Trotsky, who was born under this name, but rather the **teddy bear**⁴⁰, "Bronnie Bear", that my brother Stephen had as a youth, and lost at the age of 8 in the Juneau Alaska airport⁴¹.

⁴⁰ I have **no clue at all** how a toddler ended up naming his teddy bear after Trotsky. The best guess is that Stephen picked up the name from my mom, tended to make rather a study of modern history, when he was a wee tyke.

⁴¹ This event is still painful to my older brother, Stephen. Just ask him, and he will maintain that it is the second greatest tragedy of his life, the first being my birth, which deprived him of his right to be an only child.

⁴² Someone at Lockheed Martin Missiles and Fire Control⁴³ with **way** too much free time on their hands did this, but I don't know who.

⁴³ **Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty**. It wasn't the defeat, it was the fact that they seemed to view the defeat solely as a way to humiliate Clinton, and ignored the issues and basic fair play.

⁴⁴ Certainly they deserve it after causing all this **tsuris**⁴⁵.

⁴⁵ This is Yiddish for suffering, trouble, and aggravation.

⁴⁶ Despite having voted for him twice on the "lesser of two evils" ticket.

⁴⁷ You see this happening all over the world, where upwards of 50% of the national budget of some countries go toward debt service. There are countries where they have had to completely dismantle a decent, if basic, public health care system in order to pay off debt on loans that would never have been made in the first place but for the assumption that the IMF and world bank would bail them out if things really went wrong. Time and again this has been balanced on the backs of those least able to afford the hardship, while the ruling kleptocratic elite pockets half.

⁴⁸ Personally, I choose **Groucho, Chico, Harpo, Zeppo**, and **most importantly, Gummo**⁴⁹, not Karl.

⁴⁹ Milton "Gummo" Marx Gummo performed with his brothers in vaudeville, but did not feel comfortable on stage, and left the group at the beginning of World War I. He later became successful as a theatrical agent.

⁵⁰ A cat's only other product, cat hair, seems to shed in direct proportion to the degree that it will show up on what you are wearing that day.

⁵¹ If you are considering being an early adopter⁵² of any device, make sure that you can get face to face with someone who can give you a refund on the spot.

⁵² Early adopter: See unpaid testing technician, people who wear "**Steal from Me**" t-shirts, bloody fools, and the poor deluded idiots who use Microsoft[®] software voluntarily⁵³.

⁵³ The rest of us are mostly unwilling victims of Microsoft[®] thuggery that masquerades as "Freedom to Innovate on Behalf of Consumers"⁵⁴.

⁵⁴ "Freedom to innovate on behalf of consumers", "Freedom is Slavery", "Ketchup is a vegetable", and "It's not about sex, it's about perjury and obstruction of justice". **I'm rooting for the Department of Justice against Microsoft**.

⁵⁵ Lavi (Young Lion), Tudza (Rabbit), Bronwyn (White Breast), and Elryn (The Red). They are black, Jellico (tuxedo cat), tortoise shell, and ginger respectively.

Most of you know that I spend some time on the internet. Recently, I have been beefing up my music collection with MP3s⁵⁶ while violating copyright laws. It makes it more enjoyable to work on *40 Years*. I can plug in a set of headphones and listen to some good tunes while I write.

See a list of my MP3s on my web page⁶⁰. Some of the stuff is kind of **embarrassing**, but I downloaded that for my wife⁶¹.

This doesn't happen in the SCA

In Saint Andrews Church in Thornton Heath, south London, a naked man burst in and attacked churchgoers with a sword. Most gravely hurt was a man whose thumb and index finger were severed, and whose face and neck were deeply slashed.

In the USA, the man would have used guns, and folks would have died. I live less than 20 miles from the church where Larry Gene Ashbrook killed 7 and injured 7. God bless the NRA

Mutant Marsupials Take Up Arms Against Australian Air Force

(From 15 June 1999 Defense Science and Technology Organization Lecture Series, Melbourne, Australia, and staff reports)

The reuse of object-oriented code caused tactical headaches for Australia's armed forces. As virtual reality simulators take a greater role in helicopter combat training, programmers strive for realism, including detailed terrain and, in the case of the Northern Territory's Operation Phoenix, Kangaroo herds (disturbed animals may give away a helicopter's position).

The head of the Simulation division instructed developers to model the local marsupials' movements and reactions.

Being efficient programmers, they reused code modeling an infantry unit under the same stimuli, changed the mapped icon to a Kangaroo, and increased the speed of movement.

Eager to show their flying skills to visiting American pilots,

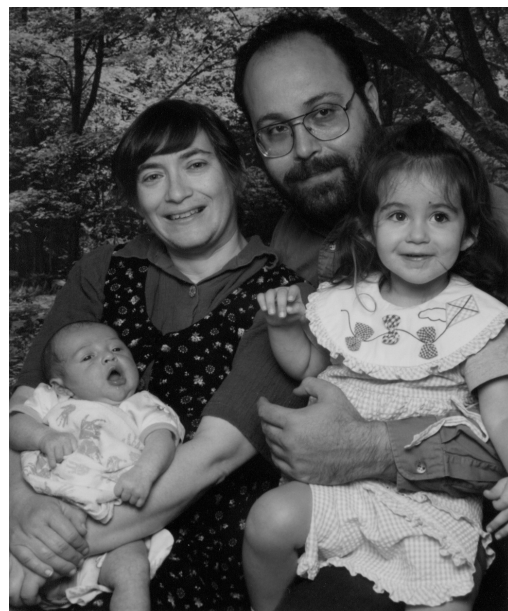
the Aussies "buzzed" the "Kangaroos" in a low flight simulation. The Kangaroos scattered, as predicted, and the Americans nodded appreciatively, then did a double-take as the Kangaroos reappeared from behind a hill and launched a **bar-**

rage of Stinger missiles at the hapless helicopter. It seems that the programmers had neglected to remove part of the infantry coding.

The lesson? Objects have attributes, and new objects made from an old one inherit them. The programmers learned to be careful reusing object-oriented code, and the Yanks left with a new regard for Australian wildlife.

Supervisors report that pilots from that point onward have strictly avoided Kangaroos, just as they were meant to.

That's about it for now, but stay tuned for the further adventures of *Matthew Saroff, Itinerant Engineer*.



The Usual Suspects

This Spot
Left for
Mailing
Sticker

⁵⁶ This stands for Moving Picture Experts Group (MPEG), Audio Layer 3, a software specification that allows one to digitally compress music to a fraction of its size. This facilitates transmission and storage of the data.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ It also gives the recording studios and the RIAA⁵⁸ the willies, as there are no copy protections protocols, which means that songs can be copied and shared freely as perfect digital copies.

⁵⁸ The record industry, with its history of cheating artists and abusing consumers is one of the lower forms of life on earth⁵⁹, and it's great that artists and consumers are using the new technology to ditch them.

⁵⁹ The lowest form of life on earth are boxing promoters...and pimps, but I'm repeating myself.

⁶⁰ <http://www.pobox.com/~msaroff>

⁶¹ Particularly *The Moody Blues*.⁶²

⁶² William Shatner singing "Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds" is **mine**. See my catbox/British overcooked Brussel sprouts argument in Volume 3, Number 1 by way of an explanation. You can download it off my webpage⁶⁰.

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