

40 Years in the Desert

Volume 8
Number 1

The Further Adventures of Matthew Saroff, Itinerant Engineer

As always, 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 still (817)469-7660. Our emails are still msaroff@pobox.com for me and sindara@pobox.com for Sharon¹, and my home page is <http://www.pobox.com/~msaroff/>. Back issues are online at <http://www.pobox.com/~msaroff/40/>.

We make the following request on all readers of *40 Years in the Desert*

If you ever need to send us some sort of package, **please do not use UPS**. As I speak, for at least the 5th time this season, Sharon¹ is on the phone cutting a UPS phone rep a new one².

Depending on how things go in the next couple of days, we may end up refusing all packages from UPS.

Good News for Sharon¹

Sharon¹ landed a job with a charter school, Treetops International School, as their educational diagnostician. In reality, it's Director of Special Education³, though she also serves as resource teacher and chief bottle washer. It's a good school, though the campus looks an awful lot like a summer camp in a forest.

This is literally the first job that she has ever had where her boss wasn't either a raving lunatic, a complete incompetent, and/or a total ninny.

She is stunned and pleasantly surprised by the turn of events, and I am truly appalled by the level of management incompetence that seems *de rigueur* in education, as shown by her previous bosses.

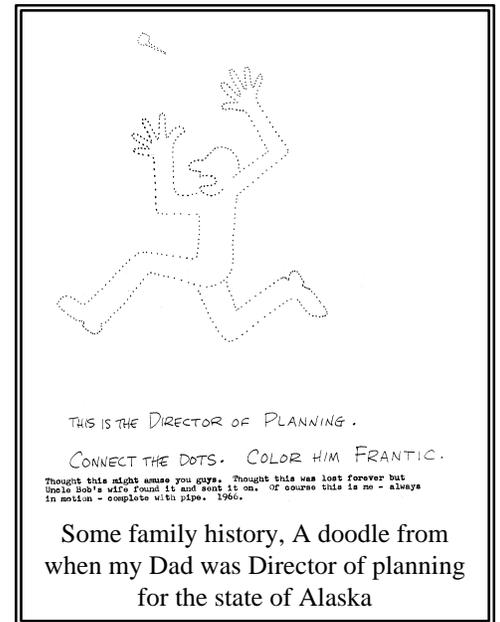
The fact that there is **any** field where management skills are worse than that of engineering is a very scary thought.

There has been an explosion in charter schools in Texas. There are two reasons, the laws have changed, making it easier to create a charter school, and the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test has generally screwed up the education in public schools in Texas.

The problem with the TAAS is that the emphasis placed on

test scores have forced public schools to stop educating children, and substitute training for the test.

Charter schools are driven by the need to satisfying parent's and child's educational needs. Public school boards are driven by the next election, and parlaying a tough stance on schools combined with a



“There aren't many things that I won't put in my mouth, but Gary Bauer's knob is one of them.”

—Dan Savage⁵, on charges filed against him in Iowa that, as part of a story for Salon “*Stalking Gary Bauer*”⁶, he licked doorknobs while suffering from the flu in an attempt to infect Bauer and members of his presidential campaign staff.

mindless obsession with test scores leads to victory.

It means that kids in charter schools actually have a better shot at getting a decent education.

I Don't Know Whether To Laugh or Cry

The other day, Natalie was singing. She is very musical, so this is not unusual, but she was singing the refrain, “You Really Got Me” from the song by the Kinks. My initial reaction

was one of relief, as I was afraid that she would inherit Sharon's¹ taste⁷ in music.

Unfortunately, she did not get this from the radio, but rather from a series of television advertisements for **The Gap**. Oh well, it's from an ad, but at least it's not the *Moody Blues*.

When I play the radio, she likes what I listen to, particularly the music that Sharon¹ asks me to turn down, so there's hope that she won't develop my wife's taste for elevator music.

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

² Interestingly enough, when I worked at **Jarvis Products Corporation**, a manufacturer of meat packaging equipment, I actually helped design a piece of equipment that did this. It's called a “Bung Dropper”.

³ She should be getting the title shortly, after **much** prodding by me. As my father always said⁴, a title doesn't cost your employer anything.

⁴ This is so embarrassing, I'm actually quoting my father. It's not that I mind the advice, but it reminds me how far I am removed from my teen years.

⁵ A journalist, and author of a syndicated column called “Savage Love”, a weekly sex advice column.

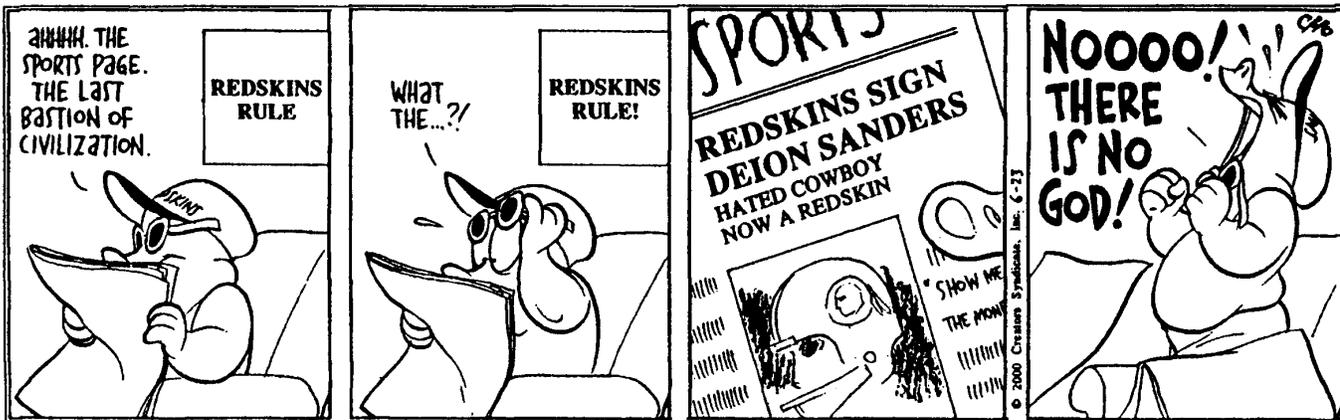
⁶ <http://www.salon.com/politics2000/feature/2000/01/25/bauer/print.html>

⁷ Please understand that I am using the term “taste”⁸ in a purely illustrative manner.

⁸ She likes Yanni and the Moody Blues, and she gets very upset when I call it elevator music, or when I maintain that it saps my will to live⁹. I figure that if you don't feel comfortable rioting to the music, it's too mellow.

⁹ Though when one is *Married With Children* the term “will to live” is used in a purely illustrative manner.

LIBERTY MEADOWS FRANK CHO



The pity is that this WASN'T the most unsettling news of the year for this *Washington Redskins* fan.

Wanderings Since the Last issue

I finished up at Lockheed Martin Missiles and Fire Control¹⁰ in February of this year. I had been doing pretty much what I had been doing at the end of last year, working with issues on various lightweight artillery rocket launchers

In March, I was back at Raytheon, working for the same division as last time. Most of the division, after having been savaged by the folks at E-Systems in Garland¹¹, had been moved from Richardson, TX to Fort Wayne, Indiana. But a few functions, mostly those that had to deal with Dallas area issues, were moved to the E-Systems site. Interestingly enough, the new site still has the same sepulchral¹² feel to it.

I was responsible for the mechanical design of a satellite communications terminal, which replaced a piece of 80s vintage electronics with a modern (and about 90% cheaper) commercial off the shelf equipment.

The enclosure (box) that had originally housed the terminal was a complex piece of fabricated and welded aluminum. We replaced it with a casting. This was pretty neat. As a result of technological advances, we could generate prototypes, and production tooling, through a process called stereo lithography, a sort of 3-D printing. We got test models generated in days and tooling generated in only a few days more, directly from the CAD¹³ files. Previously, generating a casting took 3-6 months and cost about a hundred thousand dollars for the tooling. Now it's a 4-6 week turn around, with a tooling cost in the low 5 figures.

I finished my work there in September, and in October started work with a company called Varo, again in Garland, TX. They make launch rails for missiles and military power supplies.

My first reaction when I came in was an enthusiastic, "**WOW**, I've got an **OFFICE** with a **DOOR**." I also now have

More than any other time in history, mankind faces a crossroads. One path leads to despair and utter hopelessness. The other, to total extinction. Let us pray we have the wisdom to choose correctly.

—Woody Allen, *Side Effects*

the title of "Senior Mechanical Engineer", though the title's significance is dubious¹⁴, as there are no "Junior Mechanical Engineers", or plain "Mechanical Engineers" on site.

I'm working on a power supply for a shipboard vertical launch system. They are sub-contracting to Lockheed Martin in Baltimore, MD, formerly Martin Marietta, and before that Glenn L. Martin Aircraft, known for flying boats like the Mariner and the B-26 Marauder bomber. They still have the ramp to from the old assembly building the river for launching the planes.

At Least I didn't have to mow the lawn

We had the longest rainless period ever recorded in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Following one of the wettest Junes on record, the area received no rain for 84 days, from July 1 - Sep 22, 2000. The

previous record was 58 days.

Normally, it's kind of mundane to discuss the weather, but this does seem to require some sort of mention.

An interesting postscript to this is that, due to higher than average rainfall in the Spring and Fall, Dallas has actually received above average rainfall for the year.

A belated apology to my Dad¹⁵

About 10 years ago, my dad¹⁵ and I were having a political discussion, and he opined that what we might now call the Bush I administration was the most cynical and amoral administration that he had ever experienced.

I protested that this was hyperbole. It was patently obvious that the Nixon administration was worse.

Dad, **you were right, I was wrong**. Those lying rat-bastard pig felching¹⁶ Republican operatives at work in Florida have absolutely no consideration about anything but **power**. They

¹⁰ Formerly *Lockheed Martin Vought Systems*, formerly *Loral Vought Systems*, formerly the missiles and avionics portions of *LTV Aerospace*, formerly *Chance Vought Aircraft*.

¹¹ See Volume 7, Number 1 of *40 Years in the Desert*.

¹² As in having the atmosphere of a crypt or a mausoleum. You could also say funereal, as in having the atmosphere of a funeral. Bet you didn't expect an engineer to be using these kinds of words.

¹³ Computer Aided Design. In this case a solid modeler, where one would work on an electronic and mathematical representation of the a physical object.

¹⁴ Besides the obvious value that comes to mind when one is resume padding.

¹⁵ It turns out that I'm the only one in my family who still calls him this. Everyone just calls him "Saroff". We picked this habit up from my mother.

¹⁶ No, I'm not defining the term. It's just too disgusting.¹⁷

¹⁷ No, not even in the footnotes. You can look up the term at <http://www.halcyon.com/elf/altsex/vocab.html> which list a number of terms in alphabetical order. Just in case you are wondering **yes, people really do that**.

plotted to intimidate and discourage black voters in Florida, through “lost” registration records, moving voting locations, and police roadblocks near voting places. In addition they used a database company which because of “improperly formatted” data from Texas erroneously marked thousands of black voters as felons and ineligible to vote. This company, ChoicePoint¹⁸ is a major Republican party contributor, and it was dropped from the FBI’s approved vendor list because of ties between the company founder and drug smugglers¹⁹.

Then we have Tom “The Lizard” Delay’s “rent-a-riot” team sent to Miami/Dade County, for the purpose of creating a threat of physical violence and terminating the recount.

Apparently, the right to franchise is sacred, unless you are likely to vote Democratic.

Emotionally, this all came to a head for me at Thanksgiving, when I realized that not only did I want those immoral, anti-democratic, un-American Fascists to die in prison of cancer, I wanted this to happen to their **dogs** too.

Fortunately, the Tryptophan²⁰ in the turkey kicked in, and I didn’t feel that way any more. Their **dogs** are safe.

I **still** wish this on James Baker (who makes me physically ill to hear), Antonin Scalia, and Clarence “The Speedbump” Thomas.

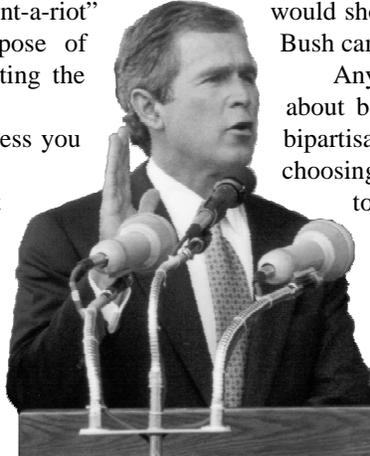
Just in case there was **any** doubt, yes. I am a **Liberal Pinko**²¹ type, and I’m proud of that fact.

For the record, if at some point in the next 4 years, I juxtapose Shrub’s last name with the title assigned to the chief executive of the United States, except in the context of quoting someone else, you have permission to slap the bejeesus out of me with a mackerel.

The democratic process has been subverted, and action must be taken. The will of the people must be made manifest, so I’m putting up a **really** strongly worded web page, and I’m, printing up **T-shirts**. Proceeds go toward efforts to ensure that a Shrub administration will be greeted with all the consideration and bipartisan spirit that the Clinton administration was. I’ll probably use the proceeds for registering a domain²² containing the word “Scaife²³”, which in some circles is synonymous with malicious vendetta. If I help get the term “Scaife” greater use in the vernacular like “Boycott²⁴” has, I will have done a service to my country and my language.

Just in case any of you are wondering, I know how truly **LAME** this all really is. I’m also planning to start getting involved with the local Democratic party.

I’m not sure of the usefulness of Democratic party work here. Democrats in Texas are rather like a man’s nipples, they can be



LIAR

I’ll be printing this as a T-shirt. Go to <http://www.pobox.com/~msaroff/liar> for more info. T-shirts are \$10.00, Long Sleeve Ts are \$15.00, and Sweat Shirts are \$17.00, +P&H

Photo: Texas State Library & Archives Commission

interesting, but they are primarily ornamental.

There were actually more Libertarians on the ballot this year than there were Democrats.

As an FYI, there is a story from the *Guardian*²⁵, a British paper, saying that as of December 23, the media examination of the votes, is now showing a Gore lead in Florida of about 140 votes. The Supreme Court decision might not be Dredd Scott, but it smells like Plessy v. Ferguson²⁶.

Gore acted as if he was convinced that a full and fair recount would show him winning in Florida. From their behavior, the Bush camp felt that way too.

Any claim to legitimacy by Shrub and his accomplices about being president of “all of us” must come from truly bipartisan actions for the benefit of the country, not by choosing a man like John Ashcroft, who is not only opposed to abortion, but is opposed to **dancing**, as Attorney General.

And Then There is the Election Coverage

While there is much to complain about the behavior of the press this election, I find the description of Nixon’s behavior in the 1960 election as being an example of “patriotic self sacrifice” to be **TRULY** odious.

As shown in the article, “*The Fallacy of Nixon’s Graceful Exit*”²⁷ By Gerald Posner²⁸ in Salon.com, the Illinois fraud was equally divided between the Democratic and Republican parts of the state, and a challenge was not made to avoid embarrassing Illinois Republicans. Furthermore, notwithstanding his statements about stepping aside for the good of the country, Nixon, through his aids and Republican party apparachiks, continued to attempt to challenge the election results until after Christmas, 1960.

And Now For a New Feature

In this issue, I am including a recipe for the first time. This is not haute cuisine. It is also high in fat and cholesterol. On the plus side, most people like it, particularly children. It can be prepared in one pot, and it keeps a long time in the refrigerator, and it reheats well. You need the following:

2-½ lbs. Spaghetti

2 lbs. American Cheese or Velveeta[®]

16 oz. Cottage Cheese

8 oz. Cheddar or what ever cheese floats your boat. (**optional**)

Take the spaghetti and cook until *al dente*²⁹, preferably in a pot with a Teflon[®] or similar coating. Drain and set to the side. Give the pot a rinse to get all the starch out.

¹⁸ http://www.salon.com/politics/feature/2000/12/04/voter_file/print.html

¹⁹ <http://www.geocities.com/glitchgate/>

²⁰ It’s an amino acid. It is supposed to mellow you out and make you sleep better.

²¹ Communists are “Reds”. If one is left of center, but not far enough left to be a Communist, then one is just a little bit red, or pink, which becomes Pinko. It’s associated with socialists, but I’m more of a welfare state and a labor supporter, kind of like the labor party in Britain before Tony Blair made it all a bunch of mush.

²² What you type in to get to a site, like pobox.com, or yahoo.com. This actually resolves to a series of numbers like 127.0.0.1 which is your machine’s actual address.

²³ The verb Scaife, which comes from Richard Mellon Scaife, an heir to the Mellon fortune, who literally spent millions of dollars on a vendetta against Bill Clinton. No stone was unturned to uncover the most irrelevant personal data to use as a weapon. See <http://www.benegesserit.com/THOTP/definitions.htm>.

²⁴ From Charles C. Boycott, an estate agent for the Earl of Erne in County Mayo, Ireland.. His behavior led to surrounding community shunning him. Boycott was isolated without servants, farmhands, service in stores, or mail delivery.

²⁵ http://www.guardianunlimited.co.uk/US_election_race/Story/0,2763,415400,00.html

²⁶ Dredd Scott was a case in the 1850s, which eliminated the right of states to ban slavery within their border. Plessy v. Ferguson established the legalized segregation standard of “Separate but Equal” for about 80 years.

²⁷ <http://www.salon.com/politics/feature/2000/11/10/nixon/print.html>

²⁸ He’s written a lot of interesting investigative works, particularly a book called *Case Closed* which is an exhaustive and devastating debunking of the whacko Kennedy assassination conspiracy theories.

²⁹ Still a bit chewy. It’s the way the Italians cook pasta. You don’t want to cook this to death, there is plenty of water in the cheese for the spaghetti to soak up when it is baking.

Over a low to medium heat, add the cottage cheese to the pot and add the American cheese slowly, allowing the first amount to melt into the mixture before adding more cheese. Stir frequently. You should add about 6 slices at a time. If you are using a flavoring cheese, add it last, as it is more prone to scorching than American Cheese.

As an alternative to making the sauce, you can simply add the cheeses to the hot spaghetti and mix it up in the pot, but I think you get better and easier³⁰ results with the cheese.

When the cheese is done, add the spaghetti to the pot, and stir everything together. Place in an oven preheated at 425° degrees F. for 60 minutes uncovered³¹. Serve plain or with spaghetti sauce.

Notes: You can use about 8 oz Cheddar, Munster, Monterey Jack, or Mozzarella for flavoring. I would avoid using more than that, because these cheeses, particularly Cheddar, have a lot of oil in them. One of these days, I will check out Swiss, which should add an interesting accent. Velveeta[®] works a bit better than American Cheese, but until Kraft[®] cheeses get a hechsher³², it doesn't get used in Sharon's¹ Kitchen.

News and Updates

My older brother Stephen, experimental high energy physicist, stained-glass hobbyist, Denebian Slime Devil aficionado, swimming bear, technical project leader, and **life sized Muppet**³³, and his long suffering (as are all Saroff Women³⁵) wife Margaret Montgomery, Sinophile, bank marketing Goddess, and literal tree hugger, are expecting a child around the first of the year. They don't know if it's going to be a boy or a girl. They want to be surprised.

For all the old Stewart and Stevenson folks, Taco Bill was laid off in 1999. The wheels do turn slowly, but they do turn.

There have been troubling developments at our synagogue, Congregation Beth Shalom³⁶, a rather eclectic³⁷ reform Shul.

³⁰ With this method, I always end up with burnt finger tips from mixing the (hot) spaghetti and cheese into each other. It's easier when one of the substances is a liquid.

³¹ If you leave it covered, you don't get the neat crunchy parts.

³² Kosher Certification. It's pronounced **heck-sure**.

³³ Think Sweetums if he were to decide to become a professional Klesmer³⁵ musician.

³⁴ It's an itinerant Eastern European Jewish musician. They dress a lot like physicists, which means **not well at all**. If you are not frightened by an **ENGINEER** disparaging someone for their fashion sense, **YOU SHOULD BE**.

³⁵ Like the Chicken said, "*You knew the job was dangerous when you took it*".

³⁶ <http://www.bethshalom.org/>

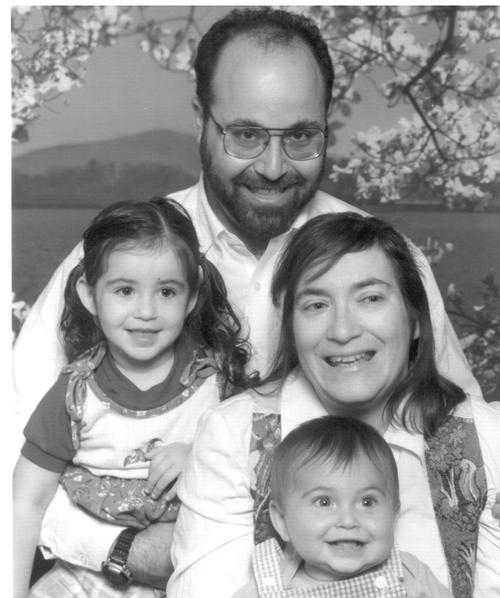
³⁷ The synagogue is officially Reform with about 50% of the congregation being Reform, about 40% being Conservative, and the remainder being some flavor of traditional, including a significant Iranian Jewish community

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Since July, we haven't had a Rabbi, the previous one having been chased off by the Synagogue Board.

The Board has fixed some financial issues, but their other effects on the congregation have been disastrous. They have juxtaposed a



This Spot
Left for
Mailing
Sticker

closed and secretive manner with frequent

You have **no idea** how hard it is to get a shot with two small children smiling at the same time.

predictions of impending doom, all while making the paid staff's lives unpleasant. The ensuing despair has permeated congregational life. The most common phrase one hears regarding the synagogue now is, "If there's no Rabbi by June, I'm out of here."

I'll end with a tip: When moving, don't fill out an address change kit. Marketers get your corrected address. Instead, fill out a **TEMPORARY** change of address card for 364 days. They only forward for a year anyway, so you only lose a day.

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