Can a robot do the foxtrot?

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On August 10, 1981, the very first issue of It’s God’s World was made available to individuals and families with an interest in current events reported from a biblical perspective for middle-schoolers. This year, 2021, marks the 40th anniversary of that auspicious date! God’s World News—and all of WORLD News Group—is inviting you to celebrate with us as we look back on the 40 years of history God has led us through—and ahead to the next 40. Over the last four decades, It’s God’s World has adapted and expanded. The publications for kids now include God’s Big WORLD, WORLDkids, and WORLDteen. New in 2020, the video program WORLD Watch for older teens came on the scene. WORLD Magazine, our biweekly news publication for adults, launched in 1986 and has since added several popular radio podcast programs, including The World and Everything In It. We hope you’re as excited as we are to see what more God will do as we now reach hundreds of thousands of people around the globe with God-glorying and hope-filled, honest journalism through these and future platforms.
ARGENTINA: Café Culture Struggles To Survive

Just a year ago, a line formed daily outside Buenos Aires’ bustling Café Tortoni. People were eager to drink a cortado (espresso with warm milk) coffee in the Argentine Belle Époque halls once frequented by artists, writers, and poets. The city has a long history of a thriving café scene. Cafés served as places for meeting of minds in the capital city. Sidewalk tables were populated with lively conversationalists and domino players for more than a century. More recently, the architecture and nostalgia-soaked décor drew tourists. All’s quiet now, as residents and visitors mostly stay behind their own doors. At least four of the city’s more than 70 officially recognized “cafés notables” have closed since March 2020. Others hang by a thread, hoping for a return to the roar of laughter and debate they once knew.

GERMANY: Artwork Stolen by Nazis Returned

German authorities have now returned 14 works from the art trove of collector Cornelius Gurlitt. Those artworks were looted under Nazi rule. The latest is “Piano Playing,” a drawing by Carl Spitzweg. It was seized from Henri Hinrichsen, a Jewish music publisher, in 1939. The next year, Gurlitt’s father, Hildebrand Gurlitt, bought it. He was an art dealer who handled works confiscated by the Nazis. Hinrichsen was killed at the Auschwitz death camp in 1942. Cornelius Gurlitt died in 2014. He left the works to a Swiss museum. A German government-backed foundation has been working with the museum. The foundation’s job is to ensure that any pieces taken from Jewish owners are returned to their heirs. Careful research into each work’s provenance (origin) finds the rightful owners.

UNITED STATES: Good News from Cancer Researchers

Cancer and heart disease are among the United States’ leading causes of death. But the overall cancer death rate has been falling since 1991. The news gets even better. From 2017 to 2018, it fell 2.4%, according to an American Cancer Society report. That beat the record 2.2% drop the year before. The report says that lung cancer accounted for almost half of the overall decline in cancer deaths in the past five years. Over the last decades, the numbers of smokers has decreased. So there are fewer cases of lung cancer illnesses and deaths. But experts say advancements in surgery, diagnostic scanning, radiation, and newer drugs have helped with the drop in deaths too.
**SIBERIA: Frozen Woolly Rhino**

What did the farmer say when he unearthed this woolly rhino in August? Maybe Ew, gross! The ancient rhino is pretty well preserved—but pretty it is not. Thanks to protective permafrost, the rhino still sports part of its intestines, some thick hair, and a lump of fat. Its horn was found next to it. Almost no other specimens of woolly rhino have held together this well for such a long time. The carcass was discovered on the bank of the Tirekhtyakh River in Siberia. Scientists found another woolly rhino there in 2014 and nicknamed it Sasha. Sasha, unlike this brownish-furred woolly rhino, had a coat of strawberry blonde. Scientists will use radiocarbon studies in the lab to estimate how long these new remains have waited for discovery.

**INDIA: Forced Religious Conversion Prohibited**

India’s ruling Hindu party approved legislation in the country’s most populous state that says it is unlawful for anyone to force a spouse to change religions. A person found guilty of violating it could spend up to 10 years in prison. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is Hindu. His religion strongly disapproves of interfaith marriages. Christianity also warns against this, calling it being “unequally yoked.” Primarily Hindu, India also has populations of Christians, Muslims, and followers of other religions. Muslims in Uttar Pradesh state are affected by the decree. In Islam, it is customary for a bride to convert if not already a Muslim. The ruling Hindu party says the conversion is forced. Under the decree, a couple belonging to two different religions must appear before a magistrate before marrying. The official must give permission to the union only after establishing testimony that there will be no forced religious conversion.

**ZIMBABWE: Teen Combats Child Marriage**

In Zimbabwe, girls as young as 10 may be forced to marry due to poverty, tradition, or religious practices. Now a teenage taekwondo enthusiast is fighting that trend. She’s using her sport to give girls in an impoverished community a shot at thinking differently. A martial arts fan since age five, Natsiraishe Maritsa is now 17 years old. “Not many people do taekwondo here . . . I use it to get their attention,” she says. Children and young married girls come for class. They stretch, kick, strike, punch—and then settle down to talk about life. Some of the teen moms share their experiences. Sadly, many include abuse, hunger, and punishment at the hands of the unloving older men they’ve been bound to since their own childhoods. “We are just too young for [marriage],” Maritsa says. She calls her class “a safe space” for girls to consider what they need for a fighting chance at a better life in a better timing.
Think fast food is a modern fad? Archaeologists say such eateries were common in ancient times. Discoveries in one uniquely preserved Roman city confirm that and support the biblical truth that “there is nothing new under the Sun.” (Ecclesiastes 1:9)

The city of Pompeii stood near Naples, Italy, from before Jesus’ birth. In A.D. 79, nearby Mount Vesuvius erupted. The blast buried Pompeii under about 20 feet of volcanic ash. Pompeii has fascinated archaeologists and scholars ever since. Much of the ancient city still lies unexcavated. Buildings and the detailed spaces left by bodies are frozen in time. The site is one of Italy’s most popular tourist attractions.

Pompeii Archaeological Park’s longtime chief, Massimo Osanna, says that about 80 fast-food eateries have been found at Pompeii. But recently, excavators completely unearthed a thermopolium for the first time.

A thermopolium is “a place where (something) hot is sold.” Pompeiians could buy ready-to-eat food—much like modern fast food. Scholars believe only travelers and those who couldn’t afford private kitchens frequented thermopolia (plural), not upper-class citizens. Ancient writings indicate that thermopolia were mostly visited by lower classes, including gamblers and criminals.

A typical thermopolium was a small room with a stone counter out front. The counter held earthenware jars (called dolia) for food embedded in the rock. (Think of soup containers nestled into modern-day salad bars.) Some excavated thermopolia reveal decorated dining areas too, complete with colorful fresco wall paintings.

In recent digs in Pompeii, archaeologists found such a counter. Plant and animal specialists are still analyzing remains from the site. But they already know that the operator of this ancient eatery found a good spot: a small square with a fountain just outside and another thermopolium nearby.

Frescoes of an undersea nymph astride a horse, two upside-down mallards, and a rooster decorated this Pompeian eatery. The vibrant frescoes likely served to communicate menu items: seafood, duck, and chicken. Anthropologist Valeria Amoretti says researchers unearthed a bronze ladle, nine ancient jars, flasks, and a ceramic oil container. They also found duck bone fragments in one container and remains from goats, pigs, fish, and snails.

Referring to Pompeii’s ruin, Osanna says, “We know what they were eating that day.” Another fresco depicts a dog on a leash. Scholars don’t believe the dog was a menu item. (Eeeewww!) Instead, the fresco provided ancient evidence that humans across the centuries are alike: All need a reminder for patrons to leash their pets.
Trickery. Confusion. Trademark infringement. The Girl Scouts are accusing the Boy Scouts of unfair practices. Lawyers for the Boy Scouts call the claims “utterly meritless.” They say the Girl Scouts are overreacting to the Boy Scouts’ move to include more girls.

Over the past two years, girls have been joining Boy Scouts by the thousands. Some want the challenge of pursuing the revered Eagle Scout status. Others think the Boy Scouts’ programming is a better fit for them than the kinds of activities Girls Scouts offers. The migration of females to the traditionally male organization has some Girl Scouts upset. They filed a lawsuit against the Boy Scouts.

The suit claims the Boy Scouts have kicked off a “highly damaging” recruitment war. The Girl Scouts insist that the Boy Scouts are unfairly recruiting girls. Girl Scout officials say that the recruitment push causes confusion—and that has led to girls accidently joining Boy Scout troops instead of Girl Scout troops.

The lawyers for Girl Scouts cite Boy Scouts councils in a handful of states for confusing people with their marketing choices. For example, in Seattle, a Boy Scouts council used the Girl Scouts trademark in social media recruiting material. In Massachusetts, a Boy Scouts council posted a recruitment flyer on Facebook that included a girl in her Girl Scouts Brownie uniform. The Boy Scouts say they aren’t trying to confuse or trick people.

The Scouts’ squabble is also over a specific word, “Scout,” and its variations. The Boy Scouts have used the term “Scout” for more than 100 years. “Not fair!” says the Girl Scouts group. Each organization says that the word “Scout” is its own intellectual property. That’s the ownership of an idea. If someone comes up with a creative design or idea, then he or she has a right to it. No one can copy it without the owner’s permission. Legally, can the Boy Scouts use the words “Scout,” “Scouts,” “Scouting,” and “Scout Me In”? They think so. The Girl Scouts adamantly disagree.

Top-notch knot-tie-ers versus expert cookies salespeople? The two programs are vastly different. They have different strengths—just like their members. But at the end of the day, the Boy Scouts and the Girl Scouts are both committed to developing strong leaders.

Because we live in a fallen world, no person or organization is perfect. That is why we need Jesus. Philippians 3:12 says, “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me His own.”
Warner Bros. Pictures, best known for cartoons, the first talking pictures, and early TV series, is making history again. The production company’s entire line of 2021 films will be released as videos-on-demand. That means folks can watch first-run movies from the comfort of their own couches—at the same time the films play in theaters.

U.S. movie studios have struggled during the COVID-19 pandemic with theater closings and disappointing ticket sales. Some theaters opened in late summer but closed again as virus cases surged.

The 117-year-old Warner Bros.’ studio is a market leader. Its films account for $1.5-2 billion in yearly ticket sales in North America.

But last year’s stats were dismal. In 2019, Americans bought a billion more movie tickets than they did in 2020. Facing those plummeting numbers, Ann Sarnoff, chief executive of Warner Media, says the company “needed a creative solution.”

So AT&T-owned Warner Bros. is trying something new. This year, the studio will debut movies in theaters—and on a streaming service at the same time. Films will be available to paid subscribers without further charge. Then after one month, the streaming will stop, and movies will continue only in theaters.

The studio considered other options. Studio execs thought about releasing big-budget films in half-full theaters or delaying film releases for another year. But those options were unappealing. “If we saw an end in sight to the pandemic, we might have a different strategy,” Sarnoff says. “But we don’t see that at this moment.”

Warner Bros.’ 2021 schedule includes the live-action/computer-animated comedy film *Tom & Jerry*, based on the 1940s cartoon of the same name.

Sarnoff says, “We’ve got to get people back in theaters at full capacity at some point.” She calls the new model a “temporary solution” and a “one-year plan.”

Indeed, Warner’s move seems to admit that a recovery for theaters is at least a year away.

“I’m very optimistic that this is a win-win-win for our fans, our filmmakers, and our exhibitors,” Sarnoff says. “We’re getting the movies out. We’re allowing them to be seen on the big screen, which is what they were made for, but giving an alternative.”

“Our content is extremely valuable,” WarnerMedia CEO Jason Kilar asserts, “unless it’s sitting on a shelf not being seen by anyone.”
Salt Lake City’s two major newspapers printed daily editions for more than a century. But now the presses will be whirring only once each week. Like many news organizations, the two Utah papers are shifting their focus online to stay afloat.

Both papers will post news stories on the internet. They’ll each print one newspaper per weekend. The Deseret News will also offer a monthly magazine.

The news industry continues to lose income as advertising and circulation numbers drop. More people are turning to the web or to TV for their news. Newsrooms are laying off some journalists. Many print newspapers and magazines are moving content online to save the cost of paper, ink, press time, and delivery.

Meanwhile, researchers say that printed reading material offers unique benefits. Studies suggest that print readers grasp and remember content better than screen viewers. A reader of print uses multiple senses in addition to sight: The reader hears pages rustle, feels weight and texture, and even sniffs that new (or old) book smell. Using many senses helps memory to imprint in the brain. It also calms and grounds readers in the physical world—a known antidote for bouts of anxiety.

And screens have downsides. Many people experience screen fatigue after using screens all day for work, school, entertainment, and connecting with friends. Blue light emitted by device screens can cause eye strain. It can also disrupt sleep patterns.

The Deseret News president and publisher Jeff Simpson says the paper has been expanding digital offerings for a decade. Now there are nearly 500 times more online readers than local print subscribers.

Both Utah papers have long histories. The Deseret News began three years after pioneers arrived to the area in 1847. It churned out printed papers daily for 170 years. The Salt Lake Tribune won the Pulitzer Prize for local reporting in 2017 and ran a printed daily for 149 years.

A free, trustworthy press is critically important. In 1786, Thomas Jefferson wrote, “Our liberty depends on the freedom of the press, and that cannot be limited without being lost.” Freedom of the press is protected in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Why is this so essential? The press is meant to inform citizens and hold powerful people and governments accountable. That’s why some repressive governments, like North Korea, Saudi Arabia, and Iran, censor journalism or even kill or imprison journalists.

Many struggling newspapers and magazines face decisions like the two Utah newspapers. “It won’t be exactly the same. And we hope you think it is better,” The Salt Lake Tribune wrote about adapting to online news. “We assure you that our commitment to the news hasn’t wavered.”
It started out simply: a pop-up school on a sidewalk in the Matamoros Tent City near the U.S.-Mexico border. The Central American children and their families living in the camp are asylum seekers. Their lives were disrupted in many ways when their families fled violence in their homelands. At the sidewalk school, they study reading, writing, math, and art. The classes offer children the chance to catch up on their education.

The sidewalk school originally met in person. But it had to switch to virtual learning because of the pandemic. Instead of being hampered by the change, it has blossomed. There are about 20 teachers now. All seek asylum in the United States too. Like in many American school systems in the last year, classes are held via Zoom.

Now teachers can reach children not only in the camp near the U.S. border but also at shelters and apartments elsewhere in Mexico.

The Sidewalk School for Children Asylum Seekers outfitted teachers and students with more than 200 Amazon tablets. Felicia Rangel-Samptonaro of Brownsville, Texas, founded that organization. She crosses the border to give food and books to asylum seekers. Rangel-Samptonaro says that she used her own money and raised funds to buy the tablets.

Every year, people come to the United States seeking protection. If they are persecuted because of their race, religion, politics, or nationality, or for being part of a targeted social group, they can apply for asylum—an official promise of access to pursue sanctuary and work inside another nation’s borders.

U.S. asylum recipients can live and work in the United States. Eventually, they could become citizens. But even under the best of circumstances, it takes a long time for the government and courts to get through all the applications. There’s a huge backlog, with approvals taking months or even years. The process is extra long now. Pandemic responses have delayed asylum case hearings and interviews. Meanwhile, the seekers just have to wait.

Gabriela Fajardo is an elementary school teacher. She fled her village in crime-ridden Honduras with her son after receiving threats because her brother is a police officer. She has spent a year and four months in Mexico, waiting as her case slowly proceeds through the U.S. courts.

Being able to teach—her life’s passion—has given Fajardo a sense of purpose. “I’ve noticed children who are older and know nothing,” she says. “I was taught in college that the reason to get an education is to be able to educate others.”

God executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing.
— Deuteronomy 10:18

Sidewalk school is a critical link in asylum seekers’ education chain.
An appeals court dismissed a request from an animal rights group. The group wanted human-like rights granted to an elephant. Instead, judges upheld a ruling that emphasizes the differences between humans and animals.

“Happy” the elephant was captured in Thailand in the 1970s. Happy’s owners brought six other elephants to the United States at the same time. They named the pachyderms after the seven dwarves of Snow White fame. Grumpy lived in the same zoo with Happy until 2002.

Folks at the Nonhuman Rights Project (NhRP) claim Happy has been “unlawfully imprisoned” at the Bronx Zoo for more than 40 years. Members of NhRP hoped to obtain Happy’s freedom under a legal concept called a “writ of habeas corpus.” A writ helps decide whether jailing or detaining a person is lawful.

There’s one obvious problem: An elephant isn’t a person. NhRP members claim Happy is kept separate from other elephants at the zoo. Group members want Happy to be released from a one-acre exhibit to a 2,300-acre sanctuary in Tennessee for the winter. There she could be around other elephants and have more freedom of movement.

Some of the NhRP group’s concerns are valid. Humans should never abuse one of God’s creatures. The righteous show compassion even to animals. (Proverbs 12:10)

The zoo insists Happy has had opportunities for contact with other elephants and that zoo staff regularly assesses her condition to make sure she is thriving.

Early last year, Bronx Supreme Court Justice Alison Tuitt found that while Happy is “an intelligent, autonomous being who should be treated with respect and dignity and who may be entitled to liberty . . . Happy is not a ‘person’ and not being illegally imprisoned.”

In December, an appeals court agreed. Five judges held that the 49-year-old elephant isn’t a human. Therefore, it can’t be regarded an illegally imprisoned person—or be sprung from imprisonment.

Further, the judges say that claiming human rights for animals “would lead to a labyrinth [a tangled maze] of questions that common-law processes are ill-equipped to answer.”

The Wildlife Conservation Society, which runs the zoo, calls it a victory for “common sense.”

“Happy” strolls inside the Bronx Zoo’s Asia Habitat in New York.

Happy was the first elephant in recorded history to demonstrate high-level self-awareness in a test. In 2005, researchers painted an X on her forehead where she couldn’t see it without a mirror. Happy touched the X over and over. Most chimpanzees fail this same test.

“All decisions regarding the health and welfare of the animals at the Bronx Zoo should and will be made by the zoo’s animal experts who know them best,” the society says. The NhRP promises to continue its legal battle for Happy. It will ask New York’s highest court to re-hear arguments about the elephant. In the meantime, Happy will continue delighting visitors to the Bronx Zoo.
Some folks never leave home without their furry friends. But traveling with pets on a plane isn't for everyone: the yapping, the nipping, the . . . uh-oh, “accidents.” A new ruling may mean some of Fido’s free rides are coming to an end.

The U.S. Department of Transportation has issued a decision about animals on planes. The rule aims to settle years of tension between airlines and passengers who tote pets on board by saying they need them for emotional help.

For years, all passengers needed was a note from a health expert. Now transportation officials say emotional support companions don’t count. Only dogs can fly free, and they must be service (not merely support) animals.

Airlines insist passengers are to blame for the change. Evidently, some animal lovers connived dishonest ways to get pets on planes. These patrons lugged something of a cumulative zoo on board, including ducks, kangaroos, monkeys, squirrels, turtles, turkeys, pot-bellied pigs, ponies, and, in one case, a peacock. Some also “[misrepresented] their pets as service animals” by obtaining fake papers, doctor’s notes, and support dog vests.

Many of these untrained animals misbehaved—including weeing (or worse!) on the carpet, barking at legitimate guide dogs, or biting other passengers.

The transportation department first proposed the new rule last year.

Under the new rule, airlines may require owners to vouch for a service dog’s health, behavior, and training and submit paperwork before a flight. Airlines can also require service dogs to be leashed at all times or ban aggressive dogs.

The rule forces passengers to check support animals into the cargo hold—and pay a pet fee—or leave them at home. That change could net airlines almost $60 million per year!

Critics contend the fees place a hardship on low-income people. The Paralyzed Veterans of America say the mere presence of a dog, cat, or rabbit—even untrained—helps some travelers. Animals provide genuine comfort and support for some people. But transportation officials say dishonest practices “eroded the public trust in legitimate service animals.” Such selfish behavior kicks all support animals off the plane—and into the doghouse.
Vermont is facing lawsuits over its education voucher program. Judges must decide whether tuition aid should be available to all students, no matter what school they select. Public education advocates worry the cases could funnel more dollars into private—including religious—schools.

Under Vermont’s system, students in communities without schools may attend schools of their choice and receive state funds to do so. The system’s guidelines include approved private institutions too.

Not good enough, says the Liberty Justice Center, a nonprofit law firm that fights for school choice. Lawyers at LJC insist Vermont’s system is unconstitutional. Why? Because it’s not available to all students in the state—only the ones in rural areas without schools.

The state’s constitution says Vermont must “provide every school-age child in Vermont an equal educational opportunity.” It prohibits the state from adopting policies that deprive children of that opportunity.

LJC attorney Brian Kelsey says, “The town tuitioning program is an exceptional benefit to families, but it is fundamentally unfair to only offer it some families and not to all of Vermonters.”

Maine and New Hampshire have similar programs for students in communities without schools. The students may attend public or private schools of their choice—as long as they’re non-religious. Those states are facing lawsuits too.

The Vermont suit comes just six months after a U.S. Supreme Court ruling in a Montana school case. Justices ruled that states must include religious schools in programs that send public money to private education.

“A state need not [fund] private education,” Chief Justice John Roberts wrote, “but once it decides to do so, it cannot disqualify some private schools because they are religious.”

Following the Montana decision, three Vermont families filed lawsuits. They call denying the tuition benefit for sending children to religious schools unconstitutional.

Randi Weingarten is president of the American Federation of Teachers. She calls the Vermont cases a “cynical attempt” to use the Montana case “to syphon even more public money into private hands.” She says a win for school choice would “set a damaging precedent.”

Indeed, if the lawsuit succeeds, LJC lawyers say they’ll file legal challenges in other states with school choice programs.

Tim Keller works for the Institute for Justice. He advocates for government support of religious schools. “The state needs to be neutral,” he declares. “They can’t say, ‘We like secular schools and not religious schools.’ That’s up to the parents.”
RADIO SHACK RESURRECTED ... AGAIN?

The effects of the coronavirus pandemic bankrupted many U.S. retailers—Dressbarn, Steinmart, and Pier 1 Imports, to name a few. Now two investors hope to salvage another former shopping standby: RadioShack. Can the once-popular electronics chain return from the brink of death . . . again?

This year would be “The Shack’s” 100th birthday. But RadioShack hasn’t had cause to celebrate for a decade. Its peak was in the pre-personal computer days of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Back then, RadioShack was the go-to place for radios, walkie-talkies, and the parts to fix or build them.

But RadioShack didn’t fare well in the PC boom that began in the mid-80s. The brand’s Tandy computers were no match for Commodore 64s, Spectrums, and the first tiny, boxy Apple computers that found their way into individual homes. Then the portable device revolution of the early 2000s left RadioShack drifting toward total extinction. Its last profitable year was 2011. RadioShack filed for bankruptcy protection in 2015—and again two years later.

Last year, investors Alex Mehr and Tai Lopez bought the failing company. Their plan is peddling tech gadgets online instead of hawking them in costly street shops or rented mall spaces.

Mehr and Lopez’s company is Retail Ecommerce Ventures (REV). REV busies itself buying other companies that bellied up during the pandemic, including the ones listed earlier.

With RadioShack, REV owners say the path back to success starts with the RadioShack name. “Brand means trust,” Mehr says, “and the brand is very, very strong.” He insists there’s data to back that up—despite the fact that today’s younger target consumers may have never even owned a radio.

REV’s plan is to build an online marketplace featuring the RadioShack brand. REV’s method recognizes a biblical principle: Having a good name is better than having riches. (See Proverbs 22:1.)

Mehr and Lopez say trust in the name will attract customers to their website. There they hope plentiful, quality merchandise will encourage shoppers to click the “Buy” button for batteries, phone chargers, and headphones.

REV’s challenge is the retail giant Amazon. The online mega-retailer has negatively impacted competitors in industries from groceries to global shipping. Marketing strategist Allen Adamson calls Amazon “the Death Star.” He says, “They have everything, and it’s easy and fast. There’s no need to go to your corner RadioShack to find something, or even to RadioShack online.”

What hope does a relic from the 1980s have?

Mehr sees things differently. He doesn’t view Amazon as a competitor—just another channel where RadioShack can sell products.

“It’s like a big mall with a lot of traffic,” Mehr says, “another distribution channel for us.”

If he’s right, RadioShack could be poised for a comeback—without a radio in sight.
Every week, one online seller mails personalized gifts to more than 1,000 of its clients. Pet product company Chewy hopes the effort sets it apart from its competition. The mailbox surprise taps into people’s passion for their fur babies—and encourages customers to promote the company themselves.

In response to the pandemic, homebound humans are cyber-shopping in droves. Plus, many people added pandemic pets to the new stay-at-home lifestyle. According to one e-commerce data company, pet-related sales grew over 37% in the final months of last year.

Those factors made 2020 especially good for Chewy. The company pairs fast delivery like Amazon with the friendliness of a local pet store. Chewy’s sales soared from August to October. The company added five million new customers.

But long before COVID-19, Chewy hit upon a genius marketing concept: The company sends free (and unrequested) pet portraits to select customers. *Surprise, it’s Fluffy in a frame!*

The pet paintings quickly had customers panting. The company typically sends them to those with pet photos on their Chewy account or who have shared pics with a customer service agent. But there’s no way to purchase one from Chewy.

“My paws are crossed that we’ll be able to send you one.” It arrived six weeks later.

Danielle Schwartz didn’t ask for an oil painting of her cat, Stinky. Still, one arrived in the mail. She says, “I was shocked that they did something so personal.”

Not everyone is delighted to receive a mystery portrait. Some confused customers even send them back—likely expecting to be charged.

But many document the gifts on social media. That gives Chewy free advertising—a trend the company noticed when it first started shipping them out.

The goal is for people to talk up Chewy to others, and for Chewy to get a prime spot on shoppers’ social media walls—mini billboards for the company.

Chewy doesn’t disclose the portrait costs, but it appears the campaign is paying off.

Annesley Clark says her Chewy painting looks just like her pit bull mix, Willow. “I was beside myself,” she says. “It’s her exactly.” She couldn’t wait to show it off. The next day, she took it to a picnic and held up the artwork. “I said, ‘Look at this. It’s perfect.’” Her friends agreed.

The personal business approach certainly works with some customers, like Schwartz.

She now says, “I just want to buy everything from them.”
Oink, oink, squeeee. Thousands of pigs grunt and shriek across Puerto Rico. Island officials struggle to control the porky pests. Residents fear the pigs are unstoppable.

Vietnamese pot-bellied pigs have wrinkly black skin, short legs, sway backs, and bulging (you guessed it) bellies. Well before one year old, a female can give birth to up to 10 piglets at a time.

Pigs are not native to Puerto Rico—even though roast pig is a storied island delicacy.

About five years ago, Puerto Ricans began buying pet pot-bellied pigs as pets. Few knew the swine grew to weigh 250 pounds or more! After Hurricane Maria struck in September 2017, some pigs escaped. Others were set free by owners. The swine multiplied. Some estimates say thousands of pot-bellied pigs now roam the island.

In their native Vietnam, pot-bellies symbolize happiness and wealth. But in Puerto Rico, they plunder gardens, bowl over trashcans, and leave stinky dung trails.

Puerto Rico’s health officials try to manage the pigs. But with no natural predators and an appetite for anything, control is difficult. The swine can’t even be killed for food because they carry many diseases. Dirty habits are one reason Bible scholars believe God called pigs unclean. (Leviticus 11:7-8)

One afternoon in the capital city San Juan, pigs rummaged through garbage and mingled with roosters and dogs. Broken glass clinked beneath tiny hooves as piglets scurried about; large, surly sows stood their ground despite nearby cars.

“When they’re small, they look real cute,” admits Valerie Figueroa. She says it’s hard to make people understand how much trouble the pigs cause.

The problem goes beyond stench and scattered trash. Figueroa’s aunt tripped when a pig chased her. The animal bit her on the knee, causing a need for surgery.

Jesús Laracuente says pigs invade his vegetable garden. “All I have left is three little plantain trees,” he laments.

Luis Meléndez says a swine herd inhabits a nearby park. “They squeal all the time,” he moans, adding that they don’t let him sleep. “They’re a disaster.”

Scientists are trying to trap the pigs. Then they take the swine to a facility and slaughter them.

Animal rights groups object. They want to relocate the pigs safely. But there’s no place to house thousands of voracious porkers.

Gustavo Olivieri is a U.S. Department of Agriculture supervisor in the Caribbean. “There were way more animals than we anticipated,” he says. It may take years to rid Puerto Rico of the newly invasive pigs.

Meanwhile, weary Puerto Ricans wait for the piggies to head to market, stay home, eat roast beef—anything but cry “wee, wee, wee” all over the island.
Pipi the stray cat already ate well. The plump, black-and-white cat lives near a favorite street cat hangout, a night market in Taipei, Taiwan. But now Pipi and his fellow felines are getting fancy. They eat at a “Midnight Cafeteria”—a little dining house designed just for cats.

People launched the Midnight Cafeteria project in September. They scattered 45 small wooden houses across Taipei. The idea behind this extensive “cat-eteria”: Give cats a place to eat and rest... without making a mess.

“In Taiwan there are a lot of people who feed strays. But often they leave a mess, and then the public becomes annoyed by it,” says researcher Chen Chen-yi, who started the program.

The Midnight Cafeteria project started in math teacher Hung Pei-ling’s neighborhood. Now Hung and about 20 of her neighbors buy cat food and clean the cafés. Hung also captures cats that are injured or need spaying. She takes them to the vet, and then returns them to their haunts. Neighbors have also delivered small cushions and decorated cardboard boxes to add to the houses.

You may live in a place where people think of pets as part of the family and where every cat or dog must have a defined home, human care, toys, teeth cleaning, and shots. But in other parts of the world, people do not believe these animals belong in the house. Historically, dogs have been a source not of cuddles but of food in South Korea. That’s a far cry from the “Dog Mom” bumper stickers you might spy in other parts of the world! Often, our perspective about a way of doing things—such as how we treat animals—is shaped by what we’ve become used to. Elsewhere, others may have a very different perspective.

Some nations take a more middle-of-the-road stance about animals. In Istanbul, Turkey, people don’t usually own cats. But they willingly take care of strays. They put bowls of food and water on the sidewalk and donate money when a stray needs to visit the vet. Cats are part of the fabric of the city’s culture—like squirrels or pigeons, only cuddlier. Something similar is happening in Taipei.

The cats certainly aren’t complaining. Pipi and two of his friends enjoy attention from Hung and another volunteer on a Sunday afternoon, eat at the cafeteria, then settle in for a lazy morning nap.

And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God.

— Luke 13:29
Koh Seng Choon’s restaurant sits smack dab in the middle of Hong Kong’s busy Mong Kok neighborhood. Dignity Kitchen serves mouthwatering Singaporean foods like noodles in spicy coconut milk broth, sweet cakes, and warm rice. The restaurant is different from other restaurants in the city though. That’s because it is almost completely staffed by employees with physical or mental disabilities.

The restaurant is huge. It’s designed like a Singaporean food court with many different food stations. Employees are trained to prep food and cook as well as serve customers. A deaf employee runs the drink stall. Posters at the stall show patrons simple sign language for drink orders. An employee with autism operates the rice stall. He excitedly introduces the daily rice dish to customers. “We used to prepare a script for him,” says Koh, smiling proudly. “But now, eight months, nine months later, he can’t stop talking.”

Ultimately, Koh’s Dignity Kitchen goal is to place current employees in other jobs in the food and service industry. Then Koh wants to welcome and train more disabled people at the restaurant—again turning them out as skilled laborers in the broader marketplace.

With access to support, disabled individuals can work hard and learn new things. Bradford and Bryan Manning have significant vision loss. But they made a recent impact on the retail world. They started an online clothing store and use their profits to fund blindness research. (See “Two Blind Brothers” at teen.wng.org/node/6503.)

Nick Vujicic is a speaker and author. He was born without limbs. But he uses his mind and voice well. Polio paralyzed Franklin Roosevelt. That didn’t stop him from being President of the United States! Hannah Sampson is a professional dancer who has Down Syndrome. Ludwig van Beethoven composed his Ninth Symphony after losing his hearing. Joni Earekson Tada is a quadriplegic who is unable to move her body below her shoulders. She is a Christian author, speaker, talented painter, and great encourager of others who serve people with disabilities.

Ming Chung is a visually impaired administrative assistant at Dignity Kitchen. “Director (Koh) told me that he doesn’t care about our disabilities. He only focuses on our abilities,” she says.

Romans 12:10 says, “Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.” That is what is happening at Dignity Kitchen. Diners are drawn to the restaurant’s mission. (The food there is good too, they say.)
Kalmane Kamegowda is working on a big project in southern India. The 72-year-old shepherd has spent the last 40 years digging a chain of ponds on a hill near his village, Dasanadoddi.

The 16 ponds are meant to fight water scarcity. Kamegowda says they’re “scientific” in design. The water flows on a slope. That helps prevent the ponds from drying up even in scorching summer months. Birds, wild animals, and villagers’ livestock drink from the pools.

It’s been a lot of hard work. Kamegowda relied mostly on shovels, spades, and pickaxes to create the pools. He also rented excavating machines when he could afford them. To build the ponds, he’s spent at least $14,000 from his and his son’s earnings from selling sheep over the years.

Four years ago, he saved some money for his pregnant daughter-in-law to have a surgical delivery. But she delivered a baby boy without it, leaving him with some extra cash. He used the money to dig another pond and named it after his grandson.

Other villagers once dismissed Kamegowda as mad. They mocked him for claiming that his father had taught him to identify ground moisture and use it to create bodies of water.

But now Kamegowda is a minor celebrity. The Karnataka state government gave him a prestigious award two years ago. Then Prime Minister Narendra Modi applauded Kamegowda’s work on his popular radio broadcast.

Kamegowda has two nicknames. One is “Pond Man.” The other is “Vanapalaka,” or guardian of forests.

Planting trees in a park near the ponds earned him the second name. Kamegowda identified a need and responded to it. He saw a new way to help others. God gave all of us creative abilities. This type of innovative thinking and self-starting impetus can lead to very good things. Those characteristics allowed him to help his community. His work will benefit others for many years to come.

Some neighbors complained, apparently jealous of the recognition Kamegowda received. But the local administrator, Deputy Commissioner M.V. Venkatesh, visited the village to check out the project. “His work is genuine,” Venkatesh says.

Venkatesh notes that every rainy season, tanks built by Kamegowda fill with water. They become reservoirs for birds and forest animals during the summer.

“He is a very dedicated man, a very selfless servant for the protection of the environment and ecology. In fact, he is a role model to other people in watershed development,” Venkatesh says.
A Floating Giraffe Rescue

Intense flooding is threatening Longicharo Island. Nearby Kenyan villages are disappearing and with them, the area’s wildlife. So an entire community is working to save some very long-necked residents stranded there. And the rescuers appear to be taking a cue from Noah’s ark.

Fewer and fewer giraffes are surviving in Africa. For years, they’ve been losing their native land to poachers and developers. One of the most threatened subspecies of these tall creatures is the Rothschild’s giraffe. There are only about 1,600 of these giraffes still living in the wild. Almost half of those live in Kenya.

In 2011, scientists relocated eight Rothschild’s giraffes to a land mass in Kenya’s Lake Baringo. At the time, the area was larger and connected to the mainland, so it was a peninsula. But powerful flooding has threatened both people and wildlife. The giraffes became stranded on what became Longicharo Island. As waters rose, the island began shrinking.

Rangers in the Ruko Community Wildlife Conservancy visited Longicharo. They provided food and performed health checkups for the giraffes. But with more flooding forecast, the rangers decided to remove the animals before it was too late.

That’s when the Kenya Wildlife Service, the Northern Rangelands Trust, and the nonprofit organization Save Giraffes Now teamed up with local residents for a strange ferry ride.

The team needed a giraffe-safe barge—and willing animals—for the daring rescue. The Ruko folks built a custom barge for the mission.

David O’Connor, president of Save Giraffes Now, calls the boat an engineering marvel. It required tall fencing to help keep a giraffe from tipping over. “The rectangular steel structure was designed and built specifically to carry [a] tall, heavy giraffe,” he says. “The barge floats atop a series of empty drums for buoyancy. Reinforced sides kept [the giraffe] from jumping out as the barge was gently maneuvered.”

The team took months helping the animals first adjust to seeing the barge on the island. Then they used mangoes to coax giraffes onto the boat.

The preparation worked. When it was time, the first giraffe aboard was one named Asiwa. “We sailed Asiwa over a mile of crocodile-ridden waters to the newly established Ruko giraffe sanctuary,” O’Connor says. “Our team was there the whole way to ensure Asiwa was safe.”

Since Asiwa’s rescue, Pasaka has come over too. The plan is to ferry the others over one by one. Rescuers hope the giraffes will someday help re-populate the region. But with lake levels still rising, saving them is a race against time.
Identical twins may look totally the same. But new research shows that identical twins aren’t so identical after all—at least not genetically.

Genes carry DNA that tells your body to make you—hair color, height, proneness to certain diseases, everything. Until now, scientists thought identical twins must have DNA that exactly matches.

Researchers in Iceland studied DNA from 387 pairs of identical twins, along with DNA from the twins’ parents, children, and spouses. According to geneticist Kari Stefansson, they found “early mutations that separate identical twins.”

A mutation is a teeny-tiny change in a sequence of DNA—neither good nor bad. Identical twins start together as just one cell. That single cell somehow divides into two separate ones. It’s now two people! But as they grow, their cells continue to divide. Scientists found that twin DNA can change slightly during this dividing process. Some twins have up to 100 DNA differences in their cells, and some have fewer.

Of course, these differences are in only a tiny portion of each twin’s genetic code, which is why identical twins are . . . identical. But the mutation might explain why one twin grows taller or develops greater risk for certain cancers. Until now, researchers believed these kinds of differences came not from nature (genes) but from nurture (how each twin lived—what food they ate, who raised them, where they lived, and other factors).

Twins—both identical and fraternal (non-identical—fraternal twins began as two separate cells all along) have always been very valuable to science. They can help answer the old “nature versus nurture” dilemma. Twins separated at birth prove especially useful for such studies. Meet one fascinating set: “The Jim Twins.”

These now-famous identical twins from Minnesota were separated as babies. Each was adopted by a different family, and both were named Jim. As adults, the Jims met. They found that they didn’t just look the same. They also had lived weirdly similar lives. Each had a son. One Jim named his son James Allan (two l’s) and the other named his son James Alan (one l). Each married a woman named Linda, divorced her, and then married a woman named Betty. Each Jim drove a blue Chevrolet, worked as a part-time sheriff, struggled with headaches, and chewed his fingernails down to the nub.

Many cases of separated twins show these surprising types of similarities. So what determines what kind of person a baby becomes—nature, or nurture? The answer, of course, is both. But the Jims show that genes may play a bigger role than people used to think. The Jims influenced science. Now science may influence the Jims—by telling them they’re not quite as similar as they thought!

What makes you you—nature or nurture? All people are born with a sin nature. When a person is converted, he or she receives a new nature—the nature of Christ. See 2 Corinthians 5:17.
Long Live the Longleaf

Longleaf pines once covered most of the southern United States. The straight, lofty trees shelter other plants and animals. Native Americans weave their foot-long needles into baskets.

But by the 1990s, logging and clear-cutting wiped out most of the pines and the grasslands beneath. Only a small number of the trees remained in areas that were too wet or dry to farm. The trees’ absence disrupted the surrounding ecosystem. Now some people are planting more.

The trees faced another problem too. For decades, the U.S. Forest Service managed forest fires by suppressing them, even in remote areas. That strategy had short-term benefits but long-term consequences. Longleaf seeds must touch the ground to sprout. Forest fires clear away debris and fertilize the ground for the seeds. And fires kill shrubs and hardwood trees that block sunlight from tender seedlings, grasses, and wildflowers.

If one part of God’s intricately designed creation is removed, the rest may suffer. Hundreds of plant and animal species are found only in longleaf forests. Nearly 30 species are now endangered or threatened. Dozens more are under consideration for protection.

Two Auburn University forestry professors came to the rescue. Rhett Johnson and Dean Gjerstad founded The Longleaf Alliance in 1995. They spread the word about the tree’s importance.

The alliance, government agencies, nonprofits, and other partners started working together. In 2010, they launched America’s Longleaf Restoration Initiative. Their aim was to have 12,500 square miles of longleaf by 2025. Now they’re over halfway to reaching that goal.

“I like to say we rescued longleaf from the dustbin. I don’t think we had any idea how successful we’d be,” says Johnson.

Longleaf pines will never cover the South like they once did. But after centuries, their numbers are growing instead of shrinking.

The effort can help landowners too. When longleaf pines flourish, landowners can profit from activities such as hunting and wildlife photography rather than only from occasional timber harvests. And the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas planted about 400 acres of longleaf for their needles. With their needle harvest restored, they’ll be able to continue creating their traditional crafts. That will help economically sustain the tribe and maintain a valued aspect of their heritage.

The work isn’t over yet. Another 5,160 square miles must be planted or reclaimed from stands mixed with other trees to meet the 2025 deadline. Alliance president Carol Denhof says, “I’m hopeful we can get there but . . . we have a lot of work to do.”
U.S. farmers faced big challenges in 2020. Problems included trade disputes, low prices, and severe weather. Yet many farmers ended the trying year with their highest net income in seven years. Where did all that cash come from? In actual dollars, farm income is at its lowest in more than a decade. But in 2020, federal government subsidies equaled nearly 40% of farmers’ income. That was a 107% increase over 2019.

A subsidy is money given by a government to help a business keep the price of a product or service low. Low prices allow consumers to afford basic goods like milk or gas or services like housing or education. Subsidies can also keep a struggling industry afloat. In 2008, the federal government funded the banking and automobile sectors. It did so to protect millions of jobs and prevent serious economic collapse.

Farmers, who must “[wait] for the precious fruit of the Earth” (James 5:7) and deal with the whims of weather and politics, often get government subsidies too. The subsidies help pay for supplies, equipment, and labor.

But subsidies have a big downside. They allow prices to go down. Low prices usually increase demand. Producers then sometimes can’t maintain the supply. That can cause a goods shortage. The shortage can trigger even greater demand, which can result in price increases. See the vicious cycle?

Not counting U.S. Department of Agriculture loans and insurance payments, farmers received over $46 billion in government subsidies in 2020. That’s the largest direct-to-farm subsidy total ever.

The impact of the farm subsidy varies from one farm to another. “The payment to one farm could be a matter of life and death of that farm and for another farm maybe just makes it not quite as bad of a year as it was going to be,” says farmer Mike Paustian.

Some farmers would have difficulty making ends meet without federal aid. But Rick Juchems tells a different story. He grows corn and soybeans and custom raises hogs. “At first [the money] did help,” Juchems says. “But then we kept getting payments, and I don’t know that those were warranted.”

How does the government finance subsidies? It doesn’t. Citizens do—in the form of taxes. Taxes provide funding to dole out to farming and other industries. Those relief checks everyone gets excited about? (See “Congress Votes on Relief Bill” at teen.wng.org/node/6569.) They’re a form of subsidy that will come out of working citizens’ pockets.

Lawmakers and economists have argued about subsidies for centuries: Would you rather pay more for groceries … or pay the government to subsidize the farmer?
Sometimes what’s old becomes new again for good reason. For hundreds of years, people have made quilts. The sturdy, insulating blankets traversed oceans and continents. Layers provide warmth and insulation, while cheerful patterns could be created economically from clothing scraps. Add a dash of human ingenuity, and quilt images can document events. Now the treasured tradition is showing up in modern homes as a trend in home décor.

Georgia Bonesteel is a professional quilter with an inherent appreciation of color, fabric, and design. Bonesteel loves her craft, and she loves teaching people how to do it.

Quilts aren’t just for making beds cozy these days. They can add a pop of color to walls, tables, and couches. Quilted pillows, placemats, and wall hangings take far less time to make than traditional bed quilts, and they add a fun twist to the age-old craft. Some modern artists use everyday items like duct tape, leather, and old blue jeans for quilts. Sabrina Gschwandtner made a quilt series from old film strips. When light shines behind one of these quilts, patterns appear.

Traditional quilts have three layers sandwiched together. The top layer has multiple fabrics cut in pieces like a puzzle and arranged in patterns. The middle layer is fluffy batting. It adds thickness and holds air to lock in warmth. The underlayer is often a single piece of fabric. Thread stitched through the three layers all over holds them together and creates extra insulating ability.

Proverbs 31:22 says the wise woman “makes bed coverings for herself.” The earliest quilters understood that layering fabrics increased warmth and protection. “It was a necessity, providing warmth for the family during winter. New fabrics were not purchased for quilts. The fabric was what was left from the clothes people wore,” explains Susan Scott. Her grandmother taught her. “I remember her sitting in her rocking chair hand-sewing quilt squares.” Fifty years later, she carries on the tradition.

Bonesteel has seen the quilting craft change over the years. In fact, she has enhanced the tradition herself. She figured out how to efficiently quilt a blanket section by section, free from the use of the huge, traditional quilting frame. Her method is called “lap quilting.” Today, quilters everywhere use her original ideas.

For the last eight years, Pat Capone and her friend Mavis Bosch have enjoyed a virtual quilting night once each week. These traditional quilters are thankful that technology keeps them connected. They treasure time together to quilt. “We show each other projects that we’re working on. Sometimes we sew and don’t even talk,” says Capone.

This quilt is made from a collection of T-shirts.
In a growth spurt? Just give these pants legs a tug! This futuristic-looking clothing is inspired by the paper folding art of origami. Each garment in the line by London-based startup Petit Pli has many creases and tucks. The adaptable attire could reduce fashion industry waste and save parents money on kids’ clothes.

The company’s name is French for “little pleat.” The clothes feature an ingenious pleat system that lets them grow along with their wearer. The outfits expand in multiple directions but also shrink back to their original size.

Company founder Ryan Yasin was inspired by a frustrating experience. He sent some clothes to his nephew in Denmark. When the clothes arrived, the little dude had already outgrown the new duds. “This served as a real stimulus to look at this as a problem that needed fixing,” Yasin says.

According to Yasin, children grow seven clothes sizes during their first two years. That leaves parents with a lot of barely worn, too-small clothes.

Yasin is an engineer specializing in deployable structures. Those are forms that can change shape and size, like an umbrella or a folding chair. To design the clothes, he used his knowledge of “stowing away as much material as possible into a small gap.” Then the material can deploy (or pop out) when needed.

The clothes aren’t cheap: A pair of pants costs about $80. Tops start at $95. But one set of Petit Pli clothes can fit a child from age nine months to four years. Then the clothes can be reset back to their smallest size and passed on to another child. (So when Mom tells you to “Fold your clothes,” she might want you to put them away. But she might also mean for you to hand them down!)

The clothes are tough, breathable, and tear-resistant. That allows children to “move completely freely and explore the world as they are meant to, not in restrictive skinny jeans that are really not designed for them,” Yasin says.

There’s another beneficial aspect to the innovative garb. “Petit Pli exists because the fashion industry is the world’s second largest polluter,” Yasin says. “We already know what one of the solutions is, and that is to extend the life and use of clothes.”

Stewarding God’s creation well includes avoiding unnecessary wastefulness. The company’s website says that since 2017, it has recycled approximately 12,841 plastic bottles to make its fabric.

The company is now experimenting with adult clothing and with prints to hide stains.
“Do you love me now that I can dance?” asks a song from 1962. Until recently, science’s most advanced androids would have left viewers scratching their heads at that question. But now a quartet of robots make the answer a resounding “Yes!”

Robotics design company Boston Dynamics posted a video in January. It begins with humanoid bots dancing in a warehouse while workers gawk from behind glass. Two Atlas models scoot, swivel, kick, leap, and caper across the screen. The bots do the twist, the mashed potato, and other classic dance moves to the upbeat tune.

The twirling automatons are joined by Spot, a doglike robot, and Handle, a wheeled bot designed for warehouse work. At one point, Spot appears to sing.

The clip is a playful attempt to close the books on 2020. “Our whole crew got together to celebrate the start of what we hope will be a happier year,” the Waltham, Massachusetts, company says in the video caption. The video also left folks wondering: Are those adroit androids really bursting with rhythm? Or is it two and a half minutes of computer-generation?

Thousands of amused online viewers applauded the robots. Others seemed a little frightened by their nimbleness. Responses ranged from “So cute!” to “Slightly creepy.”

Several of the over 25 million viewers said some variation of, “I’ll take two!”

“Do you love me? Not when you come to annihilate us,” tweeted Jan Nicolas, a photographer, speaking from a sci-fi-induced position of fear.

“I already see how in 10 years, this thing will chase me and beat me up,” commented another viewer. An abundance of examples of computer-generated magic (think Lord of the Rings or almost any space movie) makes some people question their own eyes. Well-known designer-engineer Elon Musk assures, “This is not CGI.”

Many people wondered how bots could go from rough, jerky movements with an inability to balance on two legs to this degree of dexterity so quickly. In 2016, an Atlas robot like one in the video shuffled around and stiffly picked up boxes. Now it glides like a futuristic Fred Astaire.

(Ahem . . . ask your grandparents who that is.)

The technology is mind-boggling. After all, it wasn’t very long ago that engineers were struggling to design robots that mimic the complex movements of God’s creatures. (Read “Recreating Nature Is Harder Than It looks” at teen.wng.org/node/4220.) The progress of the last few years is most impressive.

Someday, robots like Atlas, Handle, or Spot may help save lives in disasters or war zones. For now, these robots definitely have rhythm. And that’s hard not to love.
“A chicken in every pot!” pledged a famous campaign slogan. Poultry has long been one of the world’s most popular proteins. Livers, necks, feet—people eat nearly every part of a hen. Now one designer/inventor wants to add feathers to the pot as well.

Sorowut Kittibanthorn is an inventor and design student from Thailand. He studies at Central Saint Martins Art School in London. He hopes to change what people view as trash.

He’s taking aim at a “fowl” form of waste: chicken feathers. He says more than two million tons of feathers are thrown away in Europe alone. He believes up to 30% more get tossed in Asia.

High in protein and bursting with nutritious amino acids, feathers could be the next big food fad. But no one’s noshing them... yet. That’s because the human body can’t process the prickly plumes. Yet chicken feathers are made of keratin, the same protein God placed in human hair and nails.

Kittibanthorn extracts protein from discarded chicken feathers. He then uses a process called “acid hydrolysis” to turn the keratin into a powdered edible food additive. With liquid, the powder can be shaped into patties or nuggets.

“I’m transforming chicken feathers into a lean protein source and edible food for human[s] that is low fat too,” the Thai inventor says.

His current project is called “A Lighter Delicacy.” It involves turning feathers into fake meats that mimic chicken (really!) and steak. Taste testers call Kittibanthorn’s fine dining “meats” delicious.

Food blogger Cholrapee Asvichit tasted the “steak” meat made from feathers. “I feel like the texture, the fatty, the juicy, and everything is really giving me [the] feeling that I’m really eating the real meat,” he says. “Like, the real red meat.”

Asvichit can even imagine the reconstituted feather food being served in fine restaurants.

But Kittibanthorn isn’t counting his chicken feathers before they’re plucked. He says the feathers-to-food project is still in the early stages. There will be more research and development ahead. But he has worthy goals: helping to feed the hungry and reducing excess waste at the same time.

Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. — Ezekiel 16:49
**ALPHABET DEFLATES LOON**

Maybe some of the higher-ups thought it was a “loony” idea. Alphabet—Google’s parent company—is letting the air out of its worldwide internet-beaming balloon company. The announcement to shut down Loon ended lofty plans to launch thousands of massive balloons into the stratosphere. Those balloons would hand off internet signals around the globe—beaming service even to poor or low-population areas where running wires and building towers are not financially justified. (See “Balloons To Beam Internet Worldwide” at teen.wng.org/node/2731.) A few Loon balloons were providing web access to Kenya. Those will come down in March. Service can continue through on-the-ground providers to those customers. No specific reasons were given, but “The road to commercial viability has proven much longer and riskier than hoped,” Astro Teller, the head of the X division of Alphabet, wrote in a blog post.

**THE WAY THE GEODE CRUMBLES**

Did God tuck the face of a beloved Sesame Street Muppet inside a volcanic rock? Or is this just a delightful case of pareidolia—the psychological effect of seeing faces in inanimate objects, like a cloud formation or the surface of the Moon? One thing’s for sure: This geode looks like Cookie Monster! Lucas Fassari plucked the orb from a site near Soledade, Brazil. He handed it off to geologist Mike Bowers. Bowers split it open to reveal two googly eyes in a blue face with a goofy grin—apparently eager for crumbly, chocolate-chip goodness! The charming little agate is bringing bids from $10,000 to more than $100,000 from Muppet-loving rock collectors.

**YELLOWSTONE’S OLDEST KNOWN GRIZZLY**

A 34-year-old grizzly bear captured in southwestern Wyoming has been confirmed as the oldest on record in the Yellowstone region, wildlife officials say. The bruin, known as grizzly bear 168, was captured last summer after preying on calves. He weighed only 170 pounds—a fraction of his robust five-year-old weight of 450 in 1991. The 1991 measure was taken the second time the young beast was caught for evaluation. This time, the ancient fellow had just three well-worn teeth left, making it difficult for him to get the nutrients needed to thrive. He was mercifully euthanized by officials with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. “It was sad that we had to put him down,” biologist Dan Thompson says. “But ethically there was nothing else that could be done.”

**CONGRESSMAN-ELECT’S WIDOW WILL RUN**

When Louisiana Republican Luke Letlow won his November race for a U.S. House of Representatives seat, no one expected that he wouldn’t get to fill it. Letlow contracted the coronavirus and tragically, he passed away from complications of the illness on December 29. Letlow left not only an empty congressional seat. The 41-year-old also left a wife and two young children, ages three and one. Julia Letlow, his widow, described herself as “both full of grief while also having hope for the future.” So she decided to run for her husband’s empty seat. Mrs. Letlow filed her paperwork in January for the March 20 election. She pledged to continue her husband’s vision for Louisiana’s 5th District, and talked of instilling respect and responsibility for public service in her children. “We don’t always get to choose what happens to us. But we do get to choose how to respond. Today, I choose to continue to move forward. Today, I choose hope,” she said.
**BALKAN PENINSULA: ISLANDS OF GARBAGE FILL RIVERS** The Balkan nations—Bosnia and Herzegovia, Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, and others—have a problem. Huge islands of garbage clog rivers that people depend on for water, transportation, tourism, and hydropower. Landfills near the tributaries that feed the Drina River contribute to the environmental emergency situation. Swollen waterways spill over their banks, sweeping landfill contents into the flow. Officials say vast amounts of plastics, metals, and other slow-to-degrade materials are pulled from the Drina annually. A waste barrier in the river broke in early January, allowing more garbage than normal to build up near Bosnia’s Visegrad dam. A devastating war in the 1990s left the Balkans lagging far behind the rest of Europe economically. That results in a lack of resources and technology to deal with ecological threats.

**OREO-LUNCHMEAT BURGERS?!** McDonald’s is selling a sandwich made of Spam lunchmeat topped with crushed Oreo cookies in China. The sweet-and-savory, greasy-crunchy combo is intended to get attention for its gross factor. Business brands from restaurateurs to automakers sometimes roll out offbeat products to cash in on even a small segment of the world’s most populous and intensely competitive Chinese market. The “members only” sandwich boasts two Spam slices, Oreo crumbles, and mayonnaise. Sorry, McD’s . . . We’re not lovin’ it.

**SITTING DOWN ON THE JOB** Want to sit down while standing up? Factory workers or surgeons who stand for hours could get some relief by using a wearable exoskeleton leg device from Japanese startup Archelis. The device straps to the legs. It disperses the wearer’s bodyweight so that it is supported by the shins and thighs. That makes standing easier and less tiring. The ArchelisFX device, whose name comes from the Japanese for “walkable chair,” is all-mechanical. It does not need any electricity to operate. It’s not cheap, though: It will retail for around $5,000.

**“I THOUGHT ‘THIS IS A DEATH SENTENCE.’** But my disability had already taught me how to carry even this cross. For when I trusted Him to see me through, even if it did, yes, mean death, when I gave it all up to Him, I could feel God take gentle, firm possession of this strange affliction and begin to do a work in me.”

— Joni Eareckson Tada, Christian author and speaker, who was paralyzed from the neck down at age 17, after learning she had COVID-19 at age 71
Think it through

Explain It (pages 22-25)

QUIZ MY READING

1. For the first time in hundreds of years, the number of longleaf pines is __________.
   a) shrinking
   b) growing

2. How do subsidies help farming and other industries?
   a) by raising taxes and creating shortages of a certain product
   b) by covering costs to keep the price of a product or service low

3. What is the middle layer of a quilt called?
   a) the batting
   b) the pattern

4. Petit Pli’s clothing uses __________ to allow clothes to expand or shrink.
   a) elastic bands
   b) pleats and folds

MIND STIR

1. Why do you think the tradition of quilting is gaining popularity again? Give at least two possible reasons.

2. What do you think is the greatest value consumers might get from the Petit Pli clothing line?

VIZ-QUIZ

Quilters created and named patterns inspired by nature, Bible stories, and their own lives. Can you figure out which name goes with each pattern? Write the number of each name in the circle with the correct pattern.

WORDS TO BANK

1. suppressing
   a) supporting
   b) sustaining
   c) subduing

2. intricately
   a) with complexity
   b) simply
   c) infinitely

3. whims
   a) sudden changes of mind
   b) fantasies
   c) careful plans

4. warranted
   a) guaranteed
   b) justified
   c) wanted

5. inherent
   a) precocious
   b) genetic
   c) innate

6. stimulus
   a) cash incentive
   b) motivation
   c) theory

1. Bears paw
2. Blazing star
3. Cottage tulips
4. Forward and back
5. Jacob’s ladder
6. Maple leaf
7. Milady’s Fan
8. Nautilus
9. V block

QUIZ ANSWERS ON PAGE 29
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