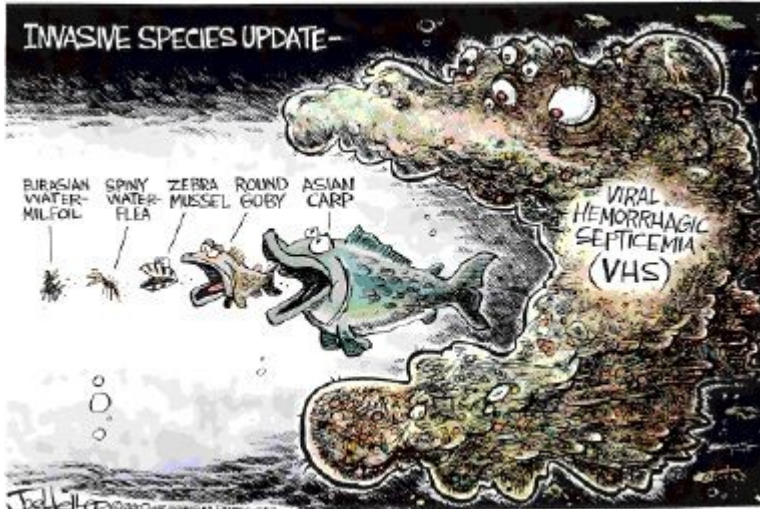


# Century Marks

Century Marks in the [June 12, 2007](#) issue



© Joe Heller

**The graduate:** Robbie Brown received a \$20,000 achievement award when he graduated from Emory University. But instead of spending the money on a new car—he drives a beat-up 1988 Volvo station wagon—or setting it aside for law school, he chose to give it to fellow Emory student Elizabeth Sholtys, who opened a home for street children in India during her junior year of college. Sholtys spends about nine months of the year working at her home for children in the slums of Pune, India. She completed much of her college work online. Due to Brown's generosity, she hopes to provide health education classes and clinical care for street children and their families. People who know Brown were not surprised at his benevolence. His mother said, "He told us he had won the award and that he was giving the money away almost all in the same sentence" (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, May 15).

**What the scrolls teach:** It's been 60 years since the Dead Sea Scrolls were first discovered by an Arab shepherd. To mark this anniversary, *Biblical Archaeology Review* (May/June) launched a series of articles in which scholars recount how working on the scrolls changed their lives and what the significance of this discovery has been. Frank Moore Cross, one of the original members of the scroll publication team, says the scrolls have helped us learn about "apocalyptic Judaism," and the

fact that there was “a thriving bunch of apocalypticists and their followers” at the time when Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism emerged. Sidnie White Crawford, a younger scholar, says that we now know that both the biblical text and the biblical canon were much more fluid during the period of Second Temple Judaism than was previously thought. In a humorous vein, Martin Abegg, an American based in western Canada, says that when he traveled to Seattle to talk about the scrolls, a U.S. customs official asked him the purpose of the visit. When he mentioned the Dead Sea Scrolls, she asked: “Oh, and what kind of band is that?”

**Cellular growth:** The *Financial Times* estimates that fewer than 1 percent of African households have landline telephones. Yet cell phone usage is growing rapidly on that continent: there were about 63 million cell phone users in 2003 but 155 million in 2006. In Africa as elsewhere, cell phones can be used for nefarious reasons: for instance, in Nigeria they are used to intimidate political candidates and voters. But cell phones are also being used in a World Bank-financed program to integrate ex-combatants into society after the end of the conflict in the Congo. And they are being used to track and control the spread of HIV/AIDS. It is estimated that a developing country’s GDP can increase by 0.6 percent when cell phone usage goes up 10 percent (*Current History*, May).

**Rebirth:** Bruce Greyson, a psychiatrist at the University of Virginia Health System’s Division of Perceptual Studies (DOPS), studies near-death experiences (NDEs) and out-of-body experiences (OBEs). People who have had an NDE report seeing visions of a bright light in a tunnel and of being welcomed by deceased ancestors or spiritual figures like Jesus. What amazes Dr. Greyson is the transformative nature of these NDEs and OBEs: “Basically, they come back believing that the golden rule is the way the universe works, just like gravity,” he says. He’s followed some people for up to 20 years after their NDE, and the changes have for the most part persisted (*Discover*, June).

**No more rice Christians:** As part of a movement to discourage evangelical Christians from proselytizing among the poorest people, Himachal Pradesh has become the fifth state in India to pass legislation banning “forced religious conversions.” Anyone who converts must give the district magistrate 30 days notice, and anyone who converts another person “by the use of force or by inducement or by any other fraudulent means” is subject to two years’ imprisonment, a fine or both. Inducement is defined to include giving gifts. This rule puts Christians in a bind since they see it as part of their mission to feed the poor. Conversion to Christianity

or Buddhism is often seen as a path out of India's caste system. The other four states with similar legislation are ruled by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, but Himachal Pradesh is currently ruled by the secular Congress Party (*Christian Science Monitor*, May 23).

**For shame:** Sexual violence against women and children has long been used by combatants as a tool in war, but sexual violence is also being perpetrated by another group of persons, according to Elizabeth G. Ferris: humanitarian workers and peacekeepers charged to aid and protect displaced peoples and refugees in conflict situations. "You people should have taken care of me. Instead you abandoned me," a child was quoted as saying in a study of three African countries conducted by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The study revealed that humanitarian workers were exchanging food, medical care and other goods for sexual favors. Parents even used their children as a means of getting help for their families. "If your family does not have a girl, your family is in crisis," a refugee mother said in Sierra Leone. Girls 13 to 18 are the most vulnerable. The UNHCR study concluded that this sexual exploitation takes place with impunity—no aid worker had been disciplined or lost his job on account of it. Most of the persons guilty of this exploitation were national staff, not expatriates (*Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Spring).

**Silent retreat:** Brian Doyle, sometime contributor to the *Christian Century*, reports that his sister, who lives in a monastery, once went on a summer-long silent retreat. He asked her what her first words were when she broke her silence. She grinned and said "Pass the butter," and when he complied, she laughed: those actually were her first words after the retreat. He also asked her if it had been hard to remain silent. At first it was, she said, but then it had become a prayer (*U.S. Catholic*, June).

**Up in smoke:** Several studies have documented that as taxes rise on cigarettes, consumption goes down. A 10 percent increase in cigarette taxes leads to a 4 percent decline in consumption, with most of the lost sales involving teens and pregnant women. However, price increases have an adverse effect on those who don't quit smoking: they respond by extracting more nicotine from each cigarette. One study concluded that "smoking a cigarette more intensively, up to the filter, leads the smoker to inhale more dangerous chemicals and has been shown to cause cancer deeper into the lung." Less frequent but more intensive smoking also produces uncomfortable nicotine highs and lows throughout the day. Taxes on cigarettes range from \$4.05 a pack in Chicago to 46 cents in South Carolina (*Society*

, May/June).

**Left fuming:** British clerics are fuming over government demands that they place no-smoking signs at the entrances to churches, cathedrals, synagogues, temples and mosques as part of a nationwide ban on smoking in public places. “One is bound to ask, when did you last hear of somebody smoking in church?” asks Colin Slee, dean of Southwark Cathedral in London (RNS).

**All about you:** The folks at [sermonspice.com](http://sermonspice.com) have come up with a parody of worship and praise services that seem to focus on the individual performers. Their online video, “It’s all about me,” features an egocentric worship leader singing familiar hymns and choruses, but with a twist: “Now I lift my name on high,” “There is none like me,” “I am why I sing” and “How great I am.”