

BRIEFS

Timber!

■ Timber!: The forests of Africa are "under siege," experts say. You've heard about the endangered ancient woods of the American Northwest, and about the slaughter of Amazonian rain forests. But you may not know about the crisis in Zaire, which "contains half of Africa's and 13 percent of the world's rain forest — an acreage surpassed only by Brazil," anthropologist Virginia Luling and journalist Damien Lewis write in *Multinational Monitor*.

"Siforzal, a subsidiary of the German company Danzer, in which Zaire's President Mobutu has a large interest, controls a vast logging concession that stretches for 250 kilometers along the banks of the Zaire River at Lokoko. Each (hardwood tree) trunk brings in \$5,000 to \$10,000 in Europe or the United States, (so) the company's logging operations are highly profitable. . . .

"Up-river, an area the size of Lokoko has been abandoned now that all its valuable timber has been cut. . . . The Pygmy peoples, who have a long tradition of avoiding confrontation, have not as yet mounted any overt resistance to the assault on their land. In the past they escaped interference by retreating further into the forest, but now the forest itself is rapidly disappearing."

Amid the brouhaha over what Christopher Columbus did to native Americans 500 years ago, the San Francisco Examiner's Science Guy thinks more news media would report what Columbus' descendants are doing to Africans right now.

San Francisco Examiner

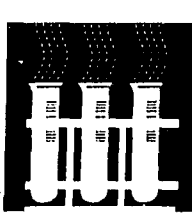
Life and death

■ Every minute, nearly 300 million cells in your body die. They're replaced immediately by the division of living cells.

Omni Magazine, December issue

New legal issues

■ New technology spawns new legal issues. For example, computers and modems allow "hackers" to exchange all kinds of information over telephone



lines. Some of this information is of dubious taste or legality. Is their electronic banter protected by the First Amendment? The courts are still deciding.

Likewise, biotechnology could generate new and weird forms of legal hassles. Far-out possibilities are suggested by Gene Stephens, a professor in the College of Criminal Justice at the University of South Carolina, in an article for *The Futurist*. He asks: Suppose biotechnologists discover "anti-aging" drugs that lengthen the human lifespan, perhaps indefinitely. If an "immortal" commits a murder, "could society afford to sentence him to life imprisonment?"

Or should aging drugs be used as a form of punishment? Imagine this: "A hot-headed 25-year-old could be 'sentenced' to being turned into a more sedate 50-year-old."

San Francisco Examiner

Signs of stress overload

■ Too much stress or mismanagement of stress can trigger physical and psychological problems. Stress overload can cause unexplained fatigue, headaches and backaches, apathy or irritability, feelings of isolation or helplessness, flashes of anger, obsession with a problem, changes in eating or sleeping habits, feeling depressed or accident-prone, and problems of communicating.

Drug Topics (Nov. 9, 1992)

Another hazard for children

■ Thanks to the fitness boom, 3 million exercise bicycles are sold in the U.S. annually. There's also been a boom in injuries involving little boys playing alone with exercise bikes. The consequences are often severe — amputation of one or more fingers, as well as fractures, lacerations and crush injuries.

Contemporary Pediatrics (December 1992)

Help for tiny hearts

New tools help diagnosis, surgery

By Elizabeth Kutter
 Gazette staff writer

The heart begins as a long worm-like tube that twists and turns and folds onto itself eventually forming a four-chambered pump.

"It's the first organ formed," said Dr. Stephen Roth, a pediatric cardiologist with Pediatric Medical Center in Cedar Rapids. "When you think of it, it's amazing that it happens right so often," said Roth.

One out of every 100 babies is born with some kind of heart defect. About five percent of those can be chalked up to heredity, Roth said. "The other 95 percent is lousy luck."

Enhanced diagnostic tools, most notably the echocardiogram, make it possible to diagnose imperfect hearts

with no risk to these tiny patients. Improved surgical techniques allow repairs to be performed in infancy.

With the echocardiogram, pulses of sound are transmitted into the body. The echoes returning from the surfaces of the heart appear on a computer monitor. Like ultrasound frequently used with pregnant women, the echocardiogram provides a continuous, changing computer image. It allows the doctor to see more fully the workings of the heart.

"We're performing surgery on infants within days of their birth instead of waiting until they are four or five years old," Roth said.

The advantage is a normal life much sooner, Roth said. Also, it results in less suffering and often fewer follow-up

surgeries.

"Your heart is about the size of your fist," Roth said. That makes the surgeon's work area on an infant heart smaller than a walnut.

The most common defect, a hole in the wall that separates the two pumps of the heart, requires no treatment in about a third of the cases, Roth said.

Blood squirting from one chamber to the other makes the heart work a little harder. This results in a murmur which can be heard through a stethoscope. It is often not serious enough to curtail normal activity or require surgery. Small holes do not get larger and they sometimes close with



Dr. Stephen Roth

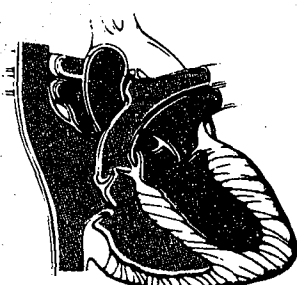
■ Please turn to page 2C: Heart



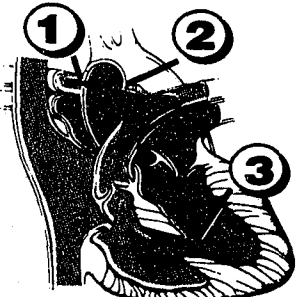
Gazette photo by J. Scott Park

Aaron Marrs, 16, enjoys playing the violin in the Washington High School orchestra. The patch in his heart doesn't keep him from an active life.

Healthy heart



Aaron's defects



1. Coarctation of aorta (Hole or thinning of aorta).
2. Patent Ductus Arteriosus (Open passageway between two major blood vessels).
3. Ventricular Septal Defect (Hole between two chambers of heart).

Patch on heart sets student apart

Aaron Marrs had 3 surgeries by age 13

By Elizabeth Kutter
 Look closely at Aaron Marrs. There's something different about the 16-year-old Washington High School sophomore.

His appearance, however, gives no hint of his uniqueness. He's dressed in gray sweats. His wire rim glasses match those of many of his classmates. His blond tousled hair is cut short. He's alert, bright, articulate.

His schedule, busy bordering on hectic, provides no clue either. Aaron plays the violin and works behind the scenes for Wash theatrical productions. He's active in Scouting, already having earned his Eagle Scout award.

What doesn't show no matter how closely you look is the patch on Aaron's heart.

Since his birth Dec. 7, 1976, Aaron has had three heart surgeries.

During his first surgery in May 1978, doctors tied off the passageway between the pulmonary artery and aorta. The

surgery corrected something that usually occurs naturally within the first few hours of birth. "That's a fairly simple procedure," said Aaron's mother, Margie.

In addition the surgeons enlarged the size of his constricted aorta by inserting

"I was kind of a fad (at school) for awhile. But it didn't last."

Aaron Marrs

a tiny tube.

In the second surgery, a year later, doctors patched a hole in the wall between the chambers of the heart.

During the third surgery, in 1990, when Aaron was 13, doctors repaired the aorta by repeating one of the procedures done in the first surgery. This time they replaced the baby-size tube in the aorta with an adult-size tube.

Untreated, Aaron's heart would have been forced to pump harder and harder

to send oxygen-rich red blood to the body. Because of the hole in the chamber oxygen-rich blood intended for the body would have mixed with the oxygen-poor blood being pumped back to his lungs for more oxygen. With that condition, blood pressure remains low even though the heart pumps harder and harder.

"I escaped those mostly OK," Aaron said, of the first two surgeries. "I don't really remember, but my mom said (after the second operation) I was riding my tricycle around the hospital. That was cool."

The most recent surgery, "I remember plenty about that one," Aaron said.

"The first day wasn't bad at all," Aaron said. "They drew some blood; I watched cartoons."

The next day began early. "It's a long surgery. They've got a lot to do, and they're working on a delicate part of the body."

Within a day or two, Aaron was up and around. "Once I could walk, I was fine. I played pool with my dad. There was a food pantry and we could have

■ Please turn to page 2C: Aaron

Dear Beakman,
 What is the deal with Christmas lights?
 Why do some strings just not work?
 Flo Mills
 Corpus Christi, Texas

Beakman or Jax,
 P.O. Box 30177
 Kansas City, MO 64112

Dear Flo,
 Sounds to me like you've had a bad experience with a whole string of tangled lights that refused to shine just because one measly bulb was burned out or was loose.

The deal with Christmas lights is the same with all electricity — it has to flow in a loop. And sometimes lights are wired in a way that makes breaking the loop easier — which makes turning on the lights more difficult.

Meanwhile, these bulbs are wired so that the loop is protected no matter what happens to an individual bulb. Bulbs like this cost a bit more. But the aggravation they save is worth it.

You Light up MY Life

This kind of light hardly ever messes up. But it's not the shape of the bulb that's important. Instead it's the way the bulbs are connected to each other that makes them easier to light up. Try loosening one or two bulbs from a string of these bulbs, and the rest of the tree will stay lit. That's because they are wired together in a way that protects the loop — the loop electrical energy must flow in.

This mini light is the kind that causes lots of problems. They are usually wired together more simply — which costs less. But it also creates lots more places to break the electrical loop.

tis the season.

...to get all upset at lights that don't light. Look at the red line. It represents the flow of electrical energy. If just 1 light bulb is loose the flow of energy is interrupted and the whole string goes out!

Beakman Place

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