Boone
by T Boone Pickens, Jr (Don Boink)
This is an interesting and exciting book written by a man who is to many people one of America’s folk heroes. In his career he has challenged some of the biggest companies in the oil industry. Here, for the first time, he tells the story of how he managed to take over Gulf Oil, Phillip Petroleum, and Unocal. These maneuvers changed the structure of American business permanently.

Boone represents the epitome of American entrepreneurship. He grew up working in the oil industry. He did not make a lot of money pumping oil but he was extremely knowledgeable about the oil business. He made his fortune recognizing the ineptitude of many large corporations leaders. From the early days when he had only $2500 he spent 30 years building a vast oil empire. This scenario reminds me of another famous entrepreneur, Sam Wyly, who wrote $2000 and an Idea.

Boone worked for Phillips three years as a geologist, getting promotions along the way. Also along the way he observed the petty graft and poor management practices of the company. He also found the work tedious and boring. Finally fed up with the way things were he quit cold. Once on his own he found he was really pressed to produce. He scouted oil leases in the Texas Panhandle and spent considerable time traveling the area looking for good prospects. It was 30 days of such frantic activity before he came upon a couple of Phillips Petroleum neglected leases that were about to expire. Going to an independent driller he made a deal. Making deals became his principal activity. It allowed him to retain an interest in the lease and at the same time collect $2500. He also got the job of overseeing the project for $75 a day. That first “deal” put him on the path to successive acquisitions and developments until he became the greatest oil man in America.

Being an entrepreneur involves the necessity of having certain personal qualities and abilities. A successful entrepreneur is, inventive and adventurous. It is important to be optimistic and attentive to details. The ability to handle failure with equanimity goes a long way. Here is where perseverance comes in. There must be a doggedness to be able to achieve, regardless of disappointment or adversity. Boone had all these qualities as well as a modicum of good luck.

His book, being a biography, is understandably self-congratulatory. He is proud of his achievements and rightly so. I enjoyed his good humor and sense of excitement that permeates the book. The last I heard, Boone, at 86 years old, was as chipper and full of energy as he was 30 years ago.
Sam and Dave Dig a Hole (Candlewick Press, 2014) Picture Book (for 2-5 year-olds)  
by Marc Barnett and Illustrated by Jon Klassen  
reviewed by Nori Morganstein, Youth Services Librarian/Assistant Director

The book begins with two friends digging a hole. They quickly decide to keep digging until they find something spectacular. They work really hard, and dig a very deep hole in the ground. Readers are granted a special view of what’s inside the dirt though, and we get to see that there are actually quite a few spectacular things in the ground, like giant jewels.

Right as the two friends approach finding such a spectacular thing though, is when they decide to start digging in a different direction, or they split up, or they decide to dig down again. The dog, that is along for the fun, knows when the jewels are nearby because his nose is always pointing in the right direction. And just when the two give up, and even fall asleep at the bottom of the hole, the dog decides to keep digging for a bone he knows is there, and then things get really interesting and everyone falls through the hole.

The best thing about this book is the humor. There are so many circumstances where kids will want to yell at the main characters to just dig one inch further. The dog makes everything even funnier, highlighting all the jewels the kids are only just missing. Kids will laugh throughout the entire book.

Also, Jon Klassen is a master illustrator. The pictures might not appeal to kids immediately because of all the earthy, neutral tones, but as the book goes on, kids will be lost in the underground colors. The pictures are very simple, but so is the concept of two boys digging a hole. The simple story and the simple images combine to make one hilarious tale. This book is great for working on the concept of perception. Also, it’s great for talking about never giving up –to keep looking for spectacular things. This is the perfect book for children who like the funnier kinds of stories, and adults will enjoy laughing a little too.

“Anything can become a children's book if you give it to a child...Children are actually the best (and worst) audience for literature because they have no patience with pretense.”  
— Orson Scott Card

“All good children's stories are the same: young creature breaks rules, has incredible adventure, then returns home with the knowledge that aforementioned rules are there for a reason. Of course, the actual message to the careful reader is: break rules as often as you can, because who the hell doesn't want to have an adventure?”
— Brian K. Vaughan, Saga, Volume 3

Often the adult book is not for you, not yet, or will only be for you when you're ready. But sometimes you will read it anyway, and you will take from it whatever you can. Then, perhaps, you will come back to it when you're older, and you will find the book has changed because you have changed as well, and the book is wiser, or more foolish, because you are wiser or more foolish than you were as a child.”
— Neil Gaiman

“~Reading a book is like looking through a window!”
— Zetta Hupf

“The wonders of a child can only be understood by the child.”
— Lailah Gifty Akita

You have brains in your head.  
You have feet in your shoes.  
You can steer yourself any direction you choose.”
— Dr. Seuss, Oh, The Places You’ll Go!
In a series of beautiful and moving poems, award-winning author Jacqueline Woodson tells the story of her life from birth through the point when she realized she wanted to be a writer, in about sixth grade. Woodson captures a child’s viewpoint and concerns, drawing readers into her personal struggles: family members’ health problems, the stress of moving, the fear that her best friend might find a new best friend. Readers also share in young Jacqueline’s joys: summers with her loving grandparents, being read to by her sister, discovering her own passion for telling stories. And given that Woodson was born in 1963 and spent her young life in Ohio, South Carolina, and New York, we also get a child’s perspective on the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 70s.

Refreshingly, this memoir in verse deals with tough times without becoming a tragedy. Like many children, Woodson loses a grandparent while young, and grieves. She loses other members of her extended family, too, and offers a touching look at not just her own reactions but the emotions of the rest of the family. Young Jacqueline is close to her siblings and her grandparents; she pays attention to what the people around her do and how they feel.

While the poems are strong and evocative, the voice is still believably a child’s. We see the little ups and downs of Jacqueline’s life: happiness at helping her grandfather in the garden, frustration at having to come in and go to bed while her friends are still out playing, pride when she wows her class by telling them a fairy tale from memory. At the same time, we get glimpses of the larger world, things young Jacqueline doesn’t yet understand. She knows people who march for civil rights, even though they could lose their jobs for it. Her own mother sits at the back of the bus, even though she’s no longer forced to, to avoid trouble.

Even early on, there is a sense that these glimpses are part of something big, something important, but it isn’t until she gets older that Jacqueline and her siblings begin to realize that the civil rights movement has meaning for them. This book isn't about civil rights, any more than I imagine the author would say that her young life was about civil rights. It is, however, the story of a clever, creative, positive, relatable girl whose life is touched by civil rights struggles. This makes the importance of that movement feel powerfully close.

The book begins with Woodson’s family tree. At the end, notes from the author discuss the research and writing of the book. Following this is a section of black-and-white photographs, matching faces to the names of Jacqueline’s family members.

The ending point of the book is well-chosen. Learning to read was never easy for Jacqueline, like it was for her brilliant older sister. Words swim in front of her. But because stories mean so much to her, she works to pin the words down and make them her own. Finally she realizes that she wants to be a writer. She needs to be a writer. Her hunger for writing stories comes through loud and clear. In reading this book – one of Woodson’s many acclaimed works, and the winner of the 2014 National Book Award – readers will thrill for young Jacqueline at the end of Brown Girl Dreaming. She’s going to get her wish in a big way.
Reverend Jim McCutcheon

On Jan 21st Rev. Jim McCutcheon passed away. Through the years his inspirational reviews have run prominently in the BLL Book Reviews. In December 2011 a special issue of the Reviews featured his memoir of his naval experiences in the Korean War, an issue that was of exceptional interest. We have included a Jim McCutcheon review written for the February 2011 issue of a fascinating story of one man’s eventful life, Unbroken, that is still at the top of the New York Times Best Seller List, four years later having been 187 weeks on the list. Jim McCutcheon was an inspiration to those who new him and will be sorely missed at BLL and throughout Brewster.

…….. Jim Mills

Unbroken, A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption
by Laura Hillenbrand
reviewed by James N. McCutcheon

“Eight years ago, an old man told me a story that took my breath away. His name was Louis Zamperini, and from the day I first spoke to him, his almost incomprehensibly dramatic story was my obsession.” So Laura Hillenbrand opens her just published #1 on the Best Seller List biography of one of the greatest runners this country has ever produced.

It wasn’t as though she hadn’t heard of Louis Zamperini. Many other especially older Americans have, of which I am one. But no one, to my knowledge, has ever tried to tell Zamperini’s story the way Laura Hillenbrand so powerfully does in Unbroken. The result of eight years of intensive research, thousands of interviews 75 of which were with Louis himself, Unbroken consists of a succession of separate short stories, roughly divided into three sections, involving different times and people that figured prominently in Louis Zamperini’s life, that Laura Hillenbrand has stitched together around the theme announced in the book’s subtitle, “A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption”.

Louis Silvie Zamperini, the son of two teen aged Italian immigrants, was born in Olean New York on January 26, 1917. Only Italian was ever spoken in the Zamperini home. Two years later the family now increased by several more children moved to California and Anthony, his father, who had secured a job as a railroad electrician, bought a half acre field on the edge of Torrance California, a town of 1,800. There Anthony and Louise, his wife, slapped together a one room wooden shack with no running water and an outhouse. A year later the family moved to a significantly better home on Gramercy Avenue in Torrance itself, and that’s where Louis grew up.

From his earliest childhood years through his teens Louis was a prankster and the family wit, while his older brother Pete, whom Louis idolized, was a star on the Torrance High School Football, Baseball, and Track teams. During those same years and until Pete helped him to discover his amazing talent as a power runner on the Torrance High School Track Team, Louis was heading into serious junior delinquency. Then in 1934, after a half dozen years of serious training, running in arguably the greatest group of high school runners ever assembled, Louis shattered the national high school record for the mile, coasting to victory in a time of 4:21.3, a record which lasted for the next 19 years.

That was the turning point. From being the town’s bad boy to being its hero, Louis Zamperini went on to star on the University of Southern California’s Track Team; then on the United States Olympic Team of 1936, running before Adolf Hitler in Berlin. He was actually training for the 1940 Olympic Games when they were cancelled because of the outbreak of World War II. Shortly after that Louis signed up in the Army, was assigned to the Air Force and became a bombardier.

So ends the first section of Unbroken. The second and longest section has to do entirely with Louis’ experiences as a 2nd lieutenant in the U.S. Air Force, both while still aloft and then as a Japanese prisoner of war in the last two and one half years of the South Pacific War. (continued)
Louis’ experiences aloft began and ended in a B-24. That plane, known throughout the Army Air Force as the “Flying Coffin”, was one of the most awful airplanes any of our armed services ever put into wartime service. It was a bear to fly, frequently broke down, hard to service, and terribly vulnerable to the vaunted Japanese Zero. All of this is meticulously described by Laura Hellenbrand, down to supplying the reader with an excellent line drawing of the plane itself. The B-24’s two virtues apparently were that the Air Force had a lot of them and the B-24 could carry a large bomb load.

The graphic descriptions of the dogfights, between B-24s and Japanese Zeros in Unbroken are almost too painful to read. On her last flight, Louis’ B-24, “Superman”, came home with almost 600 20mm Japanese cannon and shrapnel holes in her fuselage, large parts of her control surfaces shot away, half her crew of 10 seriously wounded, and a half dozen Japanese Zeros shot down. “Superman” crash-landed on its home runway and was promptly sent to the junkyard.

Sometime later, Louis’ air service ended altogether in another B-24 named “The Green Monster”, which had been kept in service even though she now had a damaged airframe. “The Green Monster” went down of engine failure complicated by human error, when the wrong engine was feathered by an inexperienced copilot. The plane crashed in the open ocean, taking all but 3 members of her crew among whom was Louis, and a badly damaged life raft, to the bottom of the Pacific Ocean. Louis and his best friend, “Phil”, thereafter set a survival record of 47 days adrift while living off what the sea provided. The third man, the plane’s navigator and a late recruit, didn’t make it and was buried at sea after he lost the will to live. On the 47th day after drifting 2,000 miles through shark-infested water, the two survivors were picked up by the Japanese in sight of Kwajalein in the Marshall Islands. That was the beginning, for Louis, of another two years as a prisoner of war in a succession of the very worst Japanese prison camps, under the special care of a pathological sadist named Mutsuhiro Watanabe, whom the prisoners had nicknamed “the Bird”.

Officers among the prisoners, in these camps, did not have to do manual labor but they also received only half of the daily ration, and were much more aggressively abused and tortured than their enlisted companions. Quite early the Japanese had discovered who Louis Zamperini really was and they subjected him to particularly harsh treatment, hoping to break him so that thereafter they could use him to make anti-American propaganda speeches on their English language broadcasts. Although he was beaten every day and regularly subjected to additional torture, the Japanese never broke Zamperini. Louis’ agony only ended a few days after B-29s dropped the first two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, when on August 20, 1945, in the Japanese POW camp at Naoetsu Japan, the commandant assembled the 700 surviving POWs and announced that the war had ended.

The third and final section of Unbroken has to do with Louis’ life after he like millions of other service men returned home, quite different sons and husbands than those that had left. Louis married a beautiful young woman, Cynthia Applewhite, with whom he sired two children, and who walked with him through the worst of his Post Traumatic Syndrome Disorder (PTSD), the uncontrollable alcoholism to which it led, and then, with Billy Graham’s help at a 1949 tent meeting in Los Angeles what appears to have been a real conversion. Louis Zamperini lost his beloved wife Cynthia some few years ago, but today, in his 93rd year, he still pursues his chosen profession as a motivational speaker, an evangelical Christian, and a national hero. Louis Zamperini, thanks to Laura Hillenbrand, continues today to remind all of us Americans of the sacrifices so many of our forebears made, who fought, suffered, and died in the armed forces of the United States, through some of the worst days of World War II, that we might enjoy the lives we lead and the freedoms we enjoy in this blessed land today.
On His Own Terms: A Life of Nelson Rockefeller (2014)  
by Richard Norton Smith  
reviewed by Jim Mills

This is a fairly short review of a very long book (721 pages). Nelson Aldrich Rockefeller was born in 1908, the second of the five Rockefeller brothers. Nelson quickly demonstrated that he was the most dynamic and gregarious of the group. With a grandfather and father both named John D. Rockefeller, Senior and Junior respectively, the brothers grew up in an environment of great wealth and opportunity and of whom much was expected.

Nelson spent the first decade following his 1930 Dartmouth graduation in New York City handling the family properties and investments. He shared with his mother a passion for modern art and was a rabid collector all of his life and was a founder of the city’s Museum of Modern Art. During the late thirties and early forties, even though he was a Republican, he was a part of the Roosevelt Administration rising to the position of Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America. With an estate in Venezuela, he visited the continent frequently and was a lifetime spokesman for Latin America rights. In the 1950s he was an Undersecretary of HEW in the Eisenhower Administration. In 1958 he was elected Governor of New York, a position he held for four terms. Rockefeller was a liberal Republican, a species that does not exist any more. His impact on New York was seismic, expanding many government services including a major expansion of University availability. With his liberal bent, Rockefeller found himself at home participating in both Democratic and Republican administrations. Due to his vast wealth he was able to supplement the incomes, when necessary, of those who worked for him and his ability to outspend his political opponents was of great value to him at election time. In 1974 when Vice President Gerald Ford became president he nominated Rockefeller to be his Vice President. His service there was quite clearly rocky. Much of his time was spent countering the influence of Ford’s Chief of Staff, Donald Rumsfeld. With the conservative shift within the Republican Party in the 1970s, Ford decided not continue Rockefeller’s role during his unsuccessful re-election bid in 1976. Returning to New York, Rockefeller’s health declined and he died of a heart attack in January 1979.

Rockefeller was a politician with soaring ambitions. In 1960, ’64 and ’68 he made bids for the Republican Presidential Nomination. In each case his liberal orientation, which served him so well in his home state, was an increasing disadvantage on the national stage. He never gave up hope that he would achieve his ultimate goal throughout his life. Born to a life of luxury and opulence, Rockefeller thrust himself onto the world stage, attempting to make a difference in the lives of millions. In many ways his passions seem reminiscent of another wealthy family, the Kennedys. Richard North Smith has created a fascinating portrait of a charming and attractive individual. There is a certain tendency for biographers to identify with their subjects, but this author seems to have taken a fairly balanced approach weighing Rockefeller’s strengths and weaknesses. Having lived in the New York metropolitan area in the 1960s through the 1980s, this reviewer ran across many familiar names from the era. At 721 pages, On His Own Terms, goes into great depth regarding various aspects of Rockefeller’s life. At some points the author generates what seems to be mind-boggling detail. If the reader is interested in exploring the life of this mid-century leader and celebrity, a skill at skimming parts of the text to extract the interesting nuggets may be of use.

Nelson Rockefeller
(In this issue two of our reviewers have reviewed the same book, *The Innovators*, both reviews have been included)

The Innovators
by Walter Isaacson
reviewed by Don Boink

The history of the development of the present day computer, Internet, and World Wide Web, is a fascinating story and is also very educational. According to the author it had its beginning back in the 1840s. Princess Ada of Lovelace, Lord Byron’s daughter, pioneered computer programming. Through the many years since many imaginative, inventive, intuitive and resourceful individuals, both men and women, contributed to that development.

The Innovators is Walter Isaacson’s revealing story of the many people who were the creators of our high tech world. The author reiterates the point several times that no one person had the blinding revelation of how to build a computer. There was a long tedious trail of events and inspired people working together that brought about the current state of affairs. That progression moves on and is ever evolving.

Ada Lovelace, as she is commonly known, foresaw the possibilities that the concept of computerization held for the future. She would not agree with the present efforts to create “artificial intelligence”. She maintained that a machine would never approach that degree of sophistication. Nonetheless computers keep getting more capable.

IBM’s “Watson” computer beat humans at Jeopardy. Also a computer beat the world’s chess champion and its speed of response was far greater than that of a human being. Nonetheless, to my way of thinking, that type of activity falls into the quantitative realm but does not come near those matters in the qualitative realm such as love, loyalty, consideration, etc.

The author spent 10 years researching, interviewing and sorting out details of several significant players in the story of computer development. Especially interesting to me was learning that Bill Gates was an uncontrollable brat growing up. Although brilliant he was a very obnoxious person and hard to deal with. Being extremely competitive he demanded to be the top dog in whatever activity he was involved. Another personality described was Steve Jobs. He also was brilliant but in a different way. He was not a scientist but he was an extraordinary entrepreneur. His coworker Steve Wozniak was the brains of the technical part of computers and was happy to share his creations with other tinkerers. Jobs felt that it was wrong to give away such valuable information and instead capitalized on it. Jobs had a keen eye for style and what appeal to people’s senses. Where IBM and Microsoft built clunky devices Job insisted on sleek shapes and colors.

The number of people mentioned and the contributions they made is eye-opening and too voluminous to include here. Anyone interested in the technical details will enjoy the book and even those simply seeking to fill in the historic gap in their knowledge of how computers came to be will be amply rewarded.

Ada Lovelace  
Bill Gates  
Steve Jobs

Read a fascinating or intriguing book lately?
Write a review (300 – 900 words) and share your experience with the BLL community.
E-Mail to Jim Mills jlmills43@comcast.net and have your review printed in an upcoming BLL Book Review.
If you have any comments on our reviews or if there are any particular books that you would like to see reviewed Please contact us at: jlmills43@comcast.net

The BLL Book Reviews
Also appear on the Brewster Ladies Library Web Site
http://www.brewsterladieslibrary.org/
In The Innovators, Walter Isaacson tells the fascinating story of the rapid development of the
digital computer and, in recent years, the parallel growth of its close ally the Internet. The saga of the
computer goes back to the early 19th century. Lord Byron’s daughter, Ada, originated some of the early
concepts used in software along with Charles Babbage’s attempts to build mechanical computers. In the
20th century the Second World War provided the impetus to develop the electronic computer. These
beheomoths were limited in capability, prone to failure, and massive in both size and power needs in
order to operate the profusion of vacuum tubes required. The invention of the transistor in 1947,
followed by the integrated circuit less than two decades later, initiated the electronics revolution that
continues to this day. The sweep of digital technology during the last half-century has been literally
breathtaking. The advent of the Internet and the widespread ownership of computers has essentially
transformed our lives at so many levels. During the last decade on-line commerce has revolutionized
how we purchase goods, Email has replaced the personal letter and to some extent the telephone. Clubs
and other organizations can easily notify their membership of basic information and of any changes in a
timely manner. This shift in economic power has been reflected in massive changes in Wall Street
evaluations, typified by the rapid rise of new enterprising firms such as Apple, Microsoft and Google.

Isaacson, working his way chronologically through this innovative history, provides the background
and developmental factors that drove each individual to make their landmark contributions. The usual
characteristic of these individual was a passionate drive to pursue a dream of future possibilities. Since
these views were not usually shared by the innovator’s mentors or supervisors, an entrepreneurial drive
was also usually necessary to break away from the parent company or university and generate a new
start-up firm. This is where at least two individuals, the technical guy and the entrepreneur, team up to
initiate the revolution. Recent examples are Paul Allen and Bill Gates at Microsoft, Sergey Brin and
Larry Page at Google and Steve Wozniac and Steve Jobs at Apple. These upstart innovators had a vision
that was not grasped by the then leaders in the field such as Xerox and IBM. The San Francisco Bay area
provided a fertile field for that explosion of innovation that came to be known as Silicon Valley. Much of
this inventiveness was sparked by a residual individuality remaining from the hippie period and the
technical knowhow resident in local universities such as Stanford and the University of California at
Berkeley. These factors were a rare combination, that at the time, could only have been found in the US
with its technical leadership and aura of individuality.

The Innovators runs for 488 pages and provides a fascinating perspective on this monumental
revolution through which we have all lived. Issacson does use a little technical terminology but it is not
pervasive and involves terms with which most of us are familiar. Most, but not all, of the innovations
described were generated in the US and have helped to maintain the technological and industrial edge
that this country has enjoyed for almost a century. In a way this story could be called the triumph of the
Geeks, a demeaning term that I have always disliked. It shows that it takes a extensive variety of
individuals from varying backgrounds and cultures and with widely divergent interests to create a
dynamic nation such as ours. What lies in the future no one can tell but if the past is any indicator, it will
be very interesting.
The Bit and the Pendulum: From Quantum Computing to M-Theory, the Physics of Information
by Tom Siegfried
reviewed by Don Boink

From the blurb: “today the realization that information is physical is at the heart of a new fashion in science. It is a fashion that may help forge a new understanding of the complexity of the universe, the secrets of time, space, life and the brain and our role in reality”. The author, Tom Siegfried, a science editor for the Dallas Morning News, wrote this book over a long span of years and it was published 15 years ago.

He begins by attempting a brief explanation of the theory of quantum mechanics which scientists have struggled to justify with Einstein’s general theory of relativity without great success. My favorite quantum physicist, Richard Feynman, has said: “don’t worry if you don’t understand quantum mechanics, my graduate students don’t either”. The information viewpoint provides a different way of understanding and offers new insights into old things. It also suggests avenues of investigation that lead to new discoveries.

One of the discussions described the “Anthropic Principle”. The “strong anthropic principle” is that the universe must have those properties which allows life to develop within it at some stage in its history. In quantum mechanical theory a significant element is that quantum physics seems to describe different possible realities. That is the “multi-universe theory”. Simultaneous, parallel universes. Try to get your mind around that idea! Frequently the comment is made that quantum theory and its implications are weird. That seems to be borne out by the successive discussions of how information-based concepts enter into many aspects of modern life.

Quantum computing is expected to be much more powerful than what is termed “classical” computing. Faster, and able to handle “complexity”, is another lengthy discussion. I’m impressed with the extent and persistence with which the author pursues his interest in the subject. He is forever at conferences, meetings of scientists, and seeking interviews with the great thinkers.

The book is provocative if nothing else. At the conclusion the author covers the subject in such a way that leads to the ultimate question of “what is reality”? Mathematical science and quantum physics keeps leading back to nothingness. Nothingness in the sense of the nonexistence of matter. One “non-scientific” source states “in the beginning was the Word”.

I looked up “the scientific statement of being” in Google. It is stated “There is no life, truth, intelligence, nor substance in matter. All is infinite Mind and its infinite manifestations, for God is all in all. Spirit is immortal Truth, matter is mortal error. Spirit is the real and eternal, matter is the unreal and temporal. Spirit is God and man is his image and likeness. Therefore man is not material, he is spiritual”.

This is a quote from “Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures” by Mary Baker Eddy. Tom Siegfried probably would not ascribe to that interpretation but to me it seems a fitting conclusion.

The title the Bit and the Pendulum is a play on the title of an Edgar Allen Poe story The Pit and the Pendulum in which a man is imprisoned in a totally dark, deep pit, and frantically feels about in an effort to determine where he is. The term “bit” is a contraction of the term “binary digit”. This relates to the computer language in which a bit has a value of either 0 or 1.

Again, looking up the current status of quantum computing, I found that a lot of effort has been devoted to solving the great number of questions pertaining to this endeavor. It can safely be said that not much progress has been made. The unit involved is no longer the “bit” but the “qubit”, combining quantum and bit. The reason for this lack of progress is that a qubit can last only a portion of a second before it is destroyed. It is a very fragile, difficult to achieve, condition.

Nonetheless, though rudimentary quantum computers do exist they are nowhere near being the size to fit under your desk. Large corporations with lots of money are investing in this type of research and Microsoft and Bell Labs are among the leading contenders. The hope is that eventually the problems will be solved to the point where a quantum computer will be able to handle problems that are totally unsolvable now. For anyone interested in this esoteric subject I strongly recommend the book because the author has done a remarkable job of putting a great deal of disparate information together.
In Without You, There Is No Us, Suki Kim, a Korean-American woman, tells of her experiences teaching English at a university just outside of Pyongyang, North Korea for several terms in 2011. The book’s title refers to a song praising the North Korean former dictator, Kim Jong-il. As fate would have it Ms. Kim’s time in North Korea ended when the announcement of the dictator’s death was in December 2011 and the succession of his son, Kim Jong-un, the third member of the Kim dynasty. Her experience in North Korea combined the fear of a misstep in a society where every move is closely watched with an empathy for her students who seem to be completely unaware of the realities of the external world.

North Korea is certainly the most isolated nation on Earth. Suki Kim’s experience as a teacher possibly provided more insight into the life and attitudes of the young generation in North Korea than that of any other Western observer. Kim’s role as a teacher was very narrowly proscribed by the requirements that she not provide any information that could be considered derogatory of North Korean life or indicative of any superiority in Western society. Her young students had ingrained views of the superiority of North Korean life and culture based on lifelong exposure to government disinformation and a lack of any differing views filtering from the outer world. The author comments on the paucity of information available with only a couple of government TV channels available and North Korea’s Intranet, a information deprived version of the external world’s Internet. Most of the “news” to which North Koreans are exposed are a continual glorification, essentially a deification, of the Kim dynasty from the founder Kim Il-sung through his son Kim Jong-il to the current dynastic leader, Kim Jong-un. These leaders are portrayed as being all knowing and the source of all that is good in the nation.

The school where the author taught is known as the Pyongyang University of Science and Technology (PUST). From what the author observed, the students only had the most rudimentary concept of current technology. They were essentially prisoners at the school having no external contacts including with their families. In many ways their lives were as regimented as if they were part of the military. The author points out that these students were the crème de la crème of North Korean society, coming from the privileged class of government and technical leaders. A cadre of “minders” and “counterparts” were ever present watching over both the students and faculty alike insuring that no ideas potentially harmful to the regime were transferred to the students. The author was aware that every conversation she made could be intercepted including the privilege that the faculty only had, access to the real Internet. No single student could meet with a teacher alone. They had to come in pairs. On rare field trips Kim was allowed to leave the campus with the students and minders. On these occasions she had an opportunity to see part of the general population. The author was struck by the small stature and famished appearance of these individuals as she viewed them by the side of the road or working in fields or at construction sites. Even the University, presumably a privileged institution, was plagued by daily power outages and lack of heating during the winter.

After less than a year exposed to the corrosive influence of a continually pervasive police state, the author was ready to return home to New York. The frequent concern that something she may have said or done would terminate her services at the school or have potentially worse consequences was debilitating. Upon leaving she had the feeling of abandoning her students to a lifetime of living in such a harsh culture. Even though this environment was all they had ever known, she could see that they were continually careful of making any errors that could bring on consequences much worse than being deported. This reviewer found Ms. Kim’s memoir of her North Korean experiences both enlightening and disturbing. Disturbing in that North Korea is an anachronistic society that exercises such brutal control over its citizens. The hope is that the walls that enclose these people will eventually collapse as did those in Eastern Europe in 1989.

Suki Kim