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## Border Birth-Center Industry Draws Steady Stream of Clients

*The Atlantic* | El Paso—The woman started having contractions after dinner in the apartment she shares with her husband and two children in Ciudad Juarez. An hour later, she was across the border, settling into a homey room at Maternidad La Luz, a midwife-run birthing center in El Paso that promises women of all nationalities the opportunity to have a natural birth—and a baby who is a U.S. citizen.

And that's what the woman, Miriam, who asked not to use her last name, did, just 40 minutes after she'd arrived, when she gave birth to a baby boy named Alexis.

The birth was the culmination of months of crossing the border to come to her prenatal appointments every few weeks at Maternidad La Luz. It had not been easy: The visa that allowed her to cross back and forth between Mexico and the U.S. is **Midwives, continued on page 2**

## Spacewalk Puts Illness, and Earth's Future, in Perspective

*The New York Times* | **Piers J. Sellers** is the deputy director of Sciences and Exploration at the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center and acting director of its Earth Sciences Division. As an astronaut, he visited the International Space Station three times and walked in space six times:

I'm a climate scientist who has just been told I have Stage 4 pancreatic cancer.

This diagnosis puts me in an interesting position. I've spent much of my professional life thinking about the science of climate change, which is best viewed through a multidecadal lens. At some level I was sure that, even at my present age of 60, I would live to see the most critical part of the problem, and its possible solutions, play out in my lifetime. Now that my personal horizon has been steeply foreshortened, I was forced to decide how to spend my remaining time. Was continuing to think about climate change **Climate, continued on page 3**

## Video | A Son's Survival

For one Korean-American family in L.A., the combination of illness, health care concerns and cultural obligations takes a grinding toll.



## Many Older Americans Are Hanging On by Thin Gray Line

*Los Angeles Times* | At the wise age of 79, **Dolores Westfall** knows food shopping on an empty stomach is a fool's errand. On her way to the grocery store last May, she pulled into the Town & Country Family Restaurant to take the edge off her appetite. After much consideration, she ordered the prime rib special and an iced tea — expensive at \$21.36, but the leftovers, **Gray line, continued on page 3**

## In Miami's Gay Community, a Clash Between Generations

*Miami Herald* | **John Byrne** was born in 1981, a few months before the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention revealed a new report about "five young, previously healthy, gay men in Los Angeles" suffering from strange infections that had already killed two of them.

That was on June 5th. Throughout that summer, doctors across the United States **PrEP, continued on page 3**

## Streisand on the Leading 'Ladykiller': Heart Disease



*InStyle* | After her mother, Diana, underwent bypass surgery at age 81, legendary singer and actress Barbra Streisand wasn't just shocked by the reality of a family member falling ill. "I later learned about the scope of the epidemic and was startled to discover that heart disease kills more women than men," she explains. "It's more deadly for us than all forms of cancers combined." In 2014 these disturbing statistics prompted her, in partnership with philanthropist Ronald O. Perelman, to found the Women's Heart Alliance, which supports research funding and treatment for female

**Heart disease, continued on page 2**



Maternidad La Luz birthing center in El Paso.

## Midwives, continued

expensive, and she had had to prove she had money in the bank and a reason to return to Mexico to be granted it. The lines at the border between Juarez and El Paso can take hours, and border agents are said to sometimes tear up the visas of women who are noticeably pregnant. Some women end up giving birth on the bridge between Juarez and El Paso because of delays, said Trish Gurley, the clinical director of Maternidad La Luz. But Miriam stuck with it because the opportunities her child would have if he was born just a few miles from his home were so much greater, she told me.

“It’s better here than in Mexico,” she said. “You can get grants to go to college, for example—in Mexico, if you can’t pay, you can’t go to college.”

For more than a century, people have crossed back and forth between Ciudad Juarez and El Paso, two cities side by side in the desert but separated by a border. Mexican residents cross into El Paso to work, to go to school, and to see family. They also come across to give birth, benefiting from the Fourteenth Amendment, which guarantees citizenship to all people born or naturalized in the United States, a fact that gains prominence in the American consciousness every now and then, as it did during the presidential race this

past summer, when candidates including Donald Trump and Jeb Bush decried “anchor babies.”

It wasn’t always this way. In the early days of El Paso’s history, Mexican women living and working in Texas would return home to give birth, according to Heather Sinclair, a former midwife and a doctoral candidate at the University of Texas-El Paso who is studying the 20th-century history of childbirth, citizenship, and race in the border region. But as the value of U.S. citizenship grew, and the population of the border region continued to expand, Mexican women began going out of their way to give birth in Texas. Turned away by hospitals, many sought out midwifery practices, first ones run by Mexican Americans and then, when restrictions drove those women out of business, practices such as Maternidad La Luz founded and run by white middle-class women.

But one thing has always been true: Along the border, for many women the question of where to have their babies has been determined by giant, supra-national forces: the relative wealth and poverty of two countries, the relationships between them, and the immigration policies that dictate the terms of those relationships.

Read the **story**, and get more **information** on women’s reproductive health. ■

## Heart disease, continued

cardiovascular disease. “Heart disease affects women’s hearts differently than it does men’s, yet most of the research is based on men,” she says. “Because of this, women aren’t getting the same chance at life, and it’s unacceptable.”

**Women are twice as likely as men to die after suffering a heart attack. How can we improve that ratio?**

It’s all about creating a viral movement, like the Breast Cancer Awareness pioneers did decades ago. This starts with the

**“Heart disease affects [women] differently than men, yet most research is based on men.”**

younger generation—they are adept at sharing information with their communities through social media.

**For the past 50 years, most cardiovascular research has been based on male subjects. Is there a misconception you’re hoping to correct because of this?**

A lot of people don’t realize women’s symptoms are frequently different from and more subtle than men’s, which leads to the disease being misdiagnosed. Our first signs of a heart attack may include nausea, backaches, extreme fatigue, or shortness of breath rather than the Hollywood version of crushing chest pain, which is more common in men.

Read the full **Q&A**, learn **more** about what can be done, and get **information** on women and heart disease. ■



## Who We Are

Hollywood, Health & Society, a program of the USC Annenberg Norman Lear Center, is a free resource for writers working on storylines about health, health-care coverage and climate change. Our funders, past and present, include the CDC, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, The Aileen Getty Foundation, The California Endowment and the SCAN Foundation.

## Climate, continued

worth the bother?

After handling the immediate business associated with the medical news — informing family, friends, work; tidying up some finances; putting out stacks of unread New York Times Book Reviews to recycle; and throwing a large “Limited Edition” holiday party, complete with butlers, I had some time to sit at my kitchen table and draw up the bucket list.

Very quickly, I found out that I had no desire to jostle with wealthy tourists on Mount Everest, or fight for some yardage on a beautiful and exclusive beach, or all those other things one toys with on a boring January afternoon. Instead, I concluded that all I really wanted to do was spend more time with the people I know and love, and get back to my office as quickly as possible.

I work for NASA, managing a large group of expert scientists doing research on the whole Earth system (I should mention that the views in this article are my own, not NASA’s). This involves studies of climate and weather using space-based



Astronaut Piers Sellers walks in space in 2006.

observations and powerful computer models. These models describe how the planet works, and what can happen as we pump carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. The work is complex, exacting, highly relevant and fascinating.

Read the rest of Piers’ **story**. ■

## PrEP, continued

reported similar cases of “GRID” (gay-related immune deficiency) and *The New York Times* went on to report on a deadly cancer affecting 41 gay men in New York and California in early July. The next year, the CDC named the new plague AIDS, and gay men in San Francisco and New York City began the first community-based efforts to eradicate its cause, human immunodeficiency virus or HIV.

Condoms were the only reliable defense against contracting HIV then, and AIDS activists fervently encouraged young gay men not to bareback.

More than three decades since those first reports, plenty has improved across the country when it comes to HIV and AIDS. Still, Miami-Dade and Broward counties currently claim the highest rates of new HIV infections in the United States.

Byrne, publisher of RawStory.com, and others throughout South Florida have begun their own community-based campaigns to address this alarming local trend. And they are dropping the latex in

favor of a little blue pill deemed equally effective in preventing the spread of HIV.

The pill, Truvada by Gilead Sciences, has been used for about a decade for HIV treatment. As it turns out, it’s been found to be nearly 100 percent effective in preventing people who are HIV negative from contracting the virus.

“Swallow This” is the slogan for a campaign Byrne recently launched. He is advocating something revolutionary: the widespread use of PrEP or pre-exposure prophylaxis. Byrne’s “I Am PrEP” party held at Hotel Gaythering in mid-November attracted about 100 young and middle age men. He and many others cheer they can at last enjoy having a healthy, active sex life without having to worry about condoms.

“I never really liked condoms. It didn’t feel sexy. It didn’t feel like sex,” says Byrne, who came out at 15 and became sexually active in high school at the height of the AIDS crisis.

Read the **story**, and get more **information** about PrEP. ■

## Gray line, continued

wrapped carefully to go, would provide two more lunches.

The problem, she later realized, was that a big insurance bill was coming due. How was she going to pay it? Was she going to tip into insolvency over a plate of prime rib?

“I thought I could handle eating and shopping,” she said, “but lunch put me over the top.”

Westfall—5 feet 1 tall, with a graceful dancer’s body she honed as a tap-dancing teenager—is as stubborn as she is high-spirited. But she finds herself these days in a precarious place: Her savings long gone, and having never done much long-term financial planning, Westfall left her home in California to live in an aging RV she calls Big Foot, driving from one temporary job to the next.

She endures what is for many aging Americans an unforgiving economy. Nearly one-third of U.S. heads of households ages 55 and older have no pension or retirement savings and a median annual income of about \$19,000.

A growing proportion of the nation’s elderly are like Westfall: too poor to retire and too young to die.

Many rely on Social Security and minimal pensions, in part because half of all workers have no employer-backed retirement plans. Eight in 10 Americans say they will work well into their 60s or skip retirement entirely.

Westfall hadn’t planned to keep working. But in 2008, as the U.S. economy spasmed, she lost her home and tumbled out of the middle class.

Today, Westfall is one of America’s graying nomads.

Read the **story**, and find out **more** about the economic insecurity of older adults and its **effects** on their well-being. ■

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