

SEPTEMBER SONG, 2013

*Myself when young did eagerly frequent
Doctors and saints, and heard great argument
But evermore came out by that same door
Wherein I went. – Omar Khayyam.*

*Und morgen auch in gleiche Weise
Beginnt genau derselbe Scheisse. – German
proverb*

Before Congress outlawed the practice, academics were forced to retire at age 65. That's how UC Davis acquired Theodosius Dobzhansky; his previous institution sent him packing despite his being the greatest living evolutionary geneticist. Now old coots like me – I'll be 68 in January 2014 – can stay around until infirmity or senility finally kicks in. You don't have to be great—just a fairly hale and hearty mediocrity.

I have no desire to retire. I enjoy almost everything I do. If I couldn't do it any more I don't know what I'd do with myself. My health seems fine, and I can still maintain a 220 day/year field schedule—and I do. By a quirk of the system, if I retired now I would get a pay raise, because I

would no longer be contributing toward my retirement! (But who cares?)

But I'm also cognizant of family medical history and my probable genetic legacy. For that reason I decided two years ago to accept no more doctoral students, lest I not be around to see their work to completion. My one remaining student, Heather Dwyer, will be my last. (I'm glad to serve on thesis committees of other people's students, though.)

If turning out at least one Ph.D. smarter and more creative than oneself is a valid justification for one's career, I have exceeded that criterion several times over. In 42 years at UC Davis I have mentored 17 Ph.D. and 15 Master's students to the degree. Among them I count a number better than me. And that's very satisfying. But, oh yes... It's that time of the year when I get seductive communications from exceedingly good prospective students, and it's very painful to have to say "no" to them. But let me fall back on the tradition of the great mathematician Paul Erdos and the "Erdos number."

If you actually worked with Erdos your Erdos number is 1. If you worked with someone who worked with Erdos, it's 2...and so on.

Well, the option of newly generating a "Shapiro number" of 1 is now closed. But if you like what

my students and I have been doing, consider applying to work with any of three recent Shapiro Ph.d.s: Matt Forister at University of Nevada, Reno; Chris Nice at Texas State University, San Marcos; or Jim Fordyce at University of Tennessee, Knoxville. (Google 'em!) We all continue to collaborate on a variety of research problems, though each has his own research program besides. We all share both research interests AND a broadly synthetic approach to science. Such is the route to a Shapiro number of 2.

As for other functions, such as identifying photos, answering queries, or generating edgy German proverbs, I remain at your service.

Davis, California, September 1, 2013