

"All the News
That's Fit to Print"

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Southern California: Low clouds and fog near the coast. Elsewhere, plenty of sunshine. High near 70 at the coast to near 100 in the southern deserts. Details are in SportsSunday, Page 16.

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24 Picked as Winners of \$500,000 'Genius Awards'

By FELICIA R. LEE

Nawal M. Nour practices the kind of medicine that leads to intense discussions about culture and politics, rather than pesky questions about aches and pains. In 1999 she founded and became the director of the African Women's Health Practice at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. Most of the women are treated for conditions related to female circumcision.

While the clinic is unique in the United States, Dr. Nour's rewards have come from acclaim in her field and patient gratitude, rather than fame or fortune. So she was more than pleasantly surprised last week by a telephone call saying that she was being honored not only with worldwide attention but also with hundreds of thousands of dollars.

"I'm so excited," said Dr. Nour, 37, a graduate of the Harvard Medical School who grew up in Sudan and came to the United States in 1980. "I had what we call palpitations."

Dr. Nour is one of 12 men and 12 women chosen for a \$500,000 "genius award," announced today by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. All the winners will receive an annual check of \$100,000 for the next five years, to be used however they want. Since 1981 the awards have been given annually for creative accomplishment in various fields. Most of the winners — called fellows — were contacted by telephone last week by Daniel J. Socolow, the director of the fellows program.

Dr. Nour had just delivered a baby when she received her call. She thought it was a fund-raising pitch.

Some other fellows assumed their calls were practical jokes.

"Daniel Socolow kept saying, 'You know why I called,' and I kept saying, 'No, I don't,'" said Angela Johnson, 42, a children's novelist and poet who lives in Kent, Ohio. The foundation said in commending her: "Her realistic novels deal with issues faced by children and adults in the context of their families — adoption, the care of elderly family members and death."

The winners this year are aged 22 to 62. The youngest is Erik Demaine, an assistant professor of computer science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the oldest is Pedro A. Sanchez, an agronomist who is the director of tropical agriculture at the Earth Institute at Columbia University.

Many are unknown to the general public but some are renowned in their field, like Peter Sis, 54, an illustrator and author for children and adults. The two children's books he most recently illustrated were "Animal Sense" and "Scranimals."

"I just finished a new book that took four years to do," Mr. Sis (pronounced like seas) said of the forthcoming book he has written and illustrated about the life and work of Charles Darwin, "The Tree of Life." Mr. Sis, who was born in Czechoslovakia and lives in Irvington, N.Y., said of the award, "It's a wonderful acknowledgment of what I'm doing."

Of Mr. Sis, the foundation said, "His drawings and the texts of his stories comprise works that are visually arresting and thought provoking."

While some fellows said they were still daydreaming about how they

Some thought it was a joke when told they would get a half million.

will spend the money, Dr. Nour had some definite ideas.

"I've been wanting to expand the program here and do more international work, go back to Africa and help women who have been circumcised," she said.

In honoring her, MacArthur officials said: "Nour's work moves beyond the cultural debate regarding female circumcision to recognize that it also represents a chronic medical risk throughout the lives of women who have undergone the ritual. She has written an influential protocol for medical management of female circumcision and has developed techniques for the surgical reversal of infibulation, the most severe form of female circumcision."

For fellows like Tom Joyce, a blacksmith who lives in Santa Fe, N.M., the fellowship will allow him to better juggle his artistic life. His work ranges from bowls to outdoor installations and includes both functional objects and sculptures.

"Joyce extends a millennia-old craft into an art form for the 21st century," the foundation said.

Mr. Joyce, 45, said: "There are a lot of misconceptions about what a blacksmith is. We are seen as someone big, brawny. I'm tall, lean and

lanky. My daughters, they all know how to forge as well. Many of my students are women who are slight of build."

Another MacArthur fellow, Loren Rieseberg, 42, a botanist at Indiana University at Bloomington, said he looked forward to using his fellowship money to hire research help. Mr. Rieseberg's experiments with sunflowers allowed him to re-enact the creation of a new species. Just how species originate is one of the biggest questions in evolutionary biology.

"Throughout his work," the foundation said, "Rieseberg applies a full range of theoretical and experimental approaches, from classical crossing experiments to contemporary molecular biologic techniques, to answer key questions of evolutionary genetics."

"I'm shocked, flabbergasted and excited," Mr. Rieseberg said. "I didn't think I was in the same league as all those people."

The other winners are Guillermo Algaze, an archaeologist; James J. Collins, a biomedical engineer; Lydia Davis, a writer; Corrine Dufka, a human rights advocate; Peter Gleick, a conservation analyst; Osvaldo Golijov, a composer; Deborah Jin, a physicist; Sarah H. Kagan, a gerontological nurse; Ned Kahn, a science exhibit artist; Jim Yong Kim, a public health physician; Amy Rosenzweig, a biochemist; Lateefah Simon, a young women's advocate; Sarah Sze, a sculptor; Eve Troutt Powell, a historian; Anders Winroth, a medieval historian; Daisy Youngblood, a ceramicist; and Xiaowei Zhuang, a biophysicist.