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Discoveries That Changed Our Lives

THE TURN of a century always is magnified as an event. The turning of the 21st century just 15 years ahead already has begun.

My neighbor, Myrl Lynch, brought over his copy of *Science 84* which proclaims the 1900s as the "Century of the Sciences" and features "20 Discoveries that Changed Our Lives."

The editors enlisted experts to write dissertations on their list of the most significant and historical discoveries in science, technology and medicine in this century, including 1900.

Lead article is about Hendrik Baekeland, who discovered a plastic material that would not melt, would hardly burn, resisted acids, and is an electrical insulator. Named Bakelite, it led to DuPont's development of neoprene and nylon, which led the rest of us into the era of plastics.

Next is Alfred Binet's method of identifying subnormal school children using the IQ test, with implications that intelligence is inherited, followed by Albert Einstein's discoveries of theories in physics and

mathematics.

Einstein is credited with establishment of the atom as a reality, which is a factual discovery. So is discovery of nuclear fission, which the writer says "has gotten the world profoundly stuck in outdated concepts for war and peace."

Karl Landsteiner's discovery that led to ways of making successful blood transfusions and organ transplants is remembered.

"Statistical methodology" is included as a discovery having applications in science, medicine, and everyday living.

Lee de Forest's vacuum tube that opened the air waves to radio and discovery of hybrid corn that increased food production are listed.

Aerodynamics scored with discoveries of how an object with a convex upper surface produces lift and how a body moving through the air encounters resistance.

"The Inventive Century" tells of discoveries used to make the telephone, automobile and electric grid useful in ways their 19th century inventors never imagined.

"Medicine's Second Revolution" also includes many discoveries. DDT is credited with leading to the environmental movement. Discovery of DNA and steroid contraceptives, "the pill," changed our lives.

So did television, the electronic transistor, computers, and the Laser beam. Chlorpromazine and lithium are credited with enabling schizophrenic people to return to almost normal lives.

One of the magazine's columnists made up a list of "Mediocre 20th Century Inventions," including shrink-wrapping, digital watches, electric guitars, and blown-in subscription cards.

Possibly no other list would include the same "greatest discoveries," because there are thousands that would merit consideration. What would you add to such a list?

Looking backward at where we have been calls for a view of where we are headed. What would you like to see discovered or invented in the 21st century? Why not do it yourself?