While most of you were huddled near your heat ducts, wrapped in a blanket, reading or watching playoff games, a small cadre of TIE volunteers were building solar ovens in an unheated warehouse in San Leandro, this past Sunday. Jack Howell, the catalyst for this project, was in considerable pain, notwithstanding the elaborate back brace he wore. Martin Majestic, an attorney, offered to represent Jack in his worker's compensation claim against TIE, and has begun organizing the volunteers. Working conditions will improve as soon as management completes its investigation (months after the project is completed).

Several Sundays later, ninety-five solar oven boxes have been assembled and painted. Improvements to the assembly process have been made, thanks to the engineers. It's interesting to listen to them collaborate. Engineers are among the linear, living it what is increasingly becoming a nonlinear world. Ok, it's beyond nonlinear and has become outright insane.

My job is to listen, run for supplies, and do what I'm told. I'm an expert at unskilled labor, which is, I believe, a self-canceling phrase. Sunday in the warehouse is a great way for Type A personalities to spend a few hours. It's not a cure for coronary heart disease but it should delay the onset. Cast the pills aside for a day and join us. Type B personalities are welcome. Just don't distract the Type A's. B's can, when the urge overwhelms them, socialize in an area that has been roped off outside for chatter.
So, what are the goals of this project? The short term goal is to build the things, deliver them to refugee camps, and convince as many Afghan families as possible to use solar, whenever possible. Solar makes perfect sense.

Wood is expensive. It's more expensive than teachers. It's now costing $105 a month to heat a classroom and $100 a month for a teacher. 70% of the time, their fires are being used to heat water. The ovens can reach 350 degrees within 45 minutes. Eliminating smoke inhalation is particularly important for women. Men aren't expected to cook or do the dishes. When, during the evolution of the "American male", did that change? Was that shortly after the establishment of a woman's right to vote in 1920?
In the long term, we hope to find a way for Afghans to build and sell solar ovens themselves. When that happens, the solar oven crew can return to their books, blankets, and playoff games. In all likelihood, however, another Jack Howell will have surfaced, with a worthwhile project. And, the call will go out for more volunteers. Will it ever end? No. Half the world's population (3 billion people) are living on less than $2 a day. Besides what would "go-gooders" do, if there is nothing left to do? The planet Earth has been designed to be eternally imperfect.
"THE GODS MUST BE CRAZY"