

THE VOICE MAGAZINE

*Volume 15 Issue 30
August 17, 2007*



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THE VOICE MAGAZINE

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Blood Money

It's a simple fact of enterprise that businesses—at least, for-profit ones—exist to do just that: make a profit. There are mark-ups, margins, and formulas galore, but the whole point is to sell a product or service and to make money doing it.

But there are ways to make a buck—and then there are ways to make a buck on the backs of people who have chosen to put their lives on the line.

Whether you believe the Bush rhetoric about the reasons behind Iraq, men and women by the thousands are dying for a cause that, at least in the beginning, they believed in and chose to fight for. And a small company in South Carolina has found a way to turn the Iraq war—and its related casualties—into big money. Big as in \$20.5 million U.S.

They did it by working on profit margins that would have had even the most jaded capitalist in awe. When the Pentagon ordered two 19-cent washers from the parts supplier in question, they were charged \$998,798 in shipping costs. The tiny package was sent from South Carolina to Texas.

In another incident, the two sisters running the company billed the Pentagon \$455,009 to ship three screws—worth a mere \$1.31 each—to Marines in Iraq. They also charged \$293,451 to send one washer to an air-force base in Florida.

They got away with it by using a flaw in the Defence Department's billing system. When items being shipped to soldiers in combat zones (or to army bases) were marked "priority," the bill was paid automatically. The blood money they pulled in was spent on "homes, beach property, jewellery and high-end automobiles."¹

Now, it could be argued that the Pentagon got exactly what it deserved. That if they're that careless throwing millions of dollars around (millions that could have been spent on medical supplies, rebuilding costs, you name it), it's their own fault that a pair of enterprising entrepreneurs dipped into the trough. There are also a growing number of voices that would argue that the Bush administration is no different: that they're putting their lust for oil profits before people's lives.

But whatever your stance on the bigger picture, the fact remains that this is one of the lowest ways to make a buck that I can think of: deliberately taking advantage of war to turn an outrageous profit (and profit that wasn't even based on a fair exchange of service).

In some ways, it's reminiscent of the T-shirts that appeared within a day of the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake in the San Francisco Bay area. People were still trapped in cars on a collapsed double-decker bridge, and at least one person was already turning a profit by selling T-shirts saying "I survived the 1989 quake."

It's blood money, plain and simple. And there's got to be a better way to make a buck.

¹ *The Globe and Mail*. "Pentagon pays dearly for 'priority' parts shipping." Friday, August 17, 2007. Report on Business, B7.

AU Profiles:

Ryan Nabozniak

by Christina M. Frey



In this week's profile, we chat with Ryan Nabozniak, a computer science student who has nearly finished his degree. During his time as an Athabasca student, Ryan has seen many ups and downs, but has stuck to his goals. He weighs in on the importance of networking, discusses some of the unique challenges distance students face, and even offers suggestions on how AU can continue meeting the special needs of its students.

After 11 years, Ryan's Athabasca adventure is drawing to a close; he plans to complete his degree this fall. Academically, the experience has been excellent. Because of the on-point case studies and emphasis on critical thinking, he feels that many of his courses have helped him practically in the workplace.

"We're taught to be systems analysts and part of that is understanding the politics and personalities in an organization," he says. He names a course on organizational behaviour as his favourite. "I learned a lot about managing different personalities and it's helped me directly on the job," he explains. Ryan also likes the fact that Athabasca's computer science courses are now offered mainly online: "it's easier to connect what you're learning with what you do on the job."

One of the reasons Ryan was initially attracted to Athabasca University was its post-diploma program, which was in its infancy at the time he enrolled. Although he has an Instrumentation Engineering Technology Diploma from NAIT and has worked in engineering for years, he didn't enjoy engineering work. "I liked systems support," he says. Athabasca University's computer science program was the answer, and the post-diploma program allowed him to transfer about 45 credits from his college diploma toward his computer science degree. Another drawing point was Athabasca's flexibility.

"Engineering is a very transient industry," Ryan says. Throughout his career, he has moved around a great deal, rarely being with one company for longer than one year. Currently he lives in Timmins, in northern Ontario, where there are no traditional universities. "AU allowed me to continue my degree wherever I was," he notes.

Ryan feels that one of the biggest challenges distance students face is isolation. He's amazed at how many Athabasca students have never talked with other students, even if they have been with Athabasca University for some time. "Being a distance ed student means feeling that you're the only person with any problems," he says. "You're not." For him, the solution was to network with other students, something he feels is crucial to success as a distance student. He recommends connecting with other students online in the

discussion forums on [AUSU's website](#). The courses now offered through the Moodle system also offer the opportunity to chat, discuss, and network with students taking the same course. There are additional avenues outside of the university itself: for example, Facebook (www.facebook.com) has a large group of Athabasca students. Ryan is involved in the Facebook subgroup for AU computer science students.

Connecting with other students also has non-social benefits, as many upper-level students can give valuable advice and perspectives on course and program planning. For example, Ryan maintains a computer course summary thread on the AUSU discussion board. "If you're in comp sci, take the time to read [it]," he says. "It will help you so much in course planning."

***"... if you
persevere, you'll
be so much
stronger and
better for it."***

The bottom line? "Network, network, network," Ryan says. "Don't be afraid to participate. You won't be rejected."

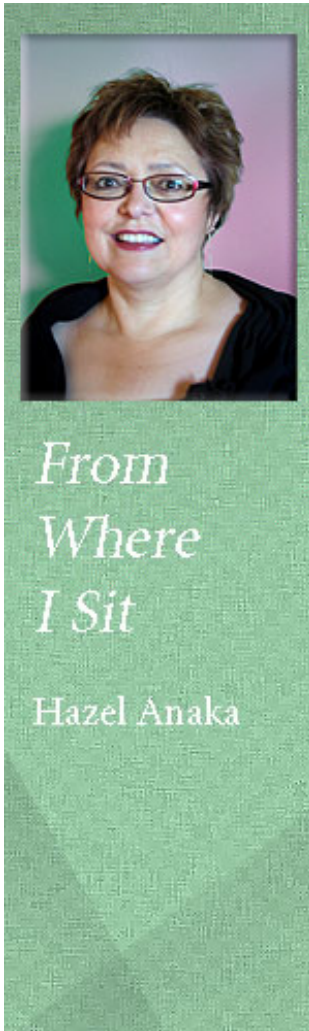
Ryan feels that the AUSU forums and the online discussion capabilities of Moodle are a "step in the right direction" toward meeting the special needs of AU students. For the future, however, he would like to see a more extensive psychological support network in place for students. Although support is given for exam and study stress, he feels these are minor compared with many of the life stresses Athabasca students experience. Typical 20-year-old undergraduate students don't need to deal with family issues like divorce and separation, death of a parent, serious physical illness, or just trying to keep a roof over their heads. "But by the time you're 40, you've definitely hit a few a bumps," he says.

Finally, Ryan warns students not to feel too discouraged when their university career does not go as planned. There was a point when he himself considered walking away from everything. At that time, he and his wife had just lost their home and savings. Focusing on homework was nearly impossible with the financial stresses in his life. "I got a 0 in my Math 309 course because I was trying to keep a roof over my head," Ryan says. He adds, "It is almost a certainty that this will take longer than you expect it to and life will get in the way. Try to take it in stride; if you persevere, you'll be so much stronger and better for it."

As graduation nears, Ryan is looking forward to starting a new position as an applications consultant for Intergraph in Calgary, Alberta. "I'll be juggling three roles in that position," he says. He'll give technical support and troubleshooting help to clients of the company's enterprise application, Smartplant, and will train users and administrators of the application and support sales staff by helping them explain the system to clients. His engineering background will come in handy as well, since the primary users of the application are engineers.

"[It] should be a lot of fun for someone like me," he says, adding, "You never know where life will take you."

If you would like to be profiled in a future issue of the Voice, please contact the Editor at voice@ausu.org



Odds and Ends

Every so often the pile of newspaper clippings, scrawled Post-it notes, and column idea fragments simply need to be dealt with. Well, today's the day. Please don't get dizzy as I whip from personal stuff to other-side-of-the-world anomalies, from stuff that may help you to things that may amaze or amuse you.

My husband was one of the 3,000 patients to receive a registered letter suggesting he get blood tested because of the St. Joseph's Hospital sterilization fiasco. He did, at another hospital. We were both relieved to hear the results were normal. Now the big question is whether or not to join the class-action lawsuit. My first reaction is, this isn't the States; we're not litigious. Yet maybe there's value in asking a few questions. We did get plunged into this situation through no fault of our own.

On the health-related theme, I just received a letter from Capital Health's Information Access and Privacy Office, advising me that "some information pertaining to you including your name and birthdate" was in one of the four laptops stolen in May. First of all, I daresay there's more in there than just my name and birthdate.

Secondly, while they outline the security precautions taken and the belief that the thieves wanted the equipment, not the information, they do advise contacting a provincial department about identity theft. Why in God's name did it take three months to advise people?

In the ain't-it-strange category, an Italian mother took away her son's house keys, cut off his allowance, and dragged him to the police station because he stayed out late. He is 61. You gotta feel for the son. Most of us aren't willing to give up

our lives, freedom, and ambition to live with our parents. We're used to birdies leaving the nest. Though in some cases, it works: a practical, symbiotic relationship that respects individual interests and boundaries.

A Manitoba doctor is attracting interest from around the world because of a paper titled "Dignity and the Essence of Medicine." He's taken the bold step of suggesting physicians treat patients with kindness and respect. What a revolutionary concept! He suggests doctors re-evaluate their attitudes, behaviour, compassion, and dialogue. A gentle touch on the arm, getting permission before procedures, repeating overwhelming or complex information are all strategies to humanize the process. Amen.

Texas researchers discovered 237 distinct reasons people have sex. From "I was horny" to "I was slumming," the reasons run the gamut. Some are loving, some are vicious, and others are sad or self-serving. Kind of just makes you grateful for a normal, healthy, loving monogamous relationship.

May these tidbits lead you to read the paper with more detail, Google for more information, shake your head in disbelief, or thank the Lord for an ordinary, predictable life. It's the least I could do for you, from where I sit.

The Chronicles of Cruiscin Lan

by
Wanda
Waterman
St. Louis





Rock, Paper, Scissors

As a child, his parents take him to visit a circle of enormous pagan stones standing in a silent field. Inspired by this, he practices transforming himself into rock. Stone, he reasons, is impervious to pain. A rock is not afraid of darkness or weather or time or death. One molecule at a time, he solidifies. Great, dangerous waves foam and break against his unyielding skin. When savage blows rain down upon him, he imagines they are no more significant than the summer rain he has seen dancing on the shoulders of marble graveyard angels.

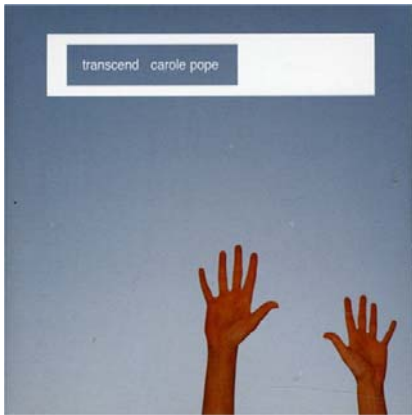
One day, he sees her sitting in the sunlight at a patio table. She is made of paper, and the light shines right through her, so that she seems to glow. As they talk and laugh, her every breath is significant to him, a perfect haiku. There are subtle intaglios beneath her skin that only he can see. There are mysteries and riddles. There are fairy tales and sonnets hidden between her sheets.

She is at a point in her life when she admires all that is solid and real to her touch. She has lived for so many years amongst the shiny scissor people. Once, she admired the way they would sharpen themselves; had been drawn to the beauty of the sparks falling from their whetstones, the sweet danger of her own combustion. But she has seen too much of tearing and cutting. She is no crepe-paper ribbon, no crude snowflake, no paper doll.

In the silence of their bedroom, she unfurls like a scroll for him. In return, he unearths for her the buried treasures, the veins of gold, and the rare, extinct creatures deep within him. She brushes back the hair from his smooth, hard forehead. She whispers into the shadowy passages of his ears, and listens for the echoes of her love calling back to her.

Sometimes, though, he worries that he is blocking the light from her skies. He feels like a crude monolith, casting ink-black shadows across her world. He withdraws into caves of mineral silence, becomes as distant as the moon. The poems he used to read in her seem to be written in some language he can no longer understand. Like a comet, he carries a burden of ice and fire and bad omens. He moves into an ever-widening orbit, dangerously close to spinning off into absolute darkness.

Always, though, she travels to the hidden centre of things. Always, she finds him and enfolds him. And the rock gives way.

Carole Pope - *Transcend*

Release date: 2005

Label: La Petit Morte Records

Tracks: 10

Rating: 3

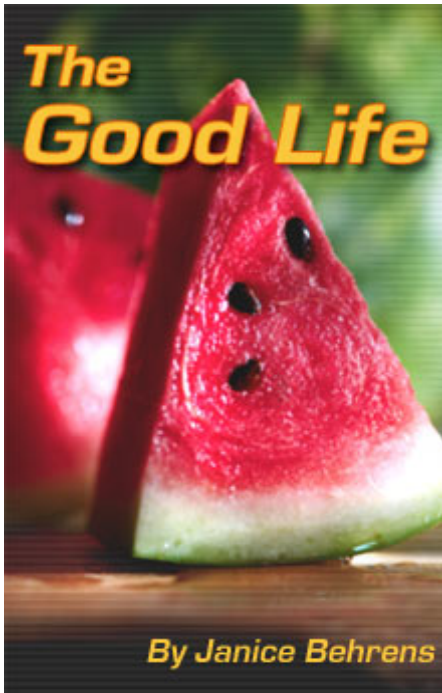
You might remember Carole Pope as the gutsy lyricist from Rough Trade, a band that captivated Canadians in the 1980s. She's fiercely feminist, an outspoken lesbian, and with this expedition into solo territory her music has taken on an even stronger vibe reflective of her personality. The album is folksy and new-wave oriented and was likely an important step

for Pope in coming to full terms with her own sense of expression.

Where Rough Trade sounds clearly like an 80's phenomenon, Carole Pope unleashed in the new millennium sounds like . . . another 80's star. I don't think I've ever heard ten tracks that are so relatively new and yet sound like the culmination of nearly three decades ago. I couldn't help but imagine Pope dressed in a tight white suit with frizzy, coloured hair, dancing a step-touch step-touch move while belting out the boisterous lyrics right from the depths of her gut.

This woman has no qualms about being herself, and there are frequent and obvious references to sex and feminine ideology—all to a pumped 80's beat. Although this album has pulled away from the established sound of Rough Trade, there are a great many similarities and clearly this is due to the musical style of Carole Pope; *Transcend* is something like a Rough Trade album with more focus on the singer than usual. This might seem an odd comment, seeing as Rough Trade relied heavily on Pope to bring the ambience to their records; however, once you have heard the solo effort you will understand that, stripped down, the singer has more folk tendencies than you might have imagined previously.

Despite my startling approval of the Rough Trade record *Weapons Remastered*, which for the sake of a fun-loving 80's atmosphere I fully understand, I am not so impressed by this effort from the long-time music maker. Why is her sound so stuck in a decade long gone? I realise that her stardom from that period will have a great influence on her music today. However, I would imagine that it also would have grown to encompass new sounds and articulations as she aged. Certainly, as already noted, Pope has not simply recreated music that her old band might have done; however, I feel like *Transcend* is more of a muted Rough Trade than a new, fresh effort by Pope. Three stars out of ten.



The Necessity of Contrasts

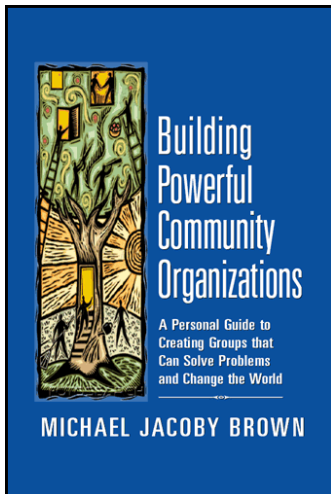
There are two particularly strong and pleasant memories I carry around with me from my childhood. One of them involves spending the day at the toboggan hill near our house in southern Alberta. We would set out early in the weekend morning, with our blue plastic sliders and clunky wooden sleds in tow. For hours on end, oblivious to the wind and cold, we would zoom down the slopes at what seemed like wild, breakneck speeds. After several hours, we would stop to fuel up on lunch (no food since has ever tasted better than those ham and cheese or egg salad sandwiches followed by homemade chocolate cake, eaten in the falling snow).

Eventually, completely exhausted and frozen to the marrow, we would trudge the several blocks (they seemed like miles!) back home. We would sit around the kitchen table and exchange our stories, drinking cup after cup of steaming hot chocolate. To this day, I can remember almost exactly the delightful feeling of my numb fingers slowly thawing out, of the sweet warmth seeping back into my cold, tired body.

The other memory involves those occasions when I would find myself alone in the house. As part of a family of six children, and living in a house that was routinely filled to the rafters with friends, relatives, and out-of-town visitors, these times of solitude were rare and quite precious to me. I remember sitting in the overstuffed corduroy chair in the living room, reading books or writing letters. I recall that sometimes, I would just sit there and daydream, listening to the sound of the house rafters creaking, or watching rain cascading down the windows. I would imagine that I was a lonely hermit woman living in the deep, dark woods. Eventually, of course, the spell would be broken, as my family would come exploding through the front door. But then, recharged by the silence, I was always glad to see them.

It seems to me that there is a profound life lesson wrapped up in my memories of those childhood days of icy slopes and silence. The warmth and light of my parents' kitchen would never have seemed so wonderful to me if it hadn't been for the hours of freezing cold that preceded them. The stillness and solitude of the empty house would have been just boring, or even depressing, if they hadn't been contrasted with the three-ring circus that was the normal state of my girlhood family life.

The lesson I try to keep in mind from this understanding is that experiences in life should be savoured and enjoyed for their unique and specific qualities. All the states of experience we find ourselves in are subject to change. All things, including our emotional states, are shifting and temporary. Likewise, all our states have their own unique beauty, and this beauty can only be understood when it is experienced in contrast to other, very different states. Just as the feelings of warmth and stillness are nothing unless they are contrasted with cold and chaos, happiness and pleasure can only be truly savoured when we have known what it is to be sad and in a state of discomfort.

Books, Music, and Film to Wake Up Your Muse and Help You Change the World

Michael Jacoby Brown - *Building Powerful Community Organizations: A Personal Guide to Creating Groups that Can Solve Problems and Change the World*

Publication date: 2006

Publisher: Long Haul Press, Arlington, MA

While watching a samurai movie one night, I noted the single-mindedness with which the samurai developed the knowledge and skills necessary to uphold the tenets of the warrior code. It occurred to me that societies might benefit significantly were social activists to take on a samuraiesque resolve in the pursuit of social justice.

What if every task to which social activists put their hands was tackled primarily with winning in mind? Not being seen as a hero, not getting laid, not awards, not power and control, but *winning*? What if Machiavellian means-justifying were replaced with steadfast moral integrity and self-sacrifice? What if activists stopped worrying about who got credit or how they would be judged if they wore fur? What if activists were to put aside all that angry, befuddling rhetoric about politicising the everyday and focus every atom of their beings on winning more and more territory for justice and peace?

A book has arrived that makes this goal wondrously accessible. *Building Powerful Community Organizations* is a thorough and detailed course in grassroots organising. If you're serious about your cause, buy, don't borrow, this book. The workbook pages are necessary for an effective absorption of the principles. Brown has drawn on thirty years of activism in just about every social arena and in defence of nearly every communal cause you can name. He has also done extensive research in grassroots activism and spent a great deal of time listening mindfully to the stories of other organisers. The author addresses, among other things, how to overcome the fear of asking for money or striving for more power, how and whom to recruit, record keeping, interviewing, and meeting structure. Particularly moving about *Building Powerful Community Organizations* are the case studies, stories drawn from the author's own experiences as well as from the lives of a host of other grassroots activists including Martin Luther King Jr. These little anecdotes test and breathe life into the canons Brown so carefully formulates.

Brown places a needed emphasis on personal motives for social involvement. I was reminded of how the loss of a child spurred me into labour activism because suddenly everyone in the world had become my child and worthy of my support. Whether your activism is spurred by the experience of racism, your community's looming demise, being beaten bloody by police during a peaceful demonstration, or by the horror you experienced when you finally realised that the powers that be were not only apathetic but incompetent to meet your community's needs, your own story is the foundation of your activism and a perpetual source of strength and wisdom.

The Mindful Bard's goal is to recommend inspiring and enlightening works to artists and activists and also to encourage artists to be activists and activists to be artists. As a poet I've met a few activists who've convinced me that come the revolution they'd be forcing me to eat my manuscripts, and this has been enough to spook me from a number of otherwise worthy causes. Brown does not fit this kind of square hole. His ideal is an active, compassionate, and above all *effective* response to real social problems. The vitality of such a life's work depends on reflection, creativity, and sensitivity, incidentally the very qualities needed for the creation of good art.

AUSU THIS MONTH



Coalition for Student Loan Fairness

AUSU is currently investigating the Coalition for Student Loan Fairness (CSLF) to determine if participation with this group would be advantageous to our members. The group, a grassroots movement of student loan borrowers from across Canada, supports fairness in the loans repayment process.

The CSLF notes that Canadian students are charged a rate of 2.5 to 4.5% above prime for loan repayment, resulting in interest charges that can amount to as much as 33% of the loan principal over the lifetime of the loan. Borrowers who utilize interest relief during low-income periods may pay considerably more. Given that student loans are offered as a public service and incentive to learning, the high profitability of these loans is of concern to AUSU.

CSLF also notes that students over the age of 30 are not included in government surveys of student loan experiences. This is of particular concern to AUSU as the majority of our membership is 30 years of age or older and we know from our experiences with our members that the current loans program does not adequately serve these members, nor does it serve members who wish to work to support themselves while studying part-time.

CSLF also asks that the government provide an Ombuds office to handle student loan complaints—a change that would help address many of the problems we hear about regarding lost forms, incorrect instructions, and confusing requirements. Additionally, CSLF supports providing for consolidation of multiple student loans into a single loan with a single payment, a change that many students have asked for.

Members are encouraged to check out the CSLF website at <http://www.studentloanfairness.ca/index.php>

AUSU Frappr—Show Us Where You Are

On June 20 AUSU launched a Frappr member map on the front page of AUSU.org. Just three days later, nearly 140 members have added their dot to our map, and a "picture" of the dispersion of our website visitors is taking shape. We're thrilled to see so many of you leaving your little mark on our site, and we love all the great pictures and shoutouts people have uploaded. Members who have left anonymous pins are encouraged to add their name (or alias, if you are shy) so we know you are all different people! If you haven't added your mark, drop by www.ausu.org—and don't forget to read the posting information if you are new to Frappr.



At Home: Quebec prisoners forced to give up smoking

Next year, Quebec will be enforcing its new anti-smoking law in its jails, a law that applies not only to inmates but to prison guards as well. Real Russey of Quebec's Public Security Department said that the move was aimed purely at creating a healthier environment for inmates and prison employees; neither of these groups will be able to smoke in or out of doors when the enforcement begins.¹ As with all bans, this policy has its share of critics, but based on federal Canadian legislation it is a logical and entirely expected step for the province.

Although smoking has been disallowed in Canada's federal prisons since 2005, provinces have taken longer to inflict the same legislation on their own prisoners. Quebec is the final province to officially take the plunge into smoke-free jails, and coordinators believe that based on examples in other provinces the restriction on tobacco will not have a large

impact on internal affairs.

Jean-Claude Bernheim of Quebec's Prisoners' Rights Committee, however, thinks that prisoners should at least have access to cigarettes while outside because in many cases they have so little to occupy their time otherwise. He remarks that cigarette breaks are often the high point of the day for Quebec prisoners and insinuates that unless more activities are organised for inmates it is unfair to take away one of the only things that an estimated 80% of them enjoy during their incarceration.²

If prisoners in the province are not ready to undertake the imposed smoking ban, they will be able to access nicotine patches from prison authorities at their own expense.

¹ CTV News, 2007. "Cigarettes to be banned from Quebec prisons." Retrieved August 15, 2007, from http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20070815/prison_smokes_070815/20070815?hub=Canada

² Breitbart.com. "Prisoners in Quebec jails to pay for nicotine patches under smoking ban." Retrieved August 15, 2007, from http://www.breitbart.com/article.php?id=cp_f9vt747b21&show_article=1

In Foreign News: India celebrates 60 years of independence and a new presence in the world

August 15 marked 60 years of independence for India, and 60 years of an economy free from the apron strings of Great Britain. Celebrations are underway not only in the country itself but in locations all over the world as Indian citizens come together to revel in years of a strengthening economy and an emerging presence on the world stage. The celebrations in Delhi will include a speech by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and the release of thousands of kites, according to Festivals of India.¹

CBC News In Depth remarks that this anniversary of independence marks the beginning of a new India, one that boasts a stable government and the kind of reliable economy that could see the country become one of the major players in Eastern affairs. In comparison with the United States and other Western nations, India has invested a higher portion of its national income in technological developments and research projects, and because of this it is expected to soon rival its close neighbour China in such areas.

With an incredibly high population of more than one billion, India has always been a remarkable nation in terms of its history and culture, but now its government and citizens want the rest of the world to see the country for its new developments and modern technologies. Atul Kohli, professor of international affairs at Princeton University, remarks that “in the past, India possessed a sluggish economy with constant fears of famine and political partitions. Now that these worries have subsided, the country is one of the world's fastest growing economies, as well as being a relatively stable democracy.”²

In coming years we should see the fruits of India's labour and investment in new technologies, its commitment to democracy, and its natural resources—namely, its population.

¹ Festivals of India. “Independence Day.” Retrieved August 16, 2007, from <http://www.festivalsofindia.in/independenceday>

² CBC News In Depth. “India at 60, on its way to being a world power.” Retrieved August 16, 2007, from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/india/binks-india60.html>

Every time I think I've seen it all, somebody proves me absolutely wrong, sometimes dumbstruck, but mostly just amazed and delighted at the capacity of the human creature to innovate and create and cause me to think, "Why didn't I think of that?" or even "I'm so glad I never thought of that."

Wall-Mountable Wireless Printer - <http://gizmodo.com/gadgets/printed-pages-in-your-face/wall+mountable-wireless-printer-saves-space-frames-up-your-print-262962.php>

This is an absolute must for the cluttered or small modern office. We tend not to use the space we have available, like going up rather than around or across.

Self-Sustainable Chair - <http://jooyounpaek.com/ssc.html>

Hideous, but probably really handy during a lengthy mall-haul.

Stonehenge Pocket Watch - <http://www.stonehengewatch.com/>

Modern convenience combined with ancient technology, this watch will not only tell time, it's very possible it can even predict the seasons—or an eclipse!

Made In Design - <http://www.madeindesign.co.uk/>

All sorts of goodies from a range of designers. "Made in Design is dedicated to modern and contemporary design furniture and offers a wide range of decorative products."

Clever - <http://clever-project.net/>

This is one of those things I wish I'd invented myself! "The CLEVER vehicle is a compact city vehicle for two with a tandem seat constellation. The length is 3066 mm, the width is 998 mm and the height is 1388 mm. The gross weight is less than 400 kg." It has the appearance of a small, covered human-powered cycle. Fabulous idea!

And just for fun (and having absolutely nothing to do with the above) . . .

Dead or Alive - <http://www.deadoraliveinfo.com/>

Just in case you wanted to know who was or who isn't. There's a handy little chart that'll even tell you how much longer you've lived than someone else. A little on the creepy side, but still nifty.

classifieds

Classifieds are free for AU students! Contact voice@ausu.org for more information.

THE VOICE

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