

THE VOICE MAGAZINE

Volume 16 Issue 01
January 4, 2008

BEST OF 2007

Photo Feature

The pleasures of Paris

Turn On, Tune In . . .

Looking beyond the
mainstream media

Clam Wars

Battle over the beaches

Plus:

*The Mindful Bard, Chronicles of Cruiscin Lan,
From Where I Sit, Lost & Found, The Good Life,
and much more...*



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We love to hear from you! Send your questions and comments to voice@ausu.org, and please indicate if we may publish your letter.



EDITORIAL

Sandra Livingston

**I Spy**

This editorial originally appeared May 11, 2007, in issue 1517.

Remember I spy? No, not the television show; the game that kids play, the one where somebody picks an object and the other players guess what item they're thinking of. Well, it seems there's a new version of the game and it's turning out to be more popular than ever; the only trouble is, you might not know you're playing.

Most consumers are familiar with the standard tactics that retailers and manufacturers use to gather information. Want to tell them how many pairs of underwear you've bought in the past year, or maybe when and where you buy your toothpaste? Easy—just use your customer loyalty card, the one that gives you points to trade in on more stuff. Want to give your bank a detailed list of where you shop, what you buy, and a pretty good idea of what other services they can target to sell you? Simple—just reach for your trusty credit card. The details of what you toss in your cart get added to the database with every swipe of the plastic.

We all know this is a trade-off. They get something, we get something. (The fairness of this exchange is disputable, but let's leave that for another day.)

The point is, consumers are aware of it. They control the decision to get—and use—those ubiquitous rewards cards. They choose whether or not to swipe their credit card. They're giving up personal information, minute details about the things they eat, wear, and use, and they're doing it willingly.

But what happens when the information you're giving away is tied to an invisible device, one that can track your movements wherever you go and send that information to the store (or bank or government agency)?

If all that sounds a little too science fiction, it's not. It's called Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) and if the companies that make your clothes and shoes and toilet paper have their way, it will be coming to a store near you.

RFID tags are tiny integrated circuits. They're small enough to be inserted into a library book, a piece of clothing, or even a credit card without being detected. Using radio signals, the data on the tags can be read by a wireless scanner—in the case of UHF tags, from as many as 5 metres away.

They've been around since World War II, and they're great for tracking just about anything that gets moved anywhere—from tracing pallets of barbecues shipped around the world to keeping track of stock in your local hardware store.

But unlike a UPC barcode, RFID tags don't just contain a number that identifies what *kind* of product they're on. Instead, RFIDs carry a unique identifying number for each individual item—that means that for every T-shirt or pair of jeans on the store shelf, the embedded RFID has its own code. In future, every consumer product in the world could carry its own unique serial number.

For information on the RFID tag to be scanned, all it needs to do is pass within a few metres of a reader, a device that can be installed in shopping malls, airports, office buildings—virtually anywhere. And you don't

need to place the tag in plain view of the reader; the information on it can be picked up through clothing, purses, or briefcases.

So what does all that have to do with the next pair of yoga pants or running shoes you're thinking of buying?

Nothing—unless, like millions of consumers every day, you pay for them using a credit card, debit card, or swipe your customer rewards card at the checkout. In short, until you create a link between your personal information and the unique RFID tag on the item you're buying.

Let's suppose you buy a new pair of shoes that has an RFID tag in it. If you pay cash (and don't collect points with a loyalty card), no problem. Any readers you walk past—at the mall, an amusement park, the office—can scan the information on the shoes but they're still just a pair of shoes. The embedded tag can tell the reader when and where they were made, what colour or size they are, and what store they were sold in, but there's still nothing to link them to the movements of a specific person.

Once you've tied them to your identity, though, things get a little more invasive. Those new tires you bought with your credit card can tell the company where you went on vacation, or how many times (and when) you drove on a particular highway. That new purse you're carrying can feed RFID scanners lots of information about your movements throughout the day—the only limitation is how many scanners are installed and where, and, of course, just who's collecting the information.

Right now, this kind of consumer-level surveillance is still being closely monitored. In the executive summary of a report by the non-profit Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC), the agency notes that Canada's Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA) currently limits the use of RFIDs for tracking consumers. Retailers are required to "obtain the informed consent of customers" before using or disclosing information that's been gathered by tracking them through RFIDs.

The potential for misuse of RFIDs has also raised the interest of Canada's Office of the Privacy Commissioner; OPCC has "asked retailers for details of their planned RFID uses."

But the rules, as the old saying goes, are made to be broken. Just ask Metro AG, the large European-based retail chain that decided to start implanting RFIDs in the customer loyalty cards they issued—without telling those same loyal customers. Even if a customer never takes the card out of their wallet, their movements in a store and the number of visits they make can be tracked by readers placed throughout the company's stores.

True, this fast-growing technology has a lot of benefits. Along with streamlining shipping and inventory tasks, it's now possible to buy smart appliances. By reading the RFID tags in your cartons of milk or eggs, they can tell you when you're running low on something, or the food in the back of your fridge is about to expire. RFID-enabled washing machines exist that can read the tags in your clothes and, by quickly computing the mix of colours and fabrics, display a message warning you that you're about to toss those brand new jeans in with a load of white T-shirts.

Yes, Will Robinson, the future is here, a heady mix of virtual and real life, of Star Trek-like gadgets and Big Brother watchfulness.

And if you just can't shake that strange feeling that someone's watching you, well . . .

PLEASURES OF PARIS

Tanja Ahlin

As part of her translation studies, Tanja Ahlin participated in an exchange program that took her to Paris. In a five-part series, Tanja treated Voice readers to a glimpse of this magnificent city through her camera lens. This photo feature originally appeared July 13, 2007, in issue 1526.



La Sorbonne

As my second semester of studying in Paris was coming to an end, I decided it was time to revise my experience and my impressions of the French capital. Not surprisingly, I was not very enthusiastic about my leaving. One of the greatest cities in the world had become my home for almost a year. I had the chance to get lost in its alleys, uncovering its secrets off the beaten tourist tracks. I found my favourite café for the morning caffeine boost and my favourite bar for the evening cocktail; the best whole wheat bread; and the sunniest spot by the Seine for an afternoon picnic with a view of the Notre Dame cathedral. I have seen the colours of Paris in every season. And this is but the beginning of the pleasures of Paris.

As I was not obliged to take many courses and pass a number of exams at my university in the suburbs, I had time to stroll around other Parisian schools and *grands écoles*, a group of the most prestigious French post-secondary institutions, to see what they offer. There are twelve universities in Paris alone and a number of other educational institutions. Thus I attended some classes at the famous Sorbonne whose inner court, which you can only enter as a student, is even more impressive than its front, overlooking a fountain and a square where students gather at lunchtime.



Parisians' favourite picnic spot by the river

Some of the lectures I was interested in took place at ENS (*Ecole Nationale Supérieure*), a peaceful sanctuary right behind the Pantheon with a garden and a fountain. The courses were quite demanding, especially as I was missing some of the basics in philosophy (not to mention my insufficient knowledge of French terminology in this field). However, just to hear some of the well-known philosophers speak made me feel I was not only in the heart of the French capital, but also in the heart of French thought.

I also attended some lectures in linguistic anthropology at EHESS (*Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales*) where I was fascinated by several presentations made by visiting professors from the U.S. In *Musée du Quai Branly* I listened to lectures by a couple of French professors, a dance choreographer, and an Australian anthropologist. And in the auditorium of the impressive *Collège de France* I attended some free public lectures on history and democracy. I believe that in terms of academic and learning pleasures Paris is hard to defeat.

Another aspect of the French capital to attract people from all over the world is art in every form. Each week you can buy *Pariscopes*, a magazine with every possible event taking place, for just a couple of cents. I saw a number of plays, concerts, and films, but there were a couple of them I will remember better than others.

The first of them happened on a windy Sunday when we were strolling around the biggest *marché aux puces* (flea market) in Europe, just north of Porte d'Orléans. After rummaging through yellowish books, crumpled bank notes (we even found some Yugoslav ones), rusty railings, and dusty but firm furniture that could still

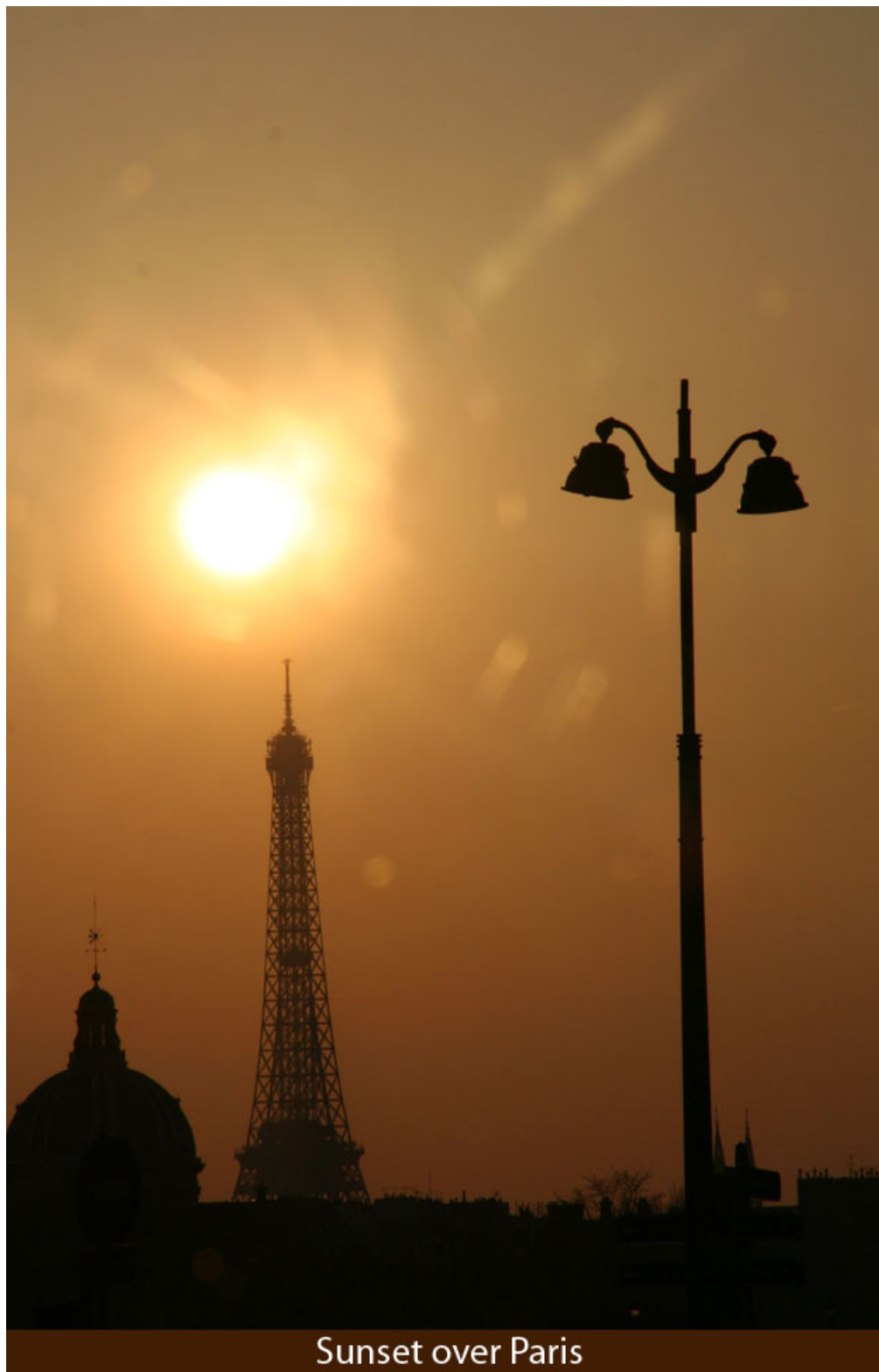
be very much in vogue, we were ready to set off to the metro when we suddenly heard some loud jazzy music coming out of a small bar. We stopped for a glass of lemonade and surrendered to the sounds of two

guitars while outside the storm burst. The musical pleasure of Paris—unexpected, unplanned, and unforgettable.

A few days before our leaving, we also had the chance to enjoy *Fête de la Musique*, the music festival. After a glance at the never-ending list of concerts, I gave up on looking for something special, so we just walked up the Latin Quarter once again. It proved to be the right thing to do, as everywhere you went music just filled your ears and people were dancing wherever they could.

Together with some of our friends we settled at a square where Zoran, an immigrant from Belgrade, Serbia, and his group were playing rock and were indeed good at it.

As the custom is in Paris, where parties often end when it is time to catch the last metro at one o'clock in the morning, all concerts stopped at midnight. But on our way back home, we bumped into a group of drum players. Their beat seemed to be addictive for we not only stopped to listen, but even followed them up the Rue Mouffetard again. Our procession grew along the



way as more and more people with tired, sleepy faces suddenly became revived at the sound of drums and turned around on their heels to join us. For a moment it seemed as if a breeze from Brazil drifted over Paris, making everyone forget the lightening sky that was already announcing another working day.



An artist's gallery in Belleville



Newspaper stand in Belleville

Then there was the weekend in *Belleville*, a quarter in the northeastern part of the city, when the local artists opened their studios, which were often parts of their own apartments, to the public. Armed with a map specially designed for the occasion, we climbed the narrow staircases of buildings too old to have escalators installed, poked our noses into people's homes, discovered what is usually hidden behind enormous blurred windows and high stone walls, and explored the most diverse artistic talents.

The pleasure of staying in Paris for a while also lies in small discoveries you cannot afford if you only come for a couple of days. We spoke to a Slovenian tourist guide who knew but the main Parisian tourist sites—the Louvre, Palais Royal, Notre Dame, Versailles, and, of course, the Eiffel Tower. The queues to climb the latter are never-ending at any time of the day on any day of the week. On the other hand, there was nobody at the ticket office to mount the 56th floor of *Tour Montparnasse* in forty seconds. The panoramic view is just as breathtaking and you can include the Eiffel Tower itself in your picture.

Then there is *Arènes de Lutèce*, the Roman amphitheatre in the 5th *arrondissement* that the city authorities wanted to transform into a dump but that Victor Hugo fought to have preserved. Concealed by the surrounding buildings, it now serves as a park where the locals eat take-away pizza and children play soccer on Sundays. And then there are the carefully tendered secret courtyard gardens behind virtually every heavy wooden door, often dating back to the 19th century, that seem impenetrable to a passing tourist. In reality, you can enter many of them by simply pushing the button on them and in the next moment you are surrounded by un-city-like peace. There, you can easily feel like Alice in Wonderland, and experience the pleasure of discovering a faraway countryside in the heart of what appears to be a stone-cold city.

During all those months, I also got to know some Parisians and was often mesmerized by their views and lifestyle. However, what I admire most about them is their ability to take a day's moment for themselves; to stop, look around, and become aware once again of the pleasures their city has to offer.

Not only do they learn to keep balance while reading at the metro during the rush hour, they also know how to sit down for a glass of red wine after work, in company or alone, just to ponder their day while watching the sun set over the Seine—the pleasure of grabbing your *self* by its tail in a half-hour meditation before you get lost in the city crowd once again.



An evening's moment

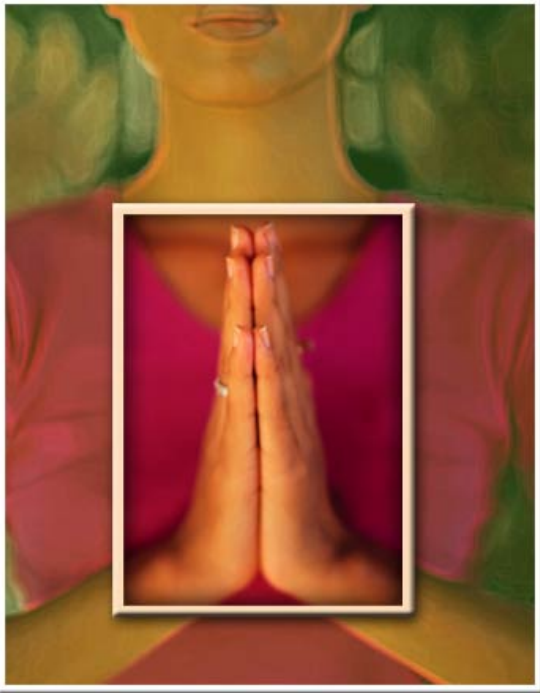


Last bags packed, sitting under the double crown
in front of the Palais Royal

In Search Of

Lonita Fraser

Lonita is a regular contributor to The Voice, and she scours the vast realm of the Internet each week to bring readers fascinating and unusual sites in "Click On This." In this article, she examines various faiths and the wonderful discoveries that can be made by keeping an open mind. This article originally appeared January 12, 2007, in issue 1502.



I'll tell you right up front that I am an atheist. I am not one in the strongest sense of the term, but what a friend once termed a "passive atheist." In the simplest terms, for me, this means that while I do not personally espouse belief in any sort of supreme being or power, nor do I feel that I need such belief in my life, I do not denigrate that need and desire in others. In fact, I find the whole thing fascinating. From the simplest belief to the most complex ceremony, I find religious, spiritual, and philosophical matters to be some of the most entrancing aspects of humankind.

I have friends and relatives who span the wide range of the belief systems of the world, from devout Catholics, to Santeria priestesses, several species of Wiccan, and even a Baptist minister. I, too, bear an ordination, in the Universal Life Church (ULC), an organization that will ordain anyone who asks, and asks nothing more of its members than that they espouse complete freedom of religion for one and all and sundry. I was recently asked, in fact, with ministerial documentation in hand,

to officiate at a friend's wedding, but it turns out the province of Ontario has not yet added ministers of the ULC to its accepted list of clergy. At the same instant that I was disappointed I couldn't perform this special duty for my friends, I also realised that I could then attend the wedding as a guest, and avoid the entire trauma of public speaking. That's the trouble with ministerial duties—they require a lot of talking in front of groups, and it's not an especial talent of mine.

I was raised a Roman Catholic, went to Catholic schools, and participated in the usual roster of Catholic ceremonies and mass, but realised very early on that it was not for me. I felt somewhat like a square peg in a round hole: the faith was a suit of clothing off the rack, and I, like so many, needed a custom fit. I've oft given thought to having myself officially excommunicated, but not doing so makes my grandmother happy, and does no harm anyhow.

Each Christmas Eve I still attend mass, but it's in Polish, a language I understand about ten words of, and most of them aren't applicable (none of them are vulgar, either; but one does not normally require the words for "head," "coffee," "tea," and "pig" during a mass). It's a tradition to attend mass with my friend of Polish descent, after the traditional Christmas Eve meal. Part of that tradition includes the breaking of holy bread that my friend's mother acquires from the local parish. Each person present takes a little piece of the bread of every other person present, and they take a piece of yours; and while you share your bread you share your wishes for that person, wish them a Merry Christmas, et cetera. It's a nice tradition, like the shaking of hands and wishing of peace during the mass itself.

My first real brush with a faith other than Catholicism was Wicca. I don't even recall how I fell into that, or met those folks, but one spring day I found myself out in the woods with a crowd of Wiccans celebrating Beltane—maypole and all. I have, sadly, a very dim memory of that event, but do recall cracking my teeth on the communal wine goblet as the presiding priestess passed around the circle holding it out for us to sip from. I remember a nice feeling of community, actually, more so from a nice day in a beautiful setting with a group of comfortable people, than from any spiritual aura. I never did feel at home in that collection of faiths either, but did come to feel that if one were to espouse any particular religion, one that respects the earth and all its fruits—animal, vegetable, and mineral—made more logical sense than anything else.

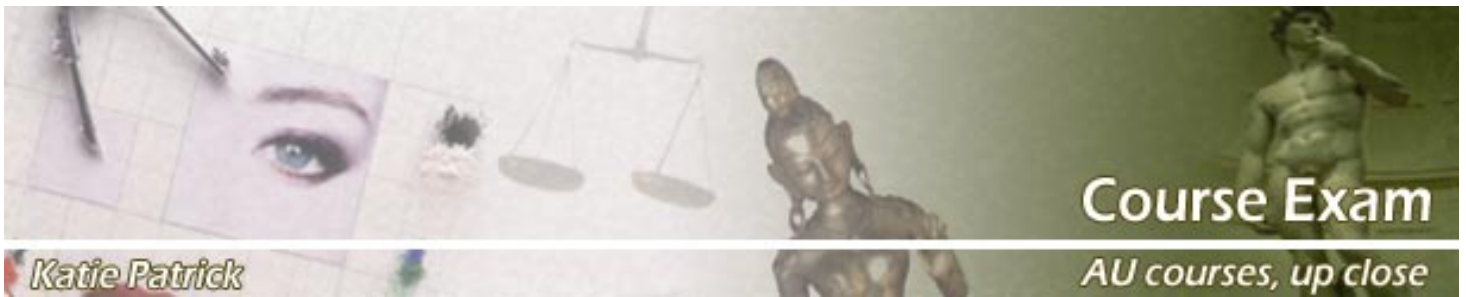
My most recent foray into the non-atheist world was allowing a friend to instruct me in some of the knowledge and practices of Santeria. It's an odd little belief system, that, but interesting. It encompasses ancestor worship, the performance of rituals, and much in the way of strong personal intent. It shares a common heritage with voodoo, both having stemmed from the Yoruba practices of Africa

Santeria, however, included certain Catholic practices so that its practitioners could continue to practice their faith without arousing the suspicions or offence of Catholic rulers. You'll find, for example, that Oshun (who is the patron saint of women, and she to whom you apply in matters of love) is often portrayed as Caridad del Cobre (Our Lady of Charity and patroness of Cuba), one of the many faces of Jesus' mother Mary. Out of respect for the faith of my friend, there is not a lot else I can detail regarding what goes on during Santeria rituals, as it is a tenet of the faith to keep it secret unless you are teaching, learning, or practicing. I can tell you, though, that a lot of rum and cigars are sometimes involved, and you don't get to have much, if any, of either. Darn it all.

What has had the strongest influence over me is not really a religion at all, though it is sometimes labelled as such and made into such by some. Taoism (Daoism), through its simple approach that encourages a direct view and experience of everything around you, has allowed me to remove a lot of unnecessary upset from my life, and to see that all things simply "are." Taoism always makes me think of that one line from *Hamlet*: "There is nothing good or bad, but thinking makes it so."

If I told you more specifically about Taoism, I'd be doing you a great disservice. It is a thing that a person must figure out and define for themselves, and can't be filtered through the eyes of another. The more I explain it to you, the less understanding you'd gain for yourself. I consider it to be a lovely philosophy, full of easily espoused and incorporated maxims and themes that shouldn't interfere with most any other religious practice anyone would care to be a part of.

I'm sure at some point in my more heated and self-absorbed youth I was dismissive of anything that didn't fit into my egocentric world view, but over the years I've come to realize that there is valuable truth in just about anything. One just has to keep their eyes and mind open, to see outside of the box. By doing so I've made some interesting friends, and enriched my own existence in ways that I'd be hard pressed to label specifically. My advice to you, should you feel bold, adventurous, or curious, is attend a religious ceremony of a faith practice that is not your own, or allow a believer to explain their beliefs to you. You never know what you might gain from it.



Law and Ethics in Education (EDUC 404)

As AU's course offerings continue to grow, Katie's course introductions offer in-depth descriptions that can help students plan their programs. Interviews with professors bring colourful—and invaluable—details to her articles, and a fresh perspective that goes beyond most syllabi. This article originally appeared March 9, 2007, in issue 1508.

Are you planning to focus your undergraduate degree in educational studies? AU has recently launched EDUC 404 (Law and Ethics in Education), a senior level education course to “provide an introductory understanding of the legal and ethical issues, and potential legal liability encountered by school principals, teachers and school administrators and counsellors,” according to course consultant Steven Boddington. This course, Boddington explains, is not one to “make teachers experts in the law or ethics in education,” but one which helps give them a basis with which to make informed decisions and realize the “important dimensions that are likely to impact their professional lives.”

EDUC 404 does not require a prerequisite, though AU's educational studies staff recommend that students complete EDUC 301 (Educational Issues and Social Change I: Historical Social Perspectives) or EDUC 302 (Educational Issues and Social Change II: Current Debates) first. Boddington emphasizes that EDUC 404 is “fully transferable to other educational institutions in Canada.”

Consisting of eight involved units, EDUC 404 begins with the study of teachers and ethical decision making. Boddington indicates that this is necessary, as it helps students become “aware of the need for teachers to know the law and ethics in their field.” Students also explore Canada's legal history, with a focus on education and how and why the current educational legislation came into being.

The next few units explore the “legal framework that exists for the provision, regulation, and governance of education” in Canada, says Boddington, and practical knowledge of its application to teachers is emphasized.

EDUC 404 also explores the role of teachers in “the comprehension, acceptance, and application of the legal and ethical principles” in today's society, says Boddington, and students have the opportunity to ponder how Canadian society portrays expectations of “ethically correct” teacher roles and how these perceptions can affect the profession.

The final units of EDUC 404 demonstrate how “law and ethics in education are relevant to the daily practice of teachers and educational human service professionals,” explains Boddington. This includes the rights of both students and teachers, as well as responsibilities of the teacher, according to Canada's Labour and Employment Laws. Students cover issues of diversity, equality, and fairness in the educational atmosphere. Other current issues, such as discipline and punishment in the classroom, and where to “draw the line,” so to speak, are also debated. Additionally, topics like classroom controversy are discussed.

Student evaluation consists of four assignments and one final exam (worth 40%). The first assignment (worth 10%), consists of a multiple-choice online quiz, which is instantly computer marked for quick feedback. The next three assignments (worth 15%, 15%, and 20%, respectively) have essay components. The first is a “medium-sized essay or two short essays”; assignment 3 is a “long essay or case study”; and the last assignment consists of a “mini research paper,” between 2,500 and 3,000 words in length. The passing grade in each assignment and in the course is 50%.

Course professor Andy Khan is a Professor Emeritus of Legal Studies at Athabasca University. He was AU’s first Chair of the Centre for State and Legal Studies, as well as the first director of University Research at AU. Previously, Khan occupied teaching posts in Australia, the United Kingdom, and Pakistan. Dr. Khan has published in a wide variety of legal and education journals, including the U.K.’s Business Law Review and the Canadian Chapter of the U.S. Yearbook of Law Education. Dr. Khan has authored three other AU education-based courses in addition to EDUC 404.

For more information on EDUC 404, see the [course syllabus](#), and for information on the Centre for State and Legal Studies, visit the Centre [homepage](#).

CLICK ON THIS – Wonderworld

Lonita Fraser

A wonderworld is just what readers discover each week as Lonita brings them the unusual, the wonderful, the inspiring, and the just plain weird—all courtesy of the Internet. This edition of Click On This originally appeared July 13, 2007, in issue 1526.

Too often, I think, we rush from sun to sun, and do not take enough time to look at the beauty of the world that we inhabit. This week, then, a celebration of some of the beauties of planet Earth.

U.S. National Arboretum: Bonsai Images

No doubt the most well-known of plant life manipulations are the collection of tiny trees we call bonsai. I used to think, as a child, that tiny apple trees would grow very tiny apples. ‘Twas not to be, however.

Arborsculpture

You can take a tree down and carve a chair, or grow a grove to suit a shape; but did you know you can manipulate full-size living trees as well?

Gordo's Cloud Gallery

They hang above us almost daily; we watch their flight and find dreams and the shapes of objects around us. Solid, yet fleeting, these clouds’ fleeting shapes are caught in the frozen time of photographs.

Deep Sea Photography

The wonders that most of us will never see up close on our own; the life beneath the undiscovered country of the sea.

World Championships of Sand Sculpture

Man manipulates not only the trees, and mentally manipulates not only the clouds, but also the tiny stones of sand that blanket almost every beach in the world. I made a tiny little sandcastle last year, but I’m guessing the waves of Lake Erie have washed it away by now.

Noam Chomsky on the Climate of the Times

Magdalena Tywoniuk

Magdalena has been a Voice contributor since 2004, and her articles always offer honest and compelling insights into the subjects she tackles. In this article, Magdalena shares the experience of attending a lecture by Noam Chomsky. This article originally appeared May 25, 2007, in issue 1519.



I often feel that I should be more active in following world politics; that being fed the information passively leaves me vulnerable and uninformed. So, I resolved to read the political pieces in the national newspapers, but found them rife with bipartisan personal opinion or spin. Not my idea of being informed. Turning to the national newscast, I found that much of it centred on U.S. issues which seemed to be filtered right from the American media. I got that odd feeling of vulnerability again because it seems that spin is what the American media is all about. This feeling becomes stronger as more flashy graphics and celebrity journalists appear on CNN.

I, like many others, retreat and hope that someone more objective will come along to clarify and present us with the big picture.

That man finally came along. The opportunity to hear Noam Chomsky speak is to stand outside the box and peer inside. Chomsky began by invoking the words of the chief U.S. prosecutor at the start of the Nuremberg trials. In order for those trials to have any merit, they had to be held under the principle of universality; that all countries will be held liable and punished for future acts of international aggression or genocide. However, as Chomsky noted, the only upheld principle of universality is that nothing is universal. That the accepted climate of morality, upheld by the media, allows those in power never to “drink from the poison chalice.” He began to outline the framework that allows for such a thing.

Chomsky clarified that an international aggressor is anyone that enters uninvited and takes power from a country, regardless of whether or not there is an official declaration of war. This encompasses U.S. actions against Iraq and many other countries. However, the U.S. government has used the media to present its actions as a noble effort to bring stability to these regions. Chomsky divulged how the U.S. has managed to commit, but never stand trial for, its own crimes. He also asserted that the U.S. is not a functional democracy because its media is not free and transparent.

He explained that stories often leaked from the government appear in a lone suburban newspaper, often a subsidiary of a larger company like the New York Times who will not print it. The story is invariably a true and unflattering view of U.S. foreign policy, which will only be hinted at a few days later in the national newspapers. Furthermore, Chomsky recounted how the U.S. has used the media in a powerful tactic. When the government makes a huge mistake, they never deny it because denial opens up a forum for discussion and dissent. Instead, they simply use the media to reposition the event as noble and heroic, like an effort to maintain stability. The media is their tool that toes the party line. The trick is that the party line is never uttered, and if it is never uttered, it can’t be disputed, debated, laughed at, or rejected. What is that line? It is that the U.S. owns the world, and so it can never be an interloper or an international aggressor. Therefore, it can commit no crime and can never be held accountable. This is very fortunate due to its long history.

U.S. foreign policy has long been concerned with bringing stability to regions. They did this in Chile, where the official media reported that destabilization of the country was necessary in order for the Americans to re-stabilize it. This occurred again in Nicaragua; Reagan avowed that the instability of this poor country—which could march on Texas in a mere *two days*—posed a great threat to U.S. security. The subsequent massacre led Nicaragua to charge the U.S. with international terrorism at the World Court, an impossibility as the U.S. cannot be tried for any international crimes. The World Court labelled U.S. actions as international terrorism. The U.S. simply vetoed the ruling to hold the U.S. responsible, a provision it stipulates in many of its international agreements.

In fact, the U.S. brings more instability to the regions they purport to be saving. The presence of U.S. soldiers increases violence. They are the target in 75% of attacks in Iraq, according to official polls and the surrounding region. U.S. interference also kills any hope of success for more moderate uprisings in fundamentalist Arab countries like Iran and Afghanistan. U.S. threats are an excuse to crush moderate movements and increase control over the population. Also, in the name of stability the U.S. has actually provided support for the fundamentalist Afghan regime rather than the countries more favoured moderates.

The most interesting case that Chomsky cited is that of the Iraq - U.S. relationship. The U.S. itself removed Saddam Hussein from an international list of terrorists in order to facilitate a trade relationship in weaponry. As the relationship thrived, Iraqi officials were even invited to attend an international symposium on the effects of shockwaves in weapon detonation. The U.S. then used their power to prohibit an Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. When Iraq did invade Kuwait, the U.S. pronounced Hussein an international aggressor.

At almost the same time, the U.S. invaded Panama, killing many more people than had the Iraq invasion. The media kept silent about Panama, with no investigation of the victors being permitted. Instead, Iraq was sanctioned. The humanitarian Oil for Food program was devised to bring aid to the Iraqi population. Again, the media ignored the resignation of two leading international diplomats from this committee, both citing that the U.S. was acting in violation of the Genocide Convention. In the end, only Saddam was sentenced to pay for the 150 lives he took sometime in the 1980s.

Chomsky then recounted the U.S.'s own interestingly constant polling results over the last four decades. They show that 75% of the public viewed the Vietnam War as morally and fundamentally wrong. That phenomenon continues today, with 75% of the U.S. public asserting that the war in Iraq is not just a mistake, but immoral. The media continues to not reflect the view of the people, nor does their government.

Chomsky summed up his talk by quoting a recent speech made by Condoleezza Rice in which she claimed that the U.S. deems all transfers of foreign weapons and foreign fighters into the U.S. as acts of international terrorism. Yet the U.S. engages in this behaviour frequently. Again, he pointed out that the U.S. is never considered responsible because they are never a foreign aggressor; after all, they own the world. This imperialist attitude even appears within their constitution, wherein there is a reference concerning the need to diminish the threat of those foreign savages.

"Foreign savages . . . oh, you mean the natives?" Chomsky chuckled.

Noam Chomsky is Professor Emeritus at MIT in the department of Linguistics and Philosophy. He is a linguist, theorist, and political activist. He has written well over 100 books and articles and is one of the world's most cited scholars.

CLAM WARS IN SOUTHWEST NOVA

Wanda Waterman St. Louis

This article first appeared as a two-part series in issues 1522 and 1523, published June 15 and 22, 2007. It concerns the growing privatization of the clam industry in southwest Nova Scotia.

The author, Wanda Waterman St. Louis, brings the same perceptive insights to this important topic as to her other work: she is the creator of the always-topical comic The Chronicles of Cruiscin Lan as well as the author of The Mindful Bard, a weekly survey of thought-provoking films, music, and books.



Community-Based Management Versus Backroom Deals

If you've driven along the Fundy shores of southwestern Nova Scotia at low tide you may have seen a solitary figure or two lurking at the outer edge of a mud flat, stooping enigmatically over small patches of ground. These people are digging up the little bivalve molluscs that have come to form an indispensable part of the world's dinner menu. Accomplished by using a bucket and a hack (a sawed-off pitchfork with tines bent perpendicular to the handle), clam harvesting is one of the

most cost-effective and environmentally safe ways of making or supplementing a year-round living off the sea.

Clams must be harvested at low tide, which happens twice a day and lasts for only a couple of hours. The clammer searches for holes in the mud and starts digging. Anything smaller than an inch and a half has to be put back into the hole to be allowed to grow to maturity.

Self-employed clammers take the clams home for shucking (shelling and beheading, pronounced SHAW-king) and sale to a licensed clam buyer. Clammers who dig on closed beaches for Innovative Fishery Products (IFP), a local company that buys and processes local clams for export and has become the employer of nearly every clam digger in Digby and Annapolis counties, have only to dig; the IFP truck drives to the beaches where its clammers are digging and loads the clams onto the truck directly from the beach. These clams are taken to the plant for depuration and shucking before being shipped to the buyer.

In the days before IFP's rise to power clam diggers were an independent lot. A hard worker could support a family and still have time to raise it properly. A digger was not at the mercy of fickle job markets and bosses. Digging required minimal formal education and only the most basic of tools. But since IFP has effectively cornered the market for clams, more and more clam diggers are finding themselves forced to work for the company, and the life just isn't what it used to be. The absence of benefits wasn't such a trial when clamming could generate a living wage, but now that diggers are being paid less for clams that are becoming harder to find some of them are wondering what they'll have to retire on or even what they're going to feed their kids. When wages drop and employment benefits peter out clam diggers are often forced to go out west to seek a better life, a last resort that has little appeal for community-minded fisher folk for whom family, community, and chosen livelihood trump fancy living.

It is an overcast autumn day in Digby, Nova Scotia. Sea breezes sweeten and cool the air. A dense crowd of clam diggers clad in the traditional regalia of Nova Scotian fisher folk—plaid jackets, duckbill hats, jeans, and rubber boots—is milling along the stretch of road between the boarded-up dairy treat building on the right and the bobby-socks era bowling alley on the left.

Environment Canada classifies clam beaches as either closed (prohibiting public clam harvesting due to mild contamination) or open. The federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) has ruled that clams

on closed beaches can only be harvested by companies with clam purification facilities known as depuration plants. Clams on open beaches can be harvested for commercial purposes by licensed clam diggers, and you and I and anyone else are legally entitled to dig a limited number of clams for personal consumption; British common law has long ruled that tidal beaches are public, and that any goods that can be harvested from them are common property.

IFP is currently the only company in Southwest Nova with an operating depuration plant, and hence the only body that can issue temporary permits to its employees to dig clams on closed beaches. Existing annual licenses permit IFP not only to harvest clams from open beaches like everyone else but also to be the sole harvester of clams on a prime stretch of closed clam beach at the head of St. Mary's Bay for the next ten years, or until the beach is declared open, whichever comes first. The company is preparing to submit an application for ten-year leases on 14 more closed clam beaches in Nova Scotia. Environmental pollution will probably bolster IFP's interests; future beach closures could widen the company's access to more and more closed beaches.

Stuck in the traffic caused by the crowd of clam diggers is IFP's Doug Bertram. It is his company's labour practices and resource management that are being protested. Doug Bertram calls to one of the protesters and asks him to fetch Ken Weir, the president of the Digby Clammers Association. Ken arrives and the two hammer out a resolution; if Ken calls a stop to the protest Doug will raise the price of clams to sixty cents a pound. He'll also hire back every one of the protesters, with the exception of three men he names. But the clammers association has recently agreed that if one of them has been fired for protesting then they have all been fired. Ken walks away. The protest continues.

Stories in local papers have clouded the issue, to the great frustration of stakeholders in this industry. The suggestion is clear; depuration companies are essential to the continued public consumption of clams. What's more, it's implied that the clam diggers are low-class, uneducated people who would sell contaminated clams to the queen if it meant another dollar in their pockets. What isn't mentioned is the fact that local clam diggers have been volunteering their time to valiant efforts to rescue their resource from being wiped out completely.

So far clam diggers have only been permitted to remove the small clams from open beaches for use in reseeded other open beaches; they would like to move clams from clam-dense closed beaches but have so far been denied permission by the DFO.

Another piece of information missing from news coverage is that depuration companies may not be essential to public safety. Clams are self-cleaning organisms that need only to be left to sit in a clean medium for a matter of days in order to become perfectly safe for human consumption.

One way to accomplish this is through relaying, the practice of removing clams from polluted beaches and moving them to clean beaches in order to facilitate self-purification. A New Brunswick study (Robinson 1991) utilized a number of stock enhancement practices, and found relaying to be a highly effective, low impact, and economical means of decontaminating clams.

Local clammers refer to the process as reseeded, a practice which they undertake voluntarily as part of a community-based management initiative in conjunction with the Clean Annapolis River Project. For the Nova Scotia Fundy region clammers, the purpose of reseeded is to bring up diminishing clam stocks, although it enables purification as well. So far clam diggers have only been permitted to remove the small clams from open beaches for use in reseeded other open beaches; they would like to move clams from clam-dense closed beaches but have so far been denied permission by the DFO.

Doug Bertram sends Ken Weir a court injunction demanding an end to the protest, and threatens to fine him \$45,000 a day until the protest ends. He tells the other clam diggers that if they continue their protest they will lose their houses. Fearful that Bertram might follow through, Weir calls for an end to the protest. The three men Bertram has named are dismissed, and clam prices remain too low to provide a decent living for the diggers.

In the fall of 2006 the provincial Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture (NSDFA) and the DFO publicly announced the signing of a joint federal-provincial agreement allowing depuration companies already in possession of one-year clam-harvesting licenses to become eligible for ten-year leases on closed beaches. IFP has only to submit an application and have it accepted in order for the company to control access to 14 beaches in the Fundy region. From where the locals are standing the agreement to grant ten-year leases to companies with depuration plants boils down to a backroom deal with IFP to gradually turn over a public resource to a private company, allowing that company to milk resources dry and then move elsewhere; it is a scenario all too familiar to Maritimers, and this time it's close to being personal.

Clam diggers and activists have long reported that a fawning DFO conceals IFP's policies and practices to a degree that justly arouses suspicion, and the licensing agreement looks like a pretty solid indication that they were right all along.

"Innovative's got such a bad system going now," says Weir, "why should the government reward it with ten more years?"

News of the impending monopoly quickly galvanizes the very groups who should have been consulted in the first place. An informal coalition comprising clam diggers, clam buyers, municipal councillors, First Nations representatives, and social activists agrees that IFP must not be granted ten-year leases to those 14 beaches. They decide to make public the following demands: "a transparent and public process which will allow for full disclosure of all data upon which the Federal and Provincial governments' decision is based"; and "a forum for all affected stakeholders to be heard, before the leases are issued." The groups decide to call representatives of the DFO, the NSDFA, and Environment Canada to a public meeting in Digby.

Doug Bertram of IFP refuses to allow me to quote him, forbids me to record our telephone conversation, and proceeds to rant for twenty minutes. After Weir's thorough and detailed analysis of the problems confronting the sustainability of the industry which sustains him, Bertram sounds like a yappy terrier. Weir has told me that Bertram once told a clammer who, after working at a breakneck pace managed to pull in \$1,200 in one week, that the man did not deserve such wages because he was uneducated. Judging from my telephone conversation with Bertram, I am no longer inclined to doubt the veracity of Weir's account.

It is January 31, 2007. The Digby municipal building is swarming with many of the same people who were at the protest. They have brought the same signs. They crowd into the municipal chambers where the meeting is scheduled to take place at 7:00. At a string of desks set up in horseshoe formation, officials from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), the Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture (NSDFA), and Environment Canada sit at microphones. This meeting is presided over by municipal councillor Linda Gregory, a fisherman's wife who rules the room with an iron hand. She announces that those wishing to ask questions of the seated officials must first approach the microphone in the centre of the horseshoe and introduce themselves.

The clammers at the back of the council chambers start to grumble. "We ain't puttin' up with it. Naw-sir. They better be tellin' us somethin' er there's hell to pay."

Linda holds up a finger and restores order with a sharp "SSHT!"

The clammers in this room, the communities they reside in, and an international market are all dependent upon an industry whose sustainability is now being threatened by a process of privatization secretly in the works for over a dozen years. Local citizens have had no input into this process because they simply did not know about it.

The federal government has long been in the habit of quickly sliding smelly deals under Maritimers' noses in the hopes that they won't catch a whiff until it's too late to send the deal back. A recent instance was the Digby wharf fiasco, in which locals were not told money was available to their community for wharf repairs until after a private company had squandered a generous chunk of the taxpayers' money and then left the wharf to rot.

Peter Stoffer, federal NDP fisheries critic, gives voice to the grounds for a growing frustration among Maritime fisher peoples: "You Maritimers witnessed the largest collapse of a public natural resource in the history of the world in the northern cod. Four billion dollars of your money went to adjust that industry. The corporate people didn't pay it, *you* paid it. And not one DFO [Department of Fisheries and Oceans] official was ever held accountable for that. What they're now allowing is for the company to have unfettered access for ten years with no other entrance into that fishery."

Stoffer expounds on what is wrong with the privatization process: "The fish do not belong to the company; they belong to the people of Canada, and the Supreme Court said that in 1997 in the case of Comeau Seafoods versus DFO: 'There is a public right to fish and it's a common property resource and not to be privatized.' Nothing's stopping Innovative Fishery Products, the Daley brothers, or Clearwater being sold to outside interests like Americans or Icelanders or whatever, and then you have foreigners controlling a public resource—the fish—just like what's happening in our forestry industry."

The existing network of government rules, regulations, and practices has indeed proven fortuitous for IFP. The more beach closures the merrier for a company that stands to increase profits and widen its monopoly every time contaminants are detected in the tidal waters of a clam flat. And thanks to the long series of bureaucratic hoops that have to be jumped through in order to have a closed beach reopened, an indefinite period of time will pass before the company loses access to those beaches.

This scenario might not look quite so bleak if the company had a history of responsible ecological practice. But by its own report, IFP is doing nothing to increase clam stocks. The DFO and the Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture (NSDFA) claim increased yields in recent years yet provide no evidence of any increase in biomass. In fact, one has only to go to the [DFO website](#) to see evidence of declining clam stocks and the suggestion that this may be due to the concentration of clam harvesters on open beaches as a result of increasing beach closures.

Sherry Pictou, of the Bear River First Nation, approaches the mic to point out that aboriginal treaty rights call for consultation with First Nations peoples before publicly owned natural resources can be leased to private businesses, and that no such consultation was initiated by government.

"Why should we agree to this process?" Sherry asks. "This is a violation of the human right to survival. Show me where this is good."

A clammer calls out, "Give that woman a medal!"

Ian Marshall, area director for DFO for South West Nova Scotia, points out that it is easier to hold one leaseholding company responsible to supply uncontaminated product than to monitor the product supplied by several hundred independent clam diggers.

In an earlier conversation, Ken Weir showed some sympathy for the DFO's quandary, but does not see a monopoly as the only feasible solution to government understaffing. "There are too many diggers everywhere," he admits. "But there are only five plants that buy clams in this area. Just go to the plant. If the clams are small, burn [penalize] the plant, and burn the guy that dug the clams and that would eliminate the problem. But I tell that to DFO and it's like I got three heads on me or something."

The DFO insists that the availability of ten-year leases to IFP is necessary to protect the business's investment in the industry. They also claim that ten-year leases can provide IFP, the one leaseholding company eligible for a ten-year lease, the opportunity to invest in stock enhancement, yet have not demanded that the company engage in stock enhancement or even good environmental stewardship. Tom Vitiello, Annapolis Royal municipal councillor, expresses amazement that ten-year leases will be granted in the absence of an independent study of the company's environmental practices.

"I am disappointed," Vitiello shakes his head. "In fact I am astounded!"

Also astounded is Arthur Bull of the Bay of Fundy Marine Resource Centre, who asks that any decisions the government makes be evidence based. Bull asks Marshall Giles of the NSDFA if the lack of information on company stock enhancement could be made a matter of public record. Giles says no, because the privacy act protects the interests of the company. The room rumbles and groans.

Bull points out that the key point is not the productivity of the company but rather stock assessment, and asks for evidence that the stock has increased. Again his request is refused, but he is told that his questions will be taken back to the office.

Plaid-shirted Mary McWhinney approaches the mic. "First of all," she announces in a powerhouse voice, "I wanna say somethin' to that fuller sittin' over there." She points to Ian Marshall of the DFO. "The whole time he was talkin'," she says, pointing back to Vitiello, "you was sittin' there with a big smirk on your face. Now you owe him an apology!"

Marshall sheepishly asserts that he meant no harm, that he was not laughing at the councillor, but apologizes anyway. Mary turns back to Vitiello.

"Are you satisfied?" she asks.

"Uh, yes!" he blurts out in amazement. "I wasn't aware that he was laughing, so no harm done."

Mary goes on to ask the officials, "You said you was here to listen. Has a decision been made yet about these leases? And can anything we say change your mind?"

"No one has made an application for these leases yet," says Marshall Giles.

This keeps getting repeated, not only as if it makes a difference, but also as if it were true. The fact is that IFP has already been granted a ten-year lease on a prime stretch of closed clam beach at the head of St. Mary's Bay. The company is now poised to submit applications for 14 more closed beaches in the area.

A clammer must harvest at least a ton-and-a-half of clams from open areas before he or she will be hired to dig clams for IFP. This means the open beaches are heavily harvested.

"I've never seen the evidence one way or the other but what the clam diggers say is that that could wipe us out," says Arthur Bull.

Ken Weir claims that many flats are now stripped of clams. The diggers now have to drive up to 30 miles to dig, in a region where once you could walk to a bountiful flat from your own back yard.

Environment Canada undertakes painstaking testing procedures to ensure that clams found beneath contaminated tidal waters do not reach the marketplace without first having been cleansed of impurities. But funds are low and staff are few and so more time than necessary may elapse before a previously closed beach can be reclassified as safe for clam harvesting by anyone but diggers for IFP.

When asked for long-term solutions, Denise Sullivan of the Annapolis Watershed Resource Committee states, "We're looking at the way things are done in coastal Maine. Their model is very different from ours in terms of who has legislative authority over the resource, and all of their management is done on a much more local scale."

Ken Weir and fellow clam harvesters agree, and have been working with the watershed committee to implement the early stages of community-based management in the area: "DFO aren't there to help us—they're out there to help the company. We want community-based management. We want to set limits to conserve our industry."

From a couple of angles the future looks hopeful. Beaches reseeded by volunteers are now peppered with clams from low- to high-water marks; in two years these clams will reach maturity and be ready for market.

"The Annapolis Watershed Resource Committee are actually looking quite strong," says Arthur Bull. "Clamming, unlike codfish, can be brought back a hundred percent. You can actually clean up the beach and clams will grow back, but you have to actually clean it up. You have to manage it. You can't just leave it."

Ken Weir reports that the DFO has recently agreed to aggressively enforce size limits, which is one means of increasing clam stocks. In the past, IFP was reputed to be lax in weeding out smaller clams; the marketplace, especially restaurants, relished the smaller clams and so there was little penalty for illegally marketing them. Enforcing size limits is one effective means of protecting the resource.

Things could be rosier. With greater government compliance toward (or less interference in) community-based management, *all* southwest Nova Scotia clam beaches might indefinitely continue to enrich both the local economy and the international diet. But for now the reseeded is done on the clambers' own time. The clam diggers' associations have submitted a proposal to the DFO requesting that clambers' employment benefits be extended through the summer months to enable the diggers to reseed depleted beaches. Such an arrangement would bring larger numbers of clambers to this endeavour for longer hours, practically guaranteeing its success. So far the proposal has not been rejected but the clambers have been informed that there is no money available for that sort of thing.

Canada's *Oceans Act* endorses the involvement of local communities in the management of coastal aquatic resources. But according to a recent paper by Melanie G. Wiber, of the University of New Brunswick's Anthropology Department, and Arthur Bull, ". . .the law has more often been deployed in ways that facilitated blocking participatory governance of resource management. Unless and until the political will exists to shift the real barriers to participatory governance, significant changes to governance structures will not emerge."¹

On the afternoon of May 25, 2007, I received this email from Arthur Bull:

Hi Folks,

I am writing to tell you that I got a call from Greg Roach at Nova Scotia Fisheries and Aquaculture this afternoon, and he told me that the Minister signed the leases [the leases allowing IFC sole harvesting rights for the 14 closed clam beaches mentioned earlier]. He said that there were some changes as a result of our interventions: 1). the areas could be opened if they were tested as clean, 2). the Annapolis River lease is only for five years, 3). the Minister can force the company to cooperate with conservation work, and 4). there will be public access for non clam harvesting use. I do not think any of these makes any difference to the essential privatization of this resource in this place. I think it will take some time to grasp the implications of this . . .

Since receiving Arthur's email, I came across this quote from the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, which may apply to this situation: "Power, like a desolating pestilence, pollutes whatever it touches . . ."

Arthur's message is followed swiftly by this from Sherry Pictou, who has just heard the devastating news:

My heart is overflowing with Grandma Sarah,
Teaching us to dig clams.
As she wrapped our harvest in foil
And cooked it over heated coals beneath the sand
I knew this was for me,
And for my lifetime . . .
And those lifetimes
Before and after me,
Where shell heaps
Bare the answers to existence
In both life and death.
The clam, the beautiful clam,
Hidden within its intergenerational
Purple blue shell,
The food of life,
Ancient food for future generations . . .
Oh my brother,
So contented as you walk slowly
The back road, your bucket full of clams,
Your clam hack,
So serene and quiet,
This walk of ancient paths,
You, carrying so quietly
The ancestral knowledge;

The rest of us
Are too absorbed
In the fast pace of tomorrow
To learn, or feel,
With our hearts, today.
I see you there
With your shucking knife,
For a second
Trying to teach me,
As your ancient laughter,
Of fathers and grandfathers
Before you,
Rings loud to this day
In my heart of all hearts
As I struggle to learn
This art now floating along
Bay shores and inlets,
And continue to do so
Today . . .

If you would like to help, please share the following concerns with Loyola Hearn, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans:

- that the government actively support community-based management of fisheries in Nova Scotia;
- that as the government works toward forming any decisions which could affect coastal resources in Nova Scotia it will implement a transparent and public process allowing for full disclosure of all data upon which the federal and provincial governments' decision is based; and
- that a forum for all affected stakeholders will play a significant role in any decision reached.

Email min@dfo-mpo.gc.ca (please include your postal and email address), or write to:

The Honourable Loyola Hearn, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans
Department of Fisheries & Oceans
200 Kent Street
15th Floor
Ottawa, ON K1A 0E6

¹ Wiber, M. G. and Bull, A., 2006. "Re-scaling governance for better resource management?" Prepared for the Law and Governance Conference, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology.



NATURE NOTES:

from the backyard to the biosphere

By Zoe Dalton

Canada Day Tirade: Sustainability in Canada's First National Urban Park in Question

From the very first Nature Notes column in 2002, Zoe Dalton has brought readers an accessible yet informed look at this remarkable planet we call home. In "Canada Day Tirade," she examines the challenges of preserving protected areas in the face of growing urbanization. This article originally appeared July 13, 2007, in issue 1526.

I am still winding down from Canada Day festivities with my family, thinking back to the ice cream, pony rides and fairground activities of the day. But it isn't only these sweet memories I find floating through my mind as the evening comes to a close.

I'm left on this Canada Day in a mood of reflection. Who could do other than reflect on a weekend marked by both a National Day of Action by Aboriginal people across the country, and a celebration of Canada's coming into being as a nation? However, reflection on the questionable basis of our country's history is met in my mind by an equally perturbing reflection on our country's geography, particularly the geography of our protected spaces.

A bit bleak sounding, I know, but it wasn't a dark cloud that came over me on this Canada Day, but rather a petition. I was approached mid-merriment by an earnest, clipboard-toting gentleman letting me know that the park in which I was honouring our country was to see 212 of its 572 acres go for housing development.

I had been aware that part of this park's mandate was to cover the costs required for its maintenance. However, I was shocked to hear of the scale to which this land—federal land put aside for protection and the long-term good of the public—was to become urbanized. The shock became increasingly pronounced as I stood, pen in hand, considering this petition, surrounded on all sides by park signs, booths, and brochures whose most prominent linguistic feature was the term *sustainability*.

572 acres of open green space in Canada's largest, most populated (and rapidly growing) city; a huge chunk of land transferred to Parks Canada from the Department of National Defence and touted as a first in our country: a national urban park; a self-proclaimed emblem of sustainability in action. What jumps to mind given this scenario is an incredible opportunity for a world-class, ecologically meaningful green space in the midst of an urban landscape; an accessible parkland for nature-hungry urbanites to satisfy that innate need for connection to

something other than concrete; and a space to give back to wildlife in a landscape in which so much habitat is continuously being taken away.

The ecological significance of the park has not been completely lost on those in management. Sections of the park are being rehabilitated, and with impressive results. A visitor to the newly restored areas is met by swallows, monarch butterflies, bird calls, the soothing sounds of swaying grasses in the wind, and the sweet smells of fresh, abundant vegetation so rare in the city. But somehow, this aspect of the park has been relegated to a position of relatively minor importance. In the development plans are sports complexes, commercial areas, and the neighbourhoods referred to above. What, I cannot help but think, does such a plan have to do with sustainability, and how, I have to ask, will another set of subdivisions and retail outlets benefit all Canadians over the long term?

National parks like Banff, infamous among conservationists for the scale of development within what are supposed to be protected areas, seem like innocents compared to Downsview. Those in management at Banff can be blamed for letting things slide, for allowing something small to get too big. But what can be said of those in charge at Downsview, when their initial vision for this rare gem of an opportunity is based on relegating nature to a back-seat position and opening their arms wide to development corporations?

Sustainability may encompass economic as well as ecological goals. But national parks occupy a special place in our collective consciousness not because of the outstanding shopping opportunities or housing designs they offer, but because they are those rare spaces where—for once—economy must give way to ecology. The land we have decided to protect in our national parks system needs a little sanctity, as well as recognition that these spaces are unique and precious precisely because they do not offer all that can be found in the next stop along the highway. Needless to say, pen hit paper with great vigour: I signed the petition.



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AU Profiles:

Ryan Nabozniak

by Christina M. Frey

Along with the advantages of being an AU learner comes the challenge of getting to know fellow students. In Christina's insightful profiles, readers get to know the faces behind the names as AU students share their dreams, goals, and advice for success. In this profile, computer science student Ryan Nabozniak shared his thoughts on the importance of networking with fellow AU students. This article originally appeared August 17, 2007, in issue 1530.



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](#) has a large group of Athabasca students. Ryan is involved in the Facebook group for AU computer and information 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."

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 head. "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."

HEALTH CONSCIOUSNESS

Rob Fursiewicz

In his Health Consciousness articles, Rob examines some of the health-related products and marketing strategies facing today's consumers. In this article, he takes a closer look at the phenomenon of rub-on medications, in particular a topical stick purported to cure headaches. This article originally appeared August 24, 2007, in issue 1531.



Apply Bamboozlement Directly to The Forehead!

You've seen the commercials, starting with the now-classic "HeadOn, apply directly to the forehead!" obnoxiousness. A more recent incarnation—"I hate your commercials, but your product is amazing!"—is a similarly crass, low-budget mess in which some schlub rants about the lameness of the very commercial you're subjected to ("Wow, I can't stand this commercial either," you tell yourself), while simultaneously raving about a magical stick of wax. ("Wow, maybe this product really is amazing," you think, convinced by the everyday-Joe quality of the quasi-actors vouching for the product's efficacy.)

Hopefully you haven't bought into this scheme, but many people likely have by now, since the commercial is very visible and the product lines pharmacy aisles in Canada and the United States. You've seen the commercial, and now you see the tubes of apparent medi-miracles on your trusted pharmacist's shelf—so how could it *not* be legitimate?

To start with, Florida-based Miralus Healthcare's HeadOn is essentially a tube of overpriced lip balm, and the so-called medical ingredients are contained in quantities of just a few ppm (parts per million). The product is based on "homeopathic" principles, which gives the manufacturer some sort of excuse for selling you a stick of wax. HeadOn's stated active ingredients include white bryony and potassium bichromate, with different formulations containing minuscule amounts of these or other "homeopathic" ingredients.

The ads use blunt force and repetition to drill the product into your head. This gimmick is needed since there is no medical evidence backing up Miralus' claims. The cooling sensation it can provide on the forehead, due to menthol, seems to inspire positive reactions from some—but the actual headache or migraine relief some may feel is only a placebo effect at best. One writer describes using it, maintaining that, "When stricken with a headache, shortly afterward, I found the product entirely useless."

The vice president of sales and marketing for Miralus has stated that HeadOn works by "stimulating your body to overcome a headache or migraine" instead of masking symptoms "like conventional headache medicines." Truly the words of a marketing wizard with nothing solid to stand on. If stimulating your body was enough to overcome a migraine, vigorous exercise or cocaine would be surefire migraine remedies. However, this isn't known to be the case.

Amazingly, an ABC News report asking Miralis how HeadOn worked got a response saying that "the proof is in Head On's sales." In less than one year, more than six million tubes were sold.

So it works because people buy it—talk about circular reasoning! Surely its sales are not because of the incredible market penetration, intense hype, and clever marketing campaign.

Nonetheless, the marketers are geniuses in at least one respect: Seth Stevensen of *Slate* theorizes that “These ads *give* viewers headaches, thus spurring demand.”

One pharmacist believes that OTC (over-the-counter) manufacturers “can sell whatever they want, and imply its intended use, without using things like science or reason to back up their claims. What’s even worse, we sell [HeadOn at our pharmacy], which implies that the licensed professionals behind the counter tacitly approve of their use. Make no mistake, I will always lead the consumer away from these types of products at my counter. Unfortunately, they don’t always ring their items up at the pharmacy counter.”

Pharmaceutically speaking, rubbing something on one’s forehead would not ease pain in the brain. It seems to make intuitive sense—pain in the forehead, therefore medicine on the forehead!—but what about protective barriers, such as the skull? Unless HeadOn absorbs from the forehead skin into the blood, it wouldn’t enter the brain. If it did absorb into the bloodstream, it could be rubbed anywhere, not just the forehead. The marketer is preying on those unable to make a proper distinction between a genuine medical product and a stick of wax.

Pharmaceutical companies, as criticized and hated as they are by some segments of society, actually have dual goals of making money and helping society. The makers and marketers of HeadOn and its related wax-sticks have created this product solely as a money-making enterprise—in my view, there is no benefit to anyone but Miralis and the stores and pharmacies selling it. Society loses, as the least-informed spend their income on a sham.

On HeadOn’s website, Miralis maintains that HeadOn “is one of the safest medications available on the market today.”

Indeed. Logically speaking, a drug that is 6 or 12 parts per million of its active ingredient won’t cause any damage. Conversely, it won’t provide any benefit, either. The ingredient content is negligible, leaving purchasers with a menthol-infused wax.

Miralus also makes ActivOn (an ache and pain reliever) and FirstOn (an anti-itch ointment), among others. Expect more variations of the wax roll-on in the next few years, as long as OTC regulations remain lax. The marketing platform revolves around fooling the consumer based on promises and premises bordering on falsity (do you really think the marketers believe in homeopathy?), and getting the product into drug and grocery stores to manufacture credibility. The only limit to the influx of profit is, how many variations can be dreamed up? How creative are the marketers involved?

On that note, here are a few new product line suggestions for the marketers and producers of this fine stable of “medications” . . .

InsulOn: the roll-on wax-stick treatment for diabetes, the formerly incurable condition! Rub wherever and whenever you inject insulin, and InsulOn will heal your pancreatic failings—homeopathically, “through the nerves”—in 4 to 6 years! “I hate your commercials and this crap clearly isn’t the long-lost cure for diabetes, but I love your product!”

**“Everybody knows about the risks
and dangers of tobacco—but not
everyone is knowledgeable about
the efficacy, science, or truth
behind these OTC ‘health’
products.”**

DeadOn: apply to the hands before hunting, to steady nerves in order to maximize gun-toting accuracy. The makers of DeadOn guarantee that, with use of the product, your hunting skills will be no worse than “Dead-Eye Dick” Cheney’s. For added benefit, apply directly to the rifle!

HardOn: no explanation needed. Will be sold as a cheap roll-on alternative to Viagra/Cialis/Levitra, but instead of actually working, will be marketed based on its homeopathic one part-per-million content of one of many alleged aphrodisiacs. Maybe chocolate? Or tiger penis?

HairOn: baldness is a bazillion-dollar industry with countless devotees dedicated to finding a solution, so people will buy no matter what the proven effectiveness. Active ingredient? Who cares; just throw in something that sounds like it might, in the words of Miralis’ Marketing VP, “stimulate your body to overcome” lack of hair! Apply directly to the bald spot!

Clearly, a major issue here is pharmacies stocking this hocus-pocus gimmickry on their shelves. Selling it in pharmacies lends it an air of credibility, with the pharmacist giving it their apparent endorsement. The debate about selling cigarettes in pharmacies should also be applied to selling deceptively marketed, useless items like HeadOn. Is it ethical for a pharmacy to sell? Pharmacies across Canada have mostly stopped selling tobacco, either by regulation (in many provinces) or conscious individual pharmacy decisions. Knowingly selling useless products to unsuspecting customers in a pharmacy is more unethical than a pharmacy selling tobacco products—because any pharmacist worth his or her weight in Vicodin will know that HeadOn isn’t worth the wax it’s presented in, while a potential purchaser may not.

Everybody knows about the risks and dangers of tobacco—but not everyone is knowledgeable about the efficacy, science, or truth behind these OTC “health” products. Seeing them in a health-care establishment, after seeing the ads, will fool people into thinking these products are legitimate. It’s time for pharmacies to stop participating in the bamboozlement of customers trusting these health providers to put their health and well-being first. If governments don’t do anything about this deceptive marketing, health professionals enjoying the public’s trust should take the first step and say no to any health product they know to be useless.

THE VOICE WANTS YOU



The Education Beat

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IN THE NAME OF HONOUR

Alessandra Palmer

In her first Voice article, Alessandra tackled a tough subject: so-called honour killings. She gave this broad topic a personal focus through the case of 17-year-old Du'a Khalil Aswad. This article originally appeared October 5, 2007, in issue 1537.



She is kicked again and again and again. At one point, what looks like a concrete block is thrown on her. Whether this is the fatal blow or not is unclear. What is clear with frightening certainty is that the girl, 17-year-old Du'a Khalil Aswad, lies dead, murdered in cold blood by an angry mob; murdered because as a Yezidi girl she loved the wrong man, a Sunni Muslim. And the people of the village, among them her own family, killed her in the name of "honour."

The four-minute video tells you none of this of course. It only documents the murder of a girl, like thousands of other girls, for whom it is too late. What motives the unknown poster had for putting it online may never be known. Optimists would like to think he did it to alert the world to the atrocities known as honour killings still being committed in Iraq and all over the world. The pessimist in me says he did it for an entirely different reason: to warn other Kurdish girls like Du'a that this is what happens when you step out of line.

What is unique about this case is that the frenzied crowd intent on killing Du'a was captured on the cellphones of the very people who are kicking, stomping, and ultimately killing her by crushing her head with a cinder block. What is so heart-rending is the fact that we get to see that Dua is alive and trying to protect her body as best she can from these men; men who probably watched her grow up and maybe grew up with her.

Sadly, this is not an isolated case. A 25-year-old British Columbian beautician was kidnapped and taken to Punjab where she was murdered, again for loving the wrong man—in this case a poor auto rickshaw driver. In Kurdistan, a girl burns to death every day. In Pakistan, a woman was axed to death.

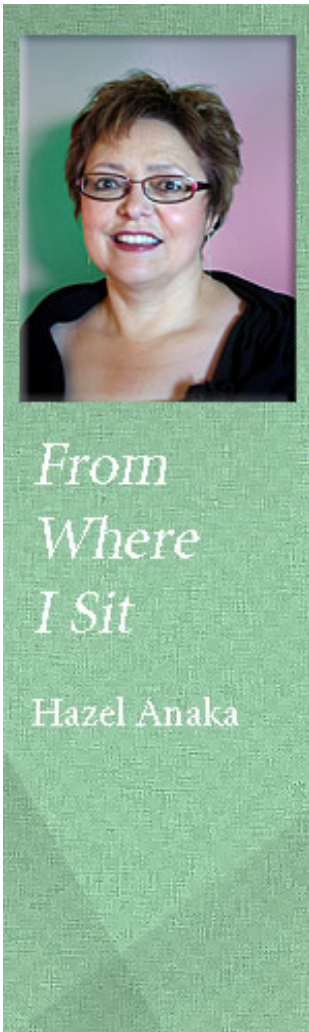
In Du'a's case, retaliation was swift: 23 Yezidi men were killed by Muslims and four of her assailants were arrested.

But there were an estimated one thousand in the crowd the day she was killed. One thousand people, some who were the assailants, some who egged the assailants on, and all who could have stopped the brutal onslaught but chose not to.

According to UN statistics, these cases are only scraping the surface. Du'a Khalil Aswad's murder is only one of the 5,000 honour killings that will be carried out this year.

Five thousand is a large, daunting number. Instead remember one: Du'a Khalil Aswad who died at 17 for loving the wrong man.

And while you remember her, ask what you can do to stop honour killings. Sites like the International Campaign Against Honour Killings and Amnesty International are great places to start.



More of the Same or Something Meaningful?

Hazel's sage and refreshing viewpoint has been a favourite of Voice readers since 2003. In this column originally published January 5, 2007 (issue 1501), she shares some unique gift ideas designed to make a meaningful difference.

Enclosed in a plastic bag with last November's issue of *Style At Home* magazine was a copy of the World Vision 2005 Christmas Gift Guide. I hung onto it because I thought it would make a great column. The other day the 2006 guide arrived.

These Christmas guides are like nothing you've ever seen before. There isn't a scented candle or sequin sweater or electronic gadget to be found. You'll be pleased to know there are three ways to order: mail, online, or an 800 number. Mastercard, Visa, American Express or a cheque are the available payment options. Bonus—no shipping charges.

In a creative move by World Vision to capture the hearts and wallets of potential donors, the catalogue is full of livestock. Yes, livestock. Poultry, piglets, goats, rabbits, heifers, and sheep are available for sale. Your purchase/donation is used to buy the product, which is then distributed to a child or family in one of World Vision's projects overseas.

This fundraiser is genius. For those people turned off by the blatant commercialization of Christmas or the embarrassment of riches and over-consumption of our society, this is a very palatable choice. It appeals to the altruistic desire to do good, give a hand up to those less fortunate, and get that warm, fuzzy feeling in the process.

According to the product description of "two hens and a rooster," "Up to 150 eggs a year explain why a set of breeding chickens and a rooster is our most popular gift, year after year. Two hens and a rooster are the beginning of a fantastic flock that can provide a healthy source of protein and steady income for years to come. What a perfect way to help a struggling family feed their children and achieve self-reliance!" All that for only 50 bucks.

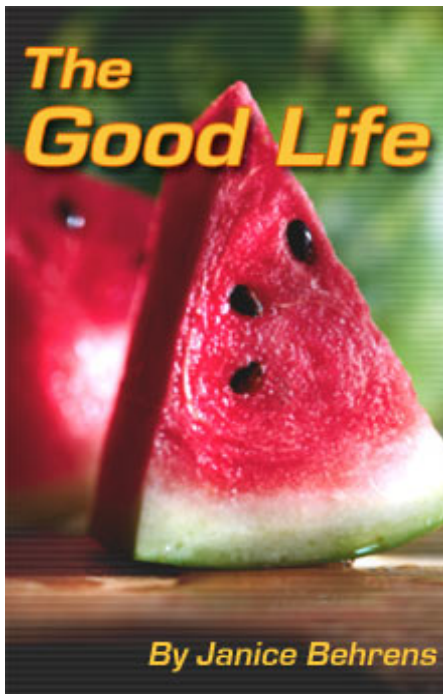
I guess the \$700 water buffalo wasn't a big seller, because it's not in the current catalogue. It seems that World Vision replaced it with the turkey farm for \$1,200, two turkeys for \$75, and four for \$150. Though it's not marked as such, there seems to be a sale on goats. The price has dropped from \$150 per goat or two for \$300 as advertised last year, to \$100 and \$200 respectively in 2006. Pigs, on the other hand, those plump and perfect presents, according to the catalogue, have gone up in price by five dollars.

If you're not into buying a stable of animals for \$1,200, you can purchase clothing, school supply kits, clean water, fruit trees, immunizations, and emergency food supplies.

Groups at school, church, or the office are encouraged to pool their resources to make a greater impact. I've just requested the kit. Who knows what might happen this Christmas?

Encouraging is the fact that program spending has risen to 84.3% (out of each dollar raised) from 79.9% last year. Both the fundraising and administration costs have dropped by a percentage point each.

So this year will it be more of the same or something truly meaningful? The answer is clear, from where I sit.



The Mythology of Back to the Basics

In The Good Life, Janice's focus is on the little details that mean so much, and her keen observations illuminate truths we often miss. This column originally appeared January 12, 2007, in issue 1502.

A friend of ours, a school teacher, informs us that in recent years there has been what amounts to a minor exodus of students away from the public school system in favour of private schools. Sometimes, this move is initiated for religious or other valid and well thought out reasons. Often, however, the reason for this migration involves a sort of misguided nostalgia. The belief is that private schools, with uniform requirements, adherence to a stricter academic curriculum more focused on basics such as grammar and arithmetic, and a higher emphasis on respect for authority, are somehow better able to prepare our young for the supposedly grim realities of life. Somehow we have come to believe, as a society, that we should return to some mythological golden age, when children were sheltered inside a bubble of rigid discipline and encouraged to cast off frivolity as they prepared

to enter the working world.

The public school system is not immune to this sort of backward-looking thinking. Over the years, we have seen schools place more and more emphasis and funding on subject areas such as math, science, and computer science, whilst funding for other educational areas, such as fine arts, music, drama, and physical education has been steadily reduced. The thinking is, I suppose, that math and computers are serious business. Mastering these subject areas will help our young people become successful citizens and contribute to our country's economic success.

I'm not sure whether this sort of thinking has any merit. By hammering our kids over the heads with math texts are we really going to create more productive citizens? More importantly, though, I think this emphasis on getting back to the basics betrays an essential sickness at the root of our society. We have somehow convinced ourselves that exposing our children to art, music, food, theatre, physical education, and poetry is all very well, but not truly essential. If it is necessary to make a choice, it is those luxury programs that will be first to get the axe.

It has often amazed me that we spend so much time teaching our children the things that we think they will need to know later in life. We are obsessed with teaching them grammar and math, and developing their accounting and computer skills. If they don't show aptitude in those areas, we panic that they will come to some sort of a terrible end.

But in truth, technology is becoming more and more user-friendly every year. Think about grammar-checking and spell-checking computer applications, for instance. On the other hand, we spend relatively little time and energy teaching children to enjoy the pleasures of going for a walk in the woods; creating a piece of sculpture or music; preparing and enjoying a healthy, delicious meal; or simply enjoying the company of others. In reality, it is those things that we seem to value so little that are the best and most important things in life. Without them, we become only lifeless drones, shackled to computer desks. Is this the sort of future success we want for our children?

The wry commentary and political savvy of the Chronicles characters have made the comic a favourite of Voice readers. "A Love Supreme" originally appeared January 12, 2007, in issue 1502.

The Chronicles of Cruiscin Lan

by
Wanda
Waterman
St. Louis





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

The Mindful Bard's search for thought-provoking, enlightening voices has introduced readers to an eclectic mix of writers, musicians, and filmmakers. In this review of *Deep Economy*, the Bard looks at the connections between healthy communities and economic stability. This column originally appeared September 21, 2007, in issue 1535.

Book: Bill McKibben, *Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future*

Publication date: 2007

Publisher: Henry Holt, New York, NY

We should slap ourselves for saying money isn't everything when it may bloody well *be* everything for the Chinese worker caring for an ailing parent, the Congolese mother whose children are starving, or the penniless American needing a heart transplant.

Until these persons' incomes hit a level at which basic needs and a few luxuries fall within reach, more money will indeed equal more happiness. Beyond that level—and this is key—money does not increase the quality of life.

Another title for this book might be: *More is Better, But Only Up to a Point*. *Deep Economy* is a skilfully wrought challenge to that throng of power-wielding Greenspan dittos who sweep aside demands for tax increases and better social security on the grounds that such measures would place limits on economic growth, limits tantamount to economic suicide. As McKibben makes clear, unlimited growth has become a very, very bad thing for all concerned, and the sooner we slow down this wildly listing hay wagon the better.

When I first saw Shumacher's book *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*, I did a double take. What? You mean economics doesn't recognize that people are important? I was soon to discover that indeed it does not. A healthy economy is a growing economy and that's that. It's all about the numbers. Economic growth has brought us gains for which we must be grateful. But untrammelled economic growth is only good *up to a point*. Beyond that point it destroys the environment, creates poverty, and worse: for all its costs economic growth does not bring happiness, not even to its beneficiaries.

The current materialistic excess of Americans alone is sucking the earth's udder dry and emerging economies like India and China are now hell-bent on achieving the same pace of consumption. If America continues to use up as much stuff as it does right now and the Indians and Chinese come close to catching up, the toll on natural resources will be several times what the planet can produce. This taxing of the environment will of course wipe us out, if the pollution created doesn't off us first.

I could go on and on about how bad things are, but the gist of this book is ever so much cheerier than that. Not only is there a way out, but a growing worldwide army is now actively engaged in carrying out the slow, laborious changes necessary for the survival of the human race. Local, community-supported agriculture,

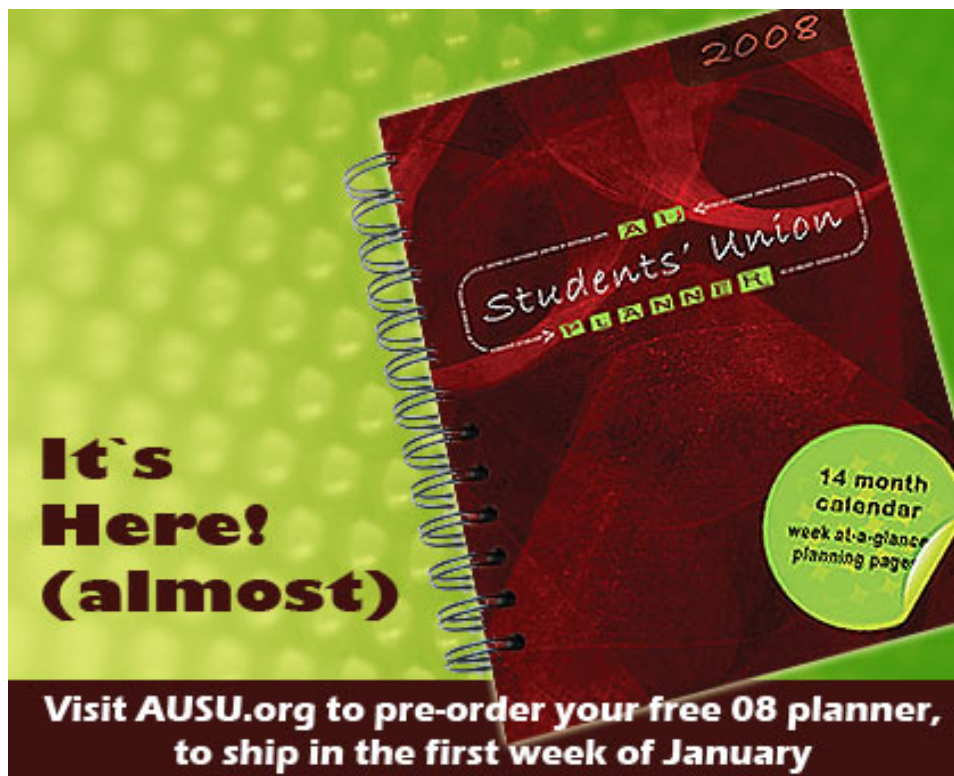
radio, music, currency, schools, politics, urban gardens, and transportation are all adding a vital dimension to economic growth, *deepening* it, if you will.

What is needed to “deepen” the economy? Community, community, community. Communities provide myriad sources of wealth that is sustainable and stable and which brings joy and personal growth to our lives. The greatest thing about farmers' markets, for example, is not that you can buy fresh, local, organic produce and even sell some yourself, but that people actually spend a lot more time talking to each other at farmers' markets than they do at the huge supermarket chains. The crowning wealth of communities is human connectedness. But it isn't enough to simply believe in community; you have to put your wallet behind it, because the building (and destroying) of communities is dependent on how we choose to spend our money.

Convention would have us believe that we creative types do much better as solitaires labouring in our ivory towers or in rooms of our own, but history and experience show us the folly, for people of imagination, of isolationism, of its tendency to lead to depression, substance abuse, and a fatal abdication of the artist's responsibility to society. McKibben refers us to ancient Greek city states and Italian Renaissance communities wherein arts and ideas flourished because people were interdependent and in frequent communion with each other.

Stop saying, “I know I should, but . . .” The world McKibben reports on and recommends isn't perfect, and it does mean consuming less. But it is rich in health, happiness, ecological balance, creative problem-solving, closeness to nature, and freedom of intellectual exploration. What are you waiting for?

The Bard could use some help scouting out new material. If you discover any books, compact disks, or movies which came out in the last twelve months and which you think fit the Bard's criteria, please drop a line to bard@voicemagazine.org. If I agree with your recommendation, I'll thank you online.





Befriending the Enemy

Regular Voice readers will recognize Bill's inimitable style: a lyrical, and often surreal, take on this topsy-turvy world. In this slightly more prosaic outing, he examines the ambiguity between friend and foe. This column originally appeared October 5, 2007, in issue 1537.

It's a night in late summer. We're gathered around the barbecue in the back yard of my friend's cabin on the Sunshine Coast. There are maybe a half dozen of us, drinking beer and eating grilled oysters. There's this American guy from Idaho—checked shirt, baseball cap, one of those foghorn voices you can hear from miles away. He's plump, maybe in his mid-fifties, owns a chain of repair garages.

Turns out he's a Bush supporter, with a big-time grudge against trade unions and the "liberal media." He's smoking a miniature cigar that smells like it's been dipped in bat guano. He's the kind of guy to whom any true-blooded, progressive-minded, socialist-leaning bloke like myself could very easily take an intense dislike.

Problem is, he's an utterly charming and apparently decent man. Turns out he's spent a lot of his weekends over the past few years helping to set up a community garden for disadvantaged senior citizens. He's been married to the same woman for 26 years, and he talks about her with affection and respect.

When he's not aggressively ranting about politics, the stories he tells about his travels through India, his dysfunctional family, the fortunes he has made and lost over the years, are interesting and filled with a subtle, self-deprecating humour. Near the end of the night, I see him in the living room, surrounded by four or five young kids, my daughter included, who are watching him perform some pretty well-done magic tricks. Their faces are alive with laughter and delight.

Contrast this to another evening, some months earlier. I'm sitting in an Irish pub in downtown Vancouver in the company of two friends and a third man I know slightly, a writer whose work I have admired for years. I have more than one volume of his work sitting on my bookshelf at home. When I read his words on the page, they seem to me to be illuminated with grace and beauty and wisdom.

Problem is, I find myself thinking that, in person, he's a tedious windbag—self-aggrandizing and almost completely humourless. I have this insane urge to pour his glass of single malt Scotch down the back of his shirt.

Our opinions of, and relationships with, others should be much simpler and more clear-cut. The people who don't share our views and values should be obvious buffoons, objects of clear ridicule. Unfortunately, it doesn't quite work that way. Time and again, we find that relationships are frustratingly complex, challenging our pat, easily formed assumptions and prejudices. Which, come to think of it, may not be such a bad thing after all.

MUSIC TO EAT LUNCH TO

Mandy Gardner

Mandy's love of music is contagious, whether she's reviewing the latest punk CD or recounting an afternoon in the mosh pit. In this column from October 19, 2007 (issue 1539), she considers the staying power of the vinyl record in this digital age.

That Old Vinyl Feeling



Five years ago I bought a copy of NOFX's *The Decline* on vinyl. The 18-minute song was to me, and still is, one of the greatest recordings of modern punk and having it on vinyl made me feel like it was all the more a piece of musical history. For this one special record I hunted down a second-hand turntable, somehow managed to hook it up to my existing stereo (by nicely asking my more technically minded boyfriend to do it for me, if I remember correctly) and carefully set the needle on the vinyl. It made a terrifying zip sound as the needle made contact; it crackled, and then I sat in awe for the entire 18-minute song, plus the B-side of "Clams have Feelings Too." It was a wonderful moment, but soon my turntable broke and my record went into storage to await an uncertain fate.

When I took my things out of storage a few months ago, this record was reclaimed, stroked lovingly, and then fastened to my bedroom wall amidst posters of Bam Margera and Chris Cole, Nonpoint, The Strokes, and of course my beloved NOFX skateboard deck. It was at home; it had a purpose and even though I didn't fully expect to listen to it again I had some vague idea that one day I would find a working turntable in a second-hand store that could be sufficiently rigged up to a modern stereo. But it didn't seem at all plausible. Today I happily stand corrected, however, as my brand new Emerson stereo not only boasts a three-CD disc changer, double cassette player, and radio but also a shiny new turntable on the very top! *The Decline* was immediately played, crackles and all, and I have to confess that the intimacy of the vinyl, the needle, and the visual spinning has something warm and affectionate to it that CDs and MP3s never will.

During the golden age of the CD player, it was unabashedly assumed that plastic was in every way superior to its vinyl predecessor and because of this the vast majority of record companies stopped pressing their releases on vinyl. If you wanted to buy music, you bought it on CD (after a previous affair with cassette tapes, of course). Subsequent to the end of vinyl pressings, stereo systems were no longer built to accommodate records, and trying to find something to play your old collection on was something that involved a lot of trips to second-hand shops and investigations on EBay.

Thanks to the perseverance of a few bands and music appreciators who just couldn't get over the bond between music and vinyl, however, a few special pressings were made available during the 1990s for bands like Green Day who had a tradition of pressing each album in green vinyl. Collectors scooped them up; most of us didn't see the point.

The strange thing is that, unlike the 8-track and the cassette tape, the record has retained a status within the music industry that seemingly can't be touched by modern innovations. Perhaps for some it is the nostalgia and for younger generations it is the novelty, but for whatever reason the vinyl pressing is something revered by young and old alike. I like to think of records in terms of old masters and new musical advances: an old Cheap Trick album is valuable because of its age, condition, and obviously because the music itself represents an era and a genre that directly affected much of what I listen to today; a new record pressed by Good Riddance, Lagwagon, Anti-Flag, or Diesel Boy is memorable because I adore the band and the music but also because its existence on vinyl is like a tribute to those who came before them. Above all, vinyl represents prestige, and I'm glad to restart my own record collection aside from my many CDs and MP3 downloads.

CLASSIFIEDS

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

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