

THE VOICE MAGAZINE

Volume 16 Issue 05

February 1, 2008

One Step at a Time

A fresh perspective

Deep Freeze

Coping with cold spells

Into the Light

Reflections of a spazzifist

Plus:

*The Mindful Bard, Milk-Crate Bandit,
AUSU This Month, 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



One Step at a Time

It's a funny thing about perspective: a little bit can go a long way. Last week, I was struggling with a particularly difficult assignment. It was a critical review of the work of two communication theorists. Interesting stuff (well, okay, maybe not *that* interesting), but it felt like climbing Everest. After two weeks of wrestling this essay to the ground, I had resigned myself to the fact that the only way to get to the finish line was going to be one slow, dogged word at a time.

I got there, and just as I started dreading the next essay (double the word length) a little bit of perspective landed at our door. Spending the winter on a fly-in northern First Nations reserve, visitors are few and far between. So when I heard a knock and saw an RCMP officer at our door, my thought was that she was searching for someone who'd gone missing in these minus 44 C temperatures (and that's before the wind chill).

Instead, she smiled and introduced the slim, bearded man standing beside her. His name was Fabien Docet, and they were looking for someone who could converse in his native French. He had just arrived in northern Saskatchewan from Whitehorse in the Yukon—on foot.

Fabien is from Anjou in the south-east of France and, as he explained as he warmed up in our living room over coffee, he wants to see the Canadian wilderness firsthand before it disappears. He is walking, pulling a sled of supplies and sleeping in a tent. He began his trek in July in Skagway, Alaska, and his route crosses Fort Simpson, NWT; Churchill, Manitoba; northern Ontario; and eventually Quebec, where he will end his journey. It is a total of over 6,600 kilometres, and his only companions are a trio of dogs. As his [website](#) says, his goal is to make it "from the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean, by foot, alone and without assistance, across the Great Canadian North, in less than 300 days."

He has encountered grizzlies, wolves, caribou, and -50 C temperatures, but his biggest concern the day we met was making it to Churchill in time. To succeed in his goal of travelling only by foot power, he needs to get to the pass before early signs of spring make the ice too risky to cross.

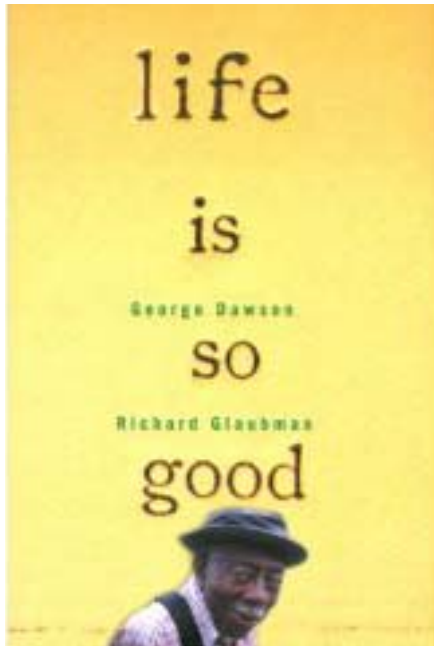
That evening, I tried to imagine what it might be like to spend the night in a tiny tent on a frozen lake, the wind gusting and ice booming, or to walk for days on end without exchanging a single word with another person. And it occurred to me that the way we approach our goals is really nothing more than a matter of perspective. To some, the challenges seem too daunting and they never even begin. There is always an excuse, always a reason why not. They look at the road ahead and think only that the finish line isn't yet in sight; they don't see the solid road underfoot that's waiting for their first steps. To others, there is simply the fun (and challenge) of the attempt. Whether they succeed or not isn't the point—they know there's always something gained in the trying.

The next morning, we watched from the warmth of our living room as Fabien set out for the next leg of his journey. In the bitter cold, he dug a set of ski poles into the snow and began to walk. After a few steps, he stopped, untangled one of the dog's harnesses, then started again. It took three more starts and stops, but eventually the small caravan was underway and we watched as Fabien, his dogs, and his sled got to the top of a rise and disappeared.

Our encounter was a wonderful surprise, and we'll be following Fabien's progress on his site. And as I return to my own goals, both big and small, I'll remind myself of the day we had an unexpected visitor—and concentrate on getting there one step at a time.

MILK-CRATE BANDIT

Erik Ditz

**Books are Carrots for Your Mind's Eye***Life is So Good* - George Dawson

This book is all about the title. It's the autobiography of George Dawson, a man whose life is incredibly hard yet full and happy. Though he certainly has his troubles, he continuously finds a way to see hope through it all, and the stories from his life are so powerful that I was in tears by page three.

Told colloquially, his tale evokes some very serious considerations, some very beautiful imagery, and some very real hope. This book will make you see the history of North America from the point of view of a freed slave's illiterate grandson, from 1908 to Y2K, and it's not very long into this book that you can't help but wonder how you never before noticed that life is so good.

Grendel - John Gardner

John Gardner has copied just about everything. His huge bibliography includes rewrites of Sherlock Holmes, Socrates, and the entire history of Finland; short stories ranging from Stephen King to Ayn Rand; Goosebumpian ghost stories; and my personal favourite, his retelling of the classic tale of Beowulf. As suggested by the title, this version sees the story from the monster's perspective, lending a certain defensible and understandable quality to epitomic evil. This is an awesome book that I can't recommend enough.

Speeding Trucks and Incurable Diseases - Crad Kilodney

Crad Kilodney has been a staple on Toronto street corners for seemingly millennia, handing out a constant stream of some of the finest Canadian literature available today, for pennies a page. With the imagination of a sugar-high 12-year-old and the skilful pen of a tracheotomy expert, Crad shifts the everyday perspective of the world ever so slightly to a demented universe of fishy CEOs and maniac Walden fans that is both childish entertaining and cleverly relevant.

Slapstick - Kurt Vonnegut

Put Asimov away, forget about Roddenberry and Serling, dump Orwell and Bradbury out the window—this is what the world will look like very soon. The most convincing thing about this account of the near future is that, unlike the mysterious universe where *Babylon 5* exists alongside *SeaQuest*, Vonnegut presents the future as ugly and stupid and a daily struggle for a reason not to die.

That's the major failing point of most sci-fi: never will it occur that everyone in the universe wears the same stupid spandex uniform, never will money be eliminated, never will bald Frenchmen rule entire starships. It's just not feasible. Like a menu photo of a McDonald's hamburger, it's more about the idea of what it should seem like than any kind of realism, and that's what separates the rest of sci-fi from

Vonnegut, who is unafraid to present the world as it very likely will be. Read this book, then go pick up *Timequake*. You'll never want to go outside again.

For Whom the Bell Tolls - Ernest Hemingway

On page one we learn that this white guy goes to Spain to join some revolution and instead he gets drunk with Spaniards and plans to blow up a bridge and then the next 503 pages say the exact same thing. And this is supposed to be his best book? Yeesh.

Bloodletting and Miraculous Cures - Vincent Lam

Vincent Lam is an emergency physician in Toronto and this is his first book, a collection of mostly related short stories focusing around the many hazards and joys of professional medicine. Though Lam insists that his book is fiction, it remains difficult while reading it to imagine these stories as anything other than a collection of professional and personal anecdotes. With the precision you might expect from, say, a physician, Lam weaves intricate plots and believable lives into scenery that vividly resembles Toronto. If I ever end up in the hospital, somebody call this guy.

The Bridge - Iain Banks

Though confusing at times—this book takes place in three separate but meshing consciousnesses—the flow of this story is astounding. It's like trying to escape Leatherface in a house of mirrors: you have no idea which way you're going, but you can't slow down to figure it out. This is part Schwarzenegger, part Kafka, and part Timothy Leary, all in an Irish voice from the future.

Sometimes I Wish Raptors Still Existed So I Could Get Disembowelled and Finally Spill My Guts to Someone - Spencer Butt

This is brilliantly sincere stream-of-consciousness poetry that speaks for itself. A decade ago, Spencer's wit garnered him the lead vocal spot in Ontario thrash punk band Beware of the Valley, followed by a three-year stint singing for the acclaimed Toronto soca-punk cabaret The Secret Handshake. Since then he's been busy winning prizes in local and national poetry competitions, hosting a horde of Toronto music and film events, and writing more poetry than old Frannie Bacon. I think Spencer may also secretly be an X-Man, but Cyclops is keeping his lips sealed. If you're interested in his books, say hello to him [here](#).



From Where I Sit

Hazel Anaka

Brrrr!

The current bone-shattering cold snap takes me back. Back to my youth when, answering the prayers of children everywhere, schools were closed and buses didn't run. Later, even when we moved to town, I wouldn't dream of going to school under those conditions: drifted roads, high wind chills.

I always thought it foolish to expect teachers, staff, and town kids to go to school when all told there were never more than a couple hundred kids in the combined kindergarten to grade 12 population. It was foolish in the late '60s, it was foolish when my kids were in school, and it's foolish in 2008. And yes, I'm aware of union realities and child-care dilemmas for parents.

I'm also reminded of our days raising cattle. There were days so brutally cold the chore tractor wouldn't start, or if it did, it needed to idle for hours just to move. One such day the steel bale spike snapped off in the cold. I remember being "gate girl" while Roy brought bale after bale of fresh straw bedding. I remember having my glasses freeze up as a scarf covered my lower face and a toque was pulled low over my brow. As cold and demoralized as we got, we felt for all of God's creatures who had to survive under those conditions. Heating the cow's drinking water, not skimping on their feed, and providing windbreaks was the least we could do for them.

Likewise for the birds that live in our yard. Refilling the feeders with black sunflower seeds and suet ensures that those tiny bodies get the energy they need to survive. We also look away when we see deer nibbling at the hay bales we've made to sell.

I'm also reminded of people in the area who've died from carbon monoxide poisoning because of sketchy stoves and chimneys. There are others who've lost fingers and toes through frostbite, and one man who lost his life through hypothermia. Cold kills, especially if you're ill-prepared or foolhardy.

I remember the sting of extreme cold, when flesh gets so cold it seems to be burning. As a kid I recall my sister and me digging a tunnel into the bank the snowplow had made along our road. Exposed areas—noses, wrists between mittens and sleeves, cheeks—were especially vulnerable.

I'm not sure if it's a realignment of priorities that comes with maturity or if we're losing our edge. I find Roy and I are less willing to do stuff that isn't smart or may even be downright dangerous. We can just hunker down at home and ride this out. It's at times like this I really love being home-based. No need to scrape windows, buck drifts, worry about roads or if the car will start at the end of the day.

I'm amazed by the creativity and resilience of people. So whatever coping strategies you have for getting through this ordeal, be smart, be safe, be alert. Cold snaps create lasting memories, from where I sit.

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

Bob Snider: Conscious and Mad

(Notes from a conversation with Wanda Waterman St. Louis)

On the New CD, *A Maze in Greys*

I got the name for this CD after listening to some politicians. It occurred to me that the world we're building is lacking in black and white truth. It's always "a maze in greys." At some point I realized that that's the exact opposite of "Amazing Grace."

There are three songs on this CD that are related: "Billy Said," "Time Will Get You Money," and "Rusty Pail Blues." I started writing "Billy Said" and I immediately said to myself, "This sounds too much like Bob Dylan." Now, every once in a while this happens, and I usually abandon the song. But this time I said, "Hey, there's no actual law against it. I've avoided it up to this point, but I've wanted to do it so I'm gonna go for it." So I wrote "Billy Said" and that opened the floodgates. "Time Will Get You Money" just popped up.

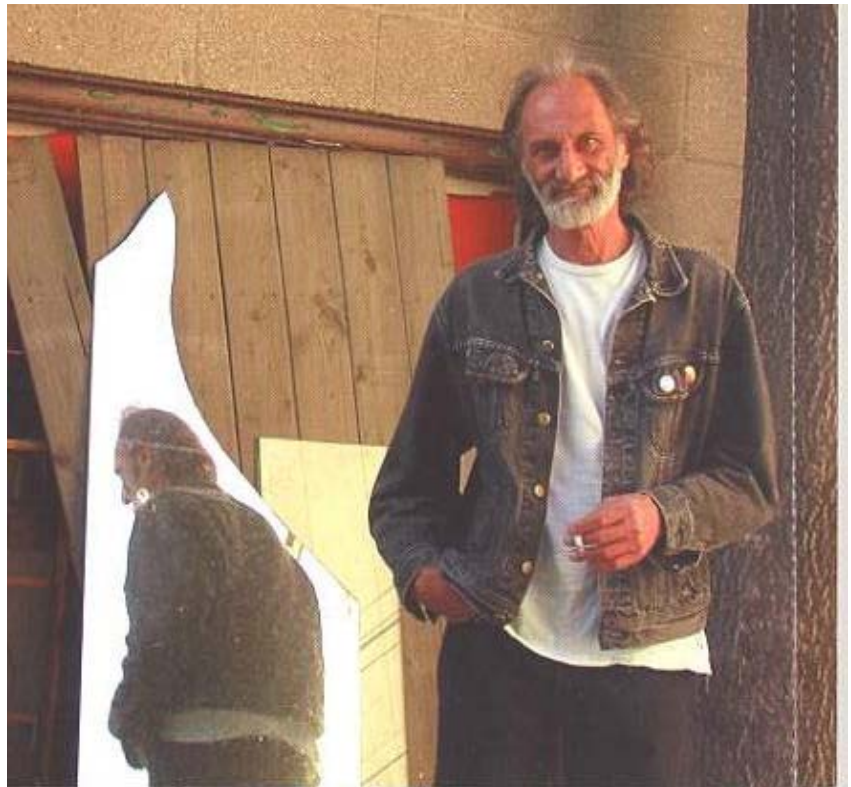
As for "Rusty Pail Blues," over the years I've collected little bits and pieces from this song and that. I call it my spare-parts department. At my cabin I have two pails. One's rusty and the other has a hole in it. For a joke I said I should take these two pails and make one good pail out of them. So then I got the idea of milk and honey in a rusted pail. It's almost Biblical, eh?

"Plum" started in 1989 and finished just before I recorded it last January. The problem with it was, there are two areas I have trouble writing songs in. The first is rock and roll. The other area is nonsense. "Plum" started out as nonsense, and I loved that, and I tried going with it. The more I wrote it the more adventurous it made me, which really frustrated me. I have a whole three-ring binder notebook full of notes for "Plum." Finally I just gave up and went with the sense-making.

This CD is my most preachy, with "Rusty Pail Blues" and "Time Will Get You Money." Sometimes I'm not even in the mood to sing them to an audience because I feel like I'm preaching too much. Those two songs, and "What an Idiot He Is" from way back, are as preachy as I've allowed myself to get.

Personal Inspiration

I was never a music listener, and am still not to this day. If it's new I don't want to hear it and if I already heard it, I already heard it. Having said that, there are tons of artists I love and tons of individual



songs I love. I like dancing to electric blues and good old rock and roll. I had an old Jimmy Reed album that I loved, and I loved Jimi Hendrix, Bob Dylan, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones . . . I also enjoyed the early folk craze, like when Dylan first came out. Everything I'm talking about is 1970 and before. Since then I've hardly listened to anything.

When I'm playing a gig sometimes somebody will crash me rather than me having to take a hotel room. When we get to their place they'll say, "Okay, what kind of music do you want to listen to?" And I'll say, "Well, actually I'm not a big music fan," and they'll say, "Okay, I have a CD for people who hate music," and they'll put on their favourite CD. This happens time and again. That's why I like hotel rooms.

Gail, my other half here, she likes plays, so every once in a while we go to a play. But you know the old expression "The theatre's been dying for five hundred years"? That's how I feel about plays. I give them all the credit in the world because they keep trying, but they take themselves so seriously that I can't suspend my disbelief.

"Evil is the conscious desire to do bad things. Wickedness is: I want this, and I can rationalize myself enough to get it by doing these things which look bad but aren't because they're the means to my end. The devil wouldn't bother with rationalizing."

Movies for me have to be pure escapism. I like things blowing up. It's such a typical guy thing. I'm a bit of a Bohemian fringe character, so I love it when I can do something that every guy does. I like action, I like car chases. I want to be sitting there eating popcorn when everybody else is up to their necks in trouble.

I like books like *The Life of the Bee*. I like the fact that somebody can spend 30 years researching a subject and I can sit there for a week and glean all the results. *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu is the same thing. I also read a lot of detective stories, adventure, escape, and some good novels. *The Grapes of Wrath*

is a great novel, one I think should be taught in high school. I just discovered Emile Zola. He's like a French Dickens. I really enjoy getting that look into another world. He's a master. And of course the usual Russian suspects—Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, and just odd books from here and there. Everywhere I go in Canada to play music I haunt used book stores.

As far as conversations, I feel me and my friends talked everything out before 1970. In the last ten years I've sort of been in the mood again to talk to people but my girlfriend's the only volunteer I have and she's not always a willing volunteer. Musicians are great to talk to, too. A lot of artists who are poets and dancers and actors and painters—they're so intense, but musicians are laid back. I like artists, but I don't necessarily feel like discussing their art all the time, which is what a lot of them want to do.

What I Do

I want to reach the person whose views are the most diametrically opposed to my own. To succeed at that you've got to be real sneaky. I want to entertain these people. I think that's my job in life because I used to be the class clown until about grade seven when I had it kicked out of me (my academics weren't such that I could afford to be class clown anymore and I was strongly discouraged from doing it). But when I started writing songs I got to be class clown again, and that was all I ever wanted out of life.

My artistic activity keeps me from exploding with frustration at the social situation. People are so trusting and they get screwed over again and again because other people play to their weaknesses and their fears and they fall for it every time. It just drives me nuts.

Conscious and Mad

I like Eastern thought. The more I read it and the older I get the more sane it sounds, the more literally true.

To me everything we've done is built on a false premise. My only political view is that with both capitalism and communism the result is that the most rapacious elements claw their way to the top, period. And yet everybody's worried—"Oh, communism!" or "Oh capitalism!" I think we ultimately have to put the material world in its true perspective, which means look both ways before you cross the street. You've got to be aware, you can't be swayed by every fad.

Evil is the conscious desire to do bad things. Wickedness is: *I want this, and I can rationalize myself enough to get it by doing these things which look bad but aren't because they're the means to my end.* The devil wouldn't bother with rationalizing. He'd say, "This is evil; I'm gonna do it." But even Hitler thought he was doing good. It's madness, not consciousness. There's no good and bad; there's only conscious and mad.

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. For a list of criteria, go to mindfulbard.blogspot.com. If I agree with your recommendation, I'll thank you online.

Hair Brain Scheme 2008 Fundraiser!



Circle April 5 on your calendar, and plan to come out and support AU's own Bonnie Nahornick as she shaves her head (for the fourth time!) in aid of two good causes: the event will raise funds for the [Alzheimer Society](#), and Bonnie's hair will be donated to [Wigs for Kids](#). Her co-worker Aretha Smith will be joining in, shaving her head for the first time, and her hair will also be donated to Wigs for Kids!

The event takes place from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. at AUPE Calgary, 600 One Executive Place, 1816 Crowchild Trail NW (next to Village Park Inn). Seating is limited, so RSVP to Bonnie at baldster2008@yahoo.com or by phone at (403) 860-6569.

If you can't attend but are willing to volunteer before the event, your time and energy will be appreciated. Donations of prizes will also be gratefully accepted.

All prizes are welcome, including gift certificates to stores and restaurants, and prizes from the arts community: if you're a singer, author, musician, artist, or comedian, donations of artwork, CDs, etc. can help make this the best Hair Brain Scheme yet! All those who volunteer or donate prizes will be mentioned during the event and acknowledged on the [Gratitude Website](#).

For more information or to obtain pledge forms, visit Bonnie's [website](#).

If you won't be in the area but want to donate a door prize, just send it along to Bonnie c/o Athabasca University, # 300, 1040 - 7 Avenue SW, Calgary, AB T2P 3G9

Here's a glimpse of past fundraisers from [2002](#) and [2004](#), just to give you an idea of the hair-raising time you'll be in for!

AUSU This Month



AUSU Election 2008 - Message from the CRO

Dear AU Students:

My name is Rehan Qureshi and I am pleased to have been appointed your Chief Recruiting Officer (CRO) for the Athabasca University Students' Union (AUSU)'s 2008 General Election. It is my position to accept and verify nominations for the election; field any questions and interpret policy and procedures for nominees; and to ensure an accurate and fair vote count at the time of voting. Please feel free to contact me at cro@ausu.org for any of the above.

If you have ever wondered how to get involved with your Students' Union, or wanted to play a role in shaping the experience of AU students, then here is your chance! Elections

will be held from March 9 - 12 on the AU website, so send in your nominations for AUSU council today.

Qualifications for nominees include:

(As stated in AUSU Policy 3.01.9, Election Conduct) "For General Elections, any Active Member in Good Standing may submit a self-nomination to run for a seat on Council." To be an active member you must be enrolled in an AU undergraduate course when the election opens on March 9, 2008 (pre-registrations do not apply; the course must have started). Plus, to be a "member in good standing" means you are an individual who is an AUSU member, has paid all fees, and has not been subject to disciplinary action from AUSU. Students must submit their name, student I.D. number, address, email address, and written consent to act if elected, along with their nomination.

All self-nominations/nominations will be acknowledged after the nomination closing date. The nomination period runs from January 9 through February 6, 2008. Nominees will be given an opportunity to withdraw their name from the list of nominees provided their notice of withdrawal is received by the last day of February 2008.

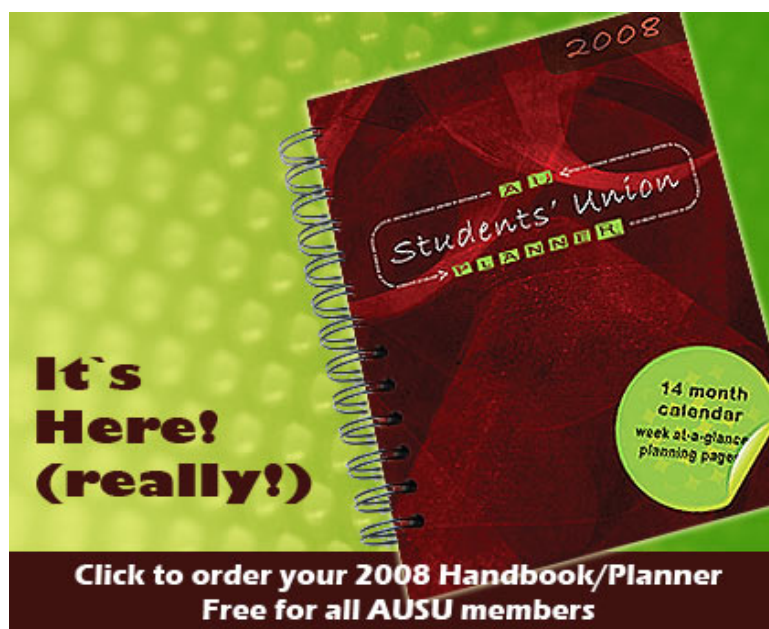
I invite you all to participate, as the student body governs on your behalf and every vote counts. I am available for any questions regarding the election so feel free to contact me. Good luck to all who enter and hopefully we will see the rest of you at the polls!

Sincerely,

Rehan Qureshi - Chief Returning Officer (CRO)
cro@ausu.org

AUSU Handbook/Planner 2008 in stock now!

The wait is over! The 2008 AUSU planner is in stock and on its way to members. We've added a few enhancements this year, including cheat



GO HOME EARLY.



Create professional-looking flowcharts, timelines, graphs, and more, in minutes, all by yourself. Then go spend some quality time with your family.

Free for AUSU members. Visit www.ausu.org



 **SmartDraw**

sheets for common citation styles, a clip-in page-marker ruler, and a funky fridge magnet to remind you to get your weekly dose of *The Voice*.

Last year we had about 400 pre-orders, but this year we have 1,000! Please be patient. We're working as fast as we can to fill all of the orders and everyone should have their book by the end of January when the 2007 edition calendar pages run out. As always, we're excited to know what you think of the planner and welcome all feedback to ausu@ausu.org

Smart Draw – Benefit for AUSU members

AUSU has purchased a licence agreement to supply the award-winning SmartDraw software to all AUSU members (current undergraduate students). To access this deal and find out more, visit the front page of our [website](http://www.ausu.org).

SmartDraw allows you to create a wide range of graphics for your assignments and submit them electronically in a Word file. You can also place your graphics in Excel or PowerPoint files, or export them as TIF, GIF, or JPEG files to make a web graphic or even a logo. Just a few of the graphics you can make include Venn diagrams, genetics charts, graphs,

organizational and flow charts, and Gantt charts. For any course that requires charts that cannot be easily created in Word or Excel, this should be a real time saver and make it easier to submit all portions of an assignment by email. Remember, though, that you should always check with your tutor to find out if there is a specific format he or she prefers. Your tutor does not have to have SmartDraw to view these graphics, however.

Installations under this program are good for one year. The package includes both the Standard and Health Care editions of SmartDraw.

AUSU Election

Convenient.
Satisfying.
Free delivery
around the world.



Submit your self-nomination,
January 9 through February 6th, 2008

INTERNATIONAL NEWS DESK



At Home: Passerby finds baby abandoned in Toronto stairwell

A woman in a Toronto parking garage thought she was walking by a doll abandoned in a freezing stairwell—until the bundle started to cry.

The tiny figure turned out to be an eight-month-old baby girl, and police have now released photos showing an adult deliberately leaving the child on the outdoor landing. Security cameras revealed a small green sedan, possibly a Ford Escort, driving straight to the second-storey stairwell door.

After first checking that the stairwell was empty, the unidentified adult returned to the car, removed the baby girl, and abandoned her to the cold.

The youngster lay in the stairwell for two hours while temperatures were below freezing and winds gusted up to 100 kilometres per hour. She was dressed in only a sleeper, socks, and a hat. The woman who spotted her called authorities immediately, and the baby is being

cared for at the Hospital for Sick Children.

Luckily, her injuries were minor. As Staff Sgt. Brian Moorcroft told reporters, “Considering how long she was left and how cold it was, she’s in very good condition.”

Although the girl is now in good hands, police are concerned about her parents’ mental state and the safety of any siblings she may have.

Police are canvassing the area around Don Mills and Finch where the baby was found, and hope that the public’s assistance will lead to a break in the case.

In Foreign News: Snowstorms in China leave millions stranded

China’s worst weather in five decades has battered the country, leaving at least 60 people dead and causing more than \$7 billion U.S. in damage.

Transportation systems across the country have ground to a halt, and the Ministry of Railways reports that “millions have been stranded at stations around the country.” The snowstorms blew across China’s central and eastern regions just in time for January’s Lunar New Year holiday. Train stations, buses, and roads were already overflowing as tens of millions of people headed home to celebrate the holiday.

According to Zhao Chunlei, deputy director of the Regulation Department of the Ministry of Railways, “Over 5.8 million people are still stranded at train stations.”

Along with the stranded travellers, the harsh weather has affected up to 80 million others. Strains on the power grid have caused power outages, and some areas are running short of essential supplies. The CBC

reports that “huge cities” have been plunged into darkness. In Chenzhou, a city of 1.2 million, some areas have been without power for eight days.

China’s state broadcaster, CCTV, says that Chenzhou’s fuel and rice supplies were dangerously low, and in spite of the treacherous weather conditions, emergency supplies had to be transported from neighbouring districts.

China’s authorities aren’t the only ones keeping a watchful eye on how the weather crisis is handled: with the 2008 Summer Olympics scheduled to take place in Beijing in August, this test of China’s transportation and emergency systems is sure to be under close scrutiny by organizers, athletes, and visitors.

A CLICK OF THE WRIST – Let It Snow

Amid the snow and slush of winter, it’s easy to feel as if you’re in the only place on earth dealing with cold, ice, and freezing winds. Here are astonishing pictures of wild weather—and its aftermath—from around the world that might make you feel a little better. Unless, of course, you live in one of these places.

Sky and Summit

Some amazing photos of an ice storm in Geneva, Switzerland. The storm was in 2005, but from the look of some of these cars, the ice might not have melted yet!

New England Winter Storm

These shots taken after a snowstorm in New England are truly beautiful—as long as you’re not the one doing the shovelling.

Digital Snow Museum

This site has it all. Some amazing winter storm photos and drawings from around the world, with some dating back to the 1700s!

Boston Snowstorm

Neat little time-lapse video of 10 hours during the course of a snowstorm. Most of the action takes place toward the end, but it’s interesting to watch the roads clear and fill and clear and fill—all at warp speed.

Floods in England

No ice in sight, but if the snowbanks are up to the top of your house right now, here’s what you can possibly expect in the spring.

FROM THE GALLERY

Sandra Livingston



Highs and Lows

The past week has been a time of surprises. Perhaps the most amazing news is on the AUSU election front. As the [AUSU website](#) has announced, nominations opened January 9—and the response has been unprecedented.

In past elections, the usual number of candidates has been around 15. So far (and with nominations still open) the number for this election has increased more than four-fold: 80 candidates have requested the paperwork to register, and inquiries are still coming in.

These numbers are great for providing members with a wide choice when it comes to voting—and that makes it all the more surprising that only two students joined the recent Town Hall meeting held by council on January 25. Advertised on the AUSU main page and in the Discussion Boards, the meeting was a great opportunity for students to get to know their councillors and let them know what issues matter most.

And what a great opportunity it would have been for the candidates: without the chance to campaign face-to-face, what better way to take the pulse of potential voters?

Not that the meeting should have been used for campaigning. Instead, candidates could have listened to questions posed by students, and discovered what the people they may be representing are interested in.

They could also have asked questions themselves: what are the hot topics council is dealing with? What progress is being made on certain issues? All in all, a great way to get a better understanding of the challenges they might face as new councillors.

It's understandable that not everyone would be available to attend. But assuming that the two students who dialled in are running for council (and that wasn't discussed), only 3% of potential candidates took advantage of the opportunity. If the two attendees *aren't* running, the involvement from prospective candidates is even more discouraging.

In spite of the small turnout, the discussion was lively. One of the questions raised was about council's efforts in having the calculation of GPAs changed from a lifetime average to one reflecting a student's 30 most-recent credits. Specifically, the conversation centred on how those changes affect part-time students.

Another hot topic was how AUSU makes its presence known to students. The questions went both ways: it was also a chance for council to find out how students first discovered AUSU's presence, and how well efforts to promote the organization are reaching students.

Tutor service standards were another topic of discussion, and as the dialogue wrapped up, councillors took the opportunity to ask students what kind of AUSU services they used most, their opinion of the online Course Surveys, the usefulness of Facebook groups, and feedback (from both students and AU) on the new SmartDraw download.

On that note, it will be interesting to see students' responses to a recent Discussion Board posting, namely one asking for the top three council deliverables that members would like to see and their thoughts on how those could be achieved.

More surprising numbers came when the conversation turned to the 2008 AUSU planners. For the 2007 planners, between 350 and 400 pre-orders were received. The planners have become such a popular item that, when the 2008 pre-order form went up on the website, council received over 1,000 requests!

Total orders have now topped 1,500 and are still climbing, so if you haven't received yours yet, rest assured that Pam at the AUSU office is busy getting all those orders filled.

On the Monday following Friday's Town Hall session, it was time for the next regular council meeting. One of the first orders of business was the ratification of a vote to place an immediate freeze on councillor's wages (including annual inflation increases), with an exemption for executive wages.

Council also ratified several items previously voted on via email. Included in these was a review of policy 3.01, which covers election conduct; the review showed that no revisions are currently needed. Another item of interest, especially with the election coming up, was an amendment to the council responsibility policy. The amendment clarifies that councillors "should be prepared to devote approximately 2 to 5 hours per week to council duties," and that "additional responsibilities, such as committee work, may require more time."

During the councillor's reports, more interesting news came from the Awards Committee. Surprisingly, there have been very few recent applications for student awards. However, council noted that the Academic Achievement awards are coming up, always a busy time for the committee.

The Executive Director's report included some info on the new look that's in the works for the AUSU website. Along with an updated, more user-friendly interface, the site will offer an online store with some exciting new AUSU gear.

The final item of business was the Administrative Assistant's report. The office is still fielding a steady flow of inquiries about planners and the election, and the new auditors are proving to be a great resource as updates to accounting practices are implemented.

The next council meeting is scheduled for March 3; see you there in The Gallery!

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EDUCATION NEWS

Ksenia Prints



Prairies push for sustainable campuses

WINNIPEG (CUP) - Environmentally concerned students from across the Prairies gathered at the University of Saskatchewan for the region's first Sustainable Campuses Conference, hosted by the Sierra Youth Coalition, to shine a light on how students can influence climate change.

"Fundamentally, we have to look at climate change as a human rights issue," said Rosa Kouri, communications coordinator for the

Canadian Youth Climate Coalition who had just returned from Bali, where she was an official observer for the United Nations conference on climate change.

"The communities that will be most affected by it are the ones that have done the least to cause it . . . and have the least resources to deal with it."

"Students have been at the vanguard of most social movements throughout most of history," said Kouri. "Now is the time to take it to the next level."

The conference took place from Jan. 18 - 20, hosting youth from Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba.

Delegates participated in sustainability and anti-oppression training sessions, shared experiences of campus sustainability efforts, and listened to keynote speeches on the relationship between climate change, social justice, and the Alberta tar sands.

"It is a forum to empower community members," said Jeh Custer, Prairies coordinator for SYC. "The conference is all about facilitating a discussion to educate folks and students about the sustainability challenges that we face . . . help students and campus community members understand how to be more effective activists."

Custer agreed that students have a unique position in universities and colleges due to their influential role in the governing structure and the high availability of resources, brainpower, and potential recruits.

"We want to see students doing practical research that's going to benefit our campus," said Kate Dykman, coordinator for the University of Winnipeg's SUNSET and a conference participant.

SUNSET (Sustainable University Now, Sustainable Earth Together), was awarded the region's Most Successful Success in sustainability at the conference.

SUNSET also offers an Experiential Learning Program, a multifaceted academic stream that connects interested students with faculty to engage in sustainability research and practice.

"The university is a place for that innovation. We have the luxury of being able to follow our values and principles, do what's right and not what's profitable," Dykman said.

"Campuses are a good testing ground for new ways of running things," said Mike Hudema, a tar sands campaigner for Greenpeace Canada and a keynote speaker at the conference.

Custer also said that the largest barriers often standing in the way of campus sustainability are university and college administrations and government.

"I think some admins are more out of touch," Custer said. "[Universities] should be people's institutions, democratic institutions."

"It's really immoral for a government like Canada and Canadian citizens to continue as business as usual while other people are losing their lives," Kouri said.

Kouri believes that while motivated youth have a variety of ways to get involved with sustainability initiatives on campuses across the country, personal actions to reduce their own ecological footprint are also necessary.

"Not everyone can go to an international conference or march in Ottawa. Just getting involved at the campus level . . . you're already a step ahead of the federal government," she said.

Others argued that desperate times call for desperate measures.

"The Earth needs a voice, and sometimes we need to put our bodies on the line for that," Hudema said.

The Sustainable Campuses Conferences are now in their ninth year, in both national and regional capacities, as part of the SYC's Sustainable Campuses Project.

Despite their wide popularity, this was the first year the conference took place in the Prairies.

"The Prairies was a bit of a slower region . . . because it is so vast," Custer said.

"Sometimes the Prairies are lagging behind and seem reluctant to adopt certain practices," Dykman said.

Hudema was more critical of this slow progression.

"The Prairies should be one of the firsts—Alberta is one of the biggest industrious polluters in the world," he said.

"Our population may not be so big, but I think you'll be seeing one of the biggest activism efforts coming out of here," Hudema said.

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