

THE

VOICE

MAGAZINE

Volume 17 Issue 01

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BEST OF 2008

Solitudes

Loneliness of the long-distance learner

Toddler Philosophy

Eat your mac-and-cheese

Goodnight My Love

A beautiful goodbye

Plus:

*The Mindful Bard, Porkpie Hat,
From Where I Sit, 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.



THE VOICE BEST OF 2008



Welcome to *The Voice Magazine's* Best of 2008 issue!

Each year, we take a look back at some of the outstanding writing we've published during the past 12 months, and this issue had plenty to choose from.

You'll find your regular favourites here, including "From Where I Sit," a column that's been offering Hazel Anaka's perceptive and refreshing viewpoint on the foibles of life since 2003. And if you've enjoyed the lush, surreal prose of Bill Pollett's "Lost & Found," his latest column, "Porkpie Hat," will pull you further along intriguing literary paths.

For those who like a diverse mix of books, films, and music, there's always something new to discover in "The Mindful Bard," as Wanda Waterman St. Louis searches out today's most enlightened, thought-provoking artists (and in "The Interviewer," her wry social observations are just as finely tuned as ever).

Another favourite is Christina M. Frey's "AU Profiles." Along with these fascinating glimpses into the lives of AU students, her musings on life always bring a smile, and we think you'll enjoy her article on toddler philosophy just as much as the first time it appeared.

The past year also brought many new and talented voices to *The Voice*, as well as the occasional visit from familiar voices—far too many to list here, so feel free to wander through the Best of 2008 and enjoy!

EDITORIAL

Sandra Livingston

A Feast of Hypocrisy

This editorial originally appeared April 4, 2008, in issue 1614.

Let's get this straight: this is not a pro-seal hunt piece. Nor is it anti-sealing. Instead, it's a question. A question that I don't have the answer to, but one that, amid the rhetoric and heated emotions swirling (as they do every year) like a snowstorm around the Canadian seal hunt, needs to be asked.

It starts with a familiar sight: against the crisp, white snow, a figure looms over a baby seal, weapon in hand. A rifle cracks, or a hakapik is brought down again and again to bludgeon the animal's skull. Whether the sealer uses a gun or a hakapik, the result is the same. A young harp, hooded, or grey seal is killed, and the public debate begins anew.



One side says the seal hunt is cruel and inhumane; the other side says it's well-regulated and an economic necessity. Whatever your stance, there's no denying that when it comes to the commercial seal hunt, it's the kind of imagery that inflames even the most apathetic among us. Celebrities and animal rights activists come out to protest; images of bloody seal carcasses are shown on the news; the debate rages over whether the hunt should be stopped.

Joe and Jane Canadian chime in, posting outraged (and sometimes outrageous) comments in response to news items. Following the recent accident involving the *Acadien II*, one reader suggested that taxpayers should not foot the bill to rescue those involved in the "outdated barbaric slaughter," and that sealing vessels should be on their own if they run into trouble. And now, in the face of the continued outcry, the European Union is considering a ban on all seal products.

But hold on a minute. Let's rewind those provocative images and take a closer look. In fact, let's swing our lenses away from those vast frozen expanses and go inside: inside the fridges and cupboards of the average news watcher who shakes his head in disgust at the footage, and inside the commercial farms where our bacon, hamburger, chicken wings, milk, and eggs come from.

If you want barbaric, the footage isn't hard to find. Imagine for a moment those baby seals everyone is so concerned about, being crammed into tractor trailers bound for the slaughterhouse. They're piled so deeply that many of them suffocate. Others have their flippers (or legs) broken under the crush of bodies. They travel in this misery for hours.

In cold weather, some become frozen to the metal sides of the truck, their flesh ripped away as they're prodded onto the ramp. Occasionally, these baby seals are boiled alive in the scalding baths that remove their hair—or they would be, if they were the pigs destined to become the bacon and pork chops sitting in your freezer.

Or perhaps those cute baby seals are lucky enough to escape the overcrowded conditions. They're placed in a tiny pen, where chains around their necks keep them from moving normally or strengthening their limbs. By the time they're paraded in a pen for auction, they are unable to support their own weight, and some can only flop through the dirt in a futile attempt to stand. This is their entire life, the only thing they know until they die. Or it would be if they were a veal calf.

To be blunt, why is the Canadian seal hunt considered more inhumane than the horrific practices we blithely ignore as we enjoy our shrink-wrapped chicken breasts and ground beef each week?

The life of these adorable seals may even be reduced to the torture of being forced into tiny cages; so tiny that, in order to avoid the animals killing each other, their beaks are cut off. Some will be artificially fattened to the point that their legs can't hold them up. If they are sick or dying, they may be hurled against the floor until they are nothing but a twitching mass. At least, they might be if they were a commercially bred chicken.

Is every commercial farm guilty of these "cruel and inhumane" practices? No. But the life of a commercially bred animal is far from wholesome, and the misery these animals endure has been well documented: there are the factory-farming videos at [PETA](#), admittedly disturbing to watch.

If you're inclined to dismiss the proof offered by activist groups, the [Toronto Vegetarian Association](#) offers a well-cited article.

The Winnipeg Humane Society affirms the main issues these other groups point to, such as the overcrowded conditions that force sows to live in “gestation crates and then farrowing crates so small that they can't even turn around. They must carry out all of their life functions (eating, sleeping, urinating, defecating, giving birth to their young and nursing their young) in this one small area.”

The Canadian branch of the Humane Society International offers more data.

Which brings us back to the question at hand: where are all the protests? Where are the celebrity photo ops outside factory farms? Where is the outcry by the average citizen posting reader comments?

***Perhaps the only difference is
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To be blunt, why is the Canadian seal hunt considered more inhumane than the horrific practices we blithely ignore as we enjoy our shrink-wrapped chicken breasts and ground beef each week?

Is it because seals are slaughtered in higher numbers than their feathered and four-legged counterparts? Wrong. According to Statistics Canada, as of January 2008 there are nearly 14 million cattle in Canada, including over 6 million animals bred for beef. That doesn't include the millions of pigs and chickens that are slaughtered or kept in appalling conditions. Yet in 2008, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans' total allowable catch for harp seals is 275,000; for hooded and grey seals, it's 8,200 and 12,000 respectively.

Is it because the seals are a natural resource, a vital part of our ecosystem, as opposed to the renewable supply of domesticated livestock? If that's the case, one would expect to see the same level of outcry over all commercial fishing practices, the kind that leads to all those cans of tuna that seem to be on sale in the grocery store flyers each week. If they were full of seal meat instead of fish, would the protests begin?

Is it the shock of watching an animal die a violent, bloody death? Surely we aren't so naive as to think that a slaughterhouse is a gentle, pain-free place. Perhaps the only difference is that seals are killed in the open, while those other beasts of industry die by the millions in closed sheds or slaughterhouses, far from our delicate eyes and burger-craving stomachs.

I don't have the answer to this question. I do know that, for some, protesting the seal hunt is a reflection of their broader sensibilities. They would no more wear a cow's hide than they would a seal's. It's logical that they would denounce the killing of *any* animal, and that consistency of beliefs is understandable.

But it defies the odds that every individual and every media outlet speaking out against the seal hunt is vegetarian, or supports only free-range farming. If they were, then small, free-range farms would outpace the billion-dollar factory-farm industry (but they don't). Or there would be high-profile news items on animal rights every week (but there aren't).

And simply put, to decry the commercial killing of one animal while supporting the industrial slaughter of others is nothing more than a feast of hypocrisy.

EVERYTHING I SHOULD KNOW NOW, I USED TO KNOW WHEN I WAS TWO Christina M. Frey



This article originally appeared September 12, 2008, in issue 1636.

There's a certain class of people—a group that's courageous, honest, earnest, creative, and sensitive—that universally faces cruel discrimination.

Instead of being perceptive of their high emotional needs, appreciative of their fresh and honest take on life, and tolerant of their creative and intellectual pursuits, we ignore them, label them, and send them away.

I'm talking about toddlers.

Toddlers get a bum rap in modern society. We've all heard the smears: "Oh, the terrible twos." "Just wait 'til she's three!" "Toddlers are like little cavemen." "Lady, can you please restrain your two-year-old from eating the cardboard cookie display?"

We've also seen the smears: grubby handprints, mashed potatoes, and squished banana on every window, wall, or piece of furniture that stands three feet high.

But personal hygiene aside, a two- or three-year-old can offer a fresh and unique outlook on living. If we examine the nature of toddlers, we can learn a lot about life and how we should approach it.

They recognize the value of simplicity

Who needs a closet full of clothes when one single outfit can be proudly worn day after day after day (and sometimes at night, too)?

What except gluttony causes adults to crave variations of chicken, beef, pork, fish, pasta, rice, and potatoes every night? A toddler is content with mac-and-cheese for breakfast, lunch, and supper.

They are fashion-forward

If you thought young Hollywood started the trend of wearing a shirt and pretending it's a dress, you'd be mistaken. My two-year-old daughter has worn the same oversized pink tank top as a minidress with knee-high pink socks every day for the past three weeks. I think it's catching on, because later I saw the identical outfit in a trendy store window. How chic.

They think outside the box

Did you ever consider that marker caps make beautiful jewellery when stuck onto stubby fingers? Or that a bra can double as a hat? I'll bet it never occurred to you that spaghetti sauce has a second use as 3-D furniture paint. To a toddler, radical concepts like these come naturally. I'm surprised more of them aren't CEOs.

They deal with their emotions in a healthy way

While it's true that the middle of the toy aisle in Wal-Mart may not be the ideal venue for psychological release, the method undeniably works. After the storm clears and you're asked to leave the store, the kid is friendly and happy and can't even recall what upset him in the first place.

Contrast this with adults, who bottle up frustration and rage until they get complexes or become serial killers.

I happen to know something about this—about venting like a toddler, that is. One day, I was furious about something or other, and my husband suggested taking a cue from our daughter and having an all-out tantrum on the floor. Since the neighbours weren't home, I did. I lay on my back, kicked my legs in the air, and raged until I was out of breath.

It worked—I ended up laughing and not mad at all. And as I no longer remember what caused my anger, it seems that the tantrum chased it away. Either that, or embarrassment is causing selective memory.

They're genuine and honest

While an adult might think a guy with an eye patch looks like Jack Sparrow's first mate, they won't say it out loud. In contrast, a two-year-old will cheerfully point and say "Look, Mommy, a pirate!"

It makes for an awkward situation when you're stuck in line with the pirate, but at least you know where you stand with a toddler. You never have to worry she'll be nice to your face and then make comments behind your back.

They appreciate the importance of exercise

I've never met a preschooler who doesn't love to run . . . from her parents. Irrksome to the parents, maybe, but that just shows the little girl's concern for their health and fitness too. And the commitment to calisthenics! If I, too, pulled out, and tried on, every item of clothing from my closet every day, I'd burn many more calories than I do by sitting at the computer.

They're artistic

Broad-minded toddlers aren't limited to paper media. The whole world literally is their canvas, especially if the part of the world they're drawing on belongs to the landlord. And they express themselves in such a wide variety of ways: indelible magic marker, indelible pen, indelible highlighter, or furniture-scoring tool.

They're great fans of alternative dispute resolution

And it's not just the use of fists or dump trucks to get their points across. Toddlers also heavily support mediation. Cries of "Mommy, he won't shaaaaaaaare," and "AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAGH" are toddlerese for "We'd like to submit this dispute to a mediator, please." And afterwards, everyone is the best of friends.

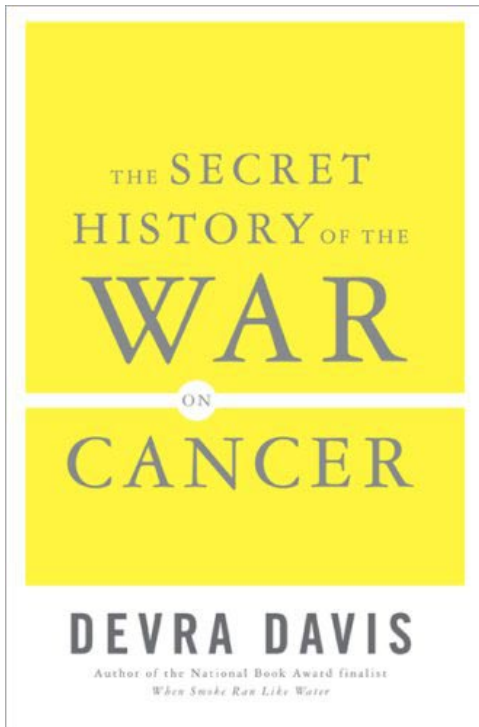
Toddlers may be at times loud, messy, dirty, or rude, but they're also the cleverest philosophers you'll ever meet. The next time you see a three-year-old having a screaming meltdown in front of a candy display, feel free to join him and rage about your boss, that assignment you can't quite get, and the fact that you want to be able to eat the whole candy display in front of you without getting fat.

You'll see more clearly, think more clearly, and go happily home to eat your mac-and-cheese. Life truly is better from three feet high.

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PAGES

John Buhler



Review: Devra Davis, *The Secret History of the War on Cancer*

This article originally appeared May 23, 2008, in issue 1621.

About a year ago, I participated in a phone survey concerning Canadian health issues. One question asked me to determine which should be the greater priority for the federal government: preventing heart disease or treating cancer?

I asked the pollster why the *prevention* of cancer was not an option. “How do you prevent cancer?” she asked, through her laughter. Well, eliminating exposure to cigarette smoke, asbestos, benzene, pesticides, and herbicides were just a few examples that I immediately provided.

Clearly, however, the researcher—hired by no less than one of Canada’s most powerful political parties—had simply swallowed whole the false assumption that we are helpless to stop new cases of cancer from developing. More disturbing, though, is that one of

our country’s major political players obviously gives little thought to the known carcinogens (to say nothing of the suspected carcinogens) in our air, water, land, food, and workplaces.

How did it come to pass that our society simply accepts cancer as the inevitable cost for living longer than previous generations? How has industry (with government complicity) managed to obscure the cancer risks to which we are being exposed?

In *The Secret History of the War on Cancer*, epidemiologist Devra Davis shows us how industries that use and produce carcinogens have concealed risks, funded self-serving studies, influenced politicians, sat on the boards of anti-cancer agencies, and exploited any doubts about the carcinogenic potential of products and employees’ working conditions. She portrays the struggles of individuals who risked litigation, loss of research funding, and even career suicide to bring attention to this dismal situation.

A central theme of Davis’s book is the potent strategy of creating doubt, first developed by the tobacco industry and taken up later by the chemical industry, to dismiss concerns about the health effects of their products. (The “doubt” about the potential of chemicals to cause harm makes it acceptable to expose our children to cancer risks, even by people who are considered to be educators: my local school board has no problem using potential carcinogens around its playgrounds, because these chemicals have not yet been “proven” to cause cancer). The tactic of creating doubt is now even used to discredit the accumulated evidence for evolutionary theory and the threat of global warming.

Davis draws upon industry records, epidemiological research, and her considerable professional experience. Not only does she delve into controversies about cancer statistics, research, detection, and prevention, she provides her own personal experiences of losing friends and family members to cancer.

The book also includes a fascinating history of medicine’s knowledge of carcinogens. By 1700, Bernardino Ramazzini, an Italian physician, had already discovered that cancer was an occupational risk in several professions.

Certainly by the 1930s, as Davis reports, many causes of cancer were well known. German researchers had even demonstrated the cancerous effects of tobacco, benzene, and asbestos.

Later that century, Percival Pott, an English surgeon, determined that scrotal cancer was an occupational hazard among chimney sweeps. Certainly by the 1930s, as Davis reports, many causes of cancer were well known. German researchers had even demonstrated the cancerous effects of tobacco, benzene, and asbestos. (Later, after Germany's defeat in the Second World War, governments and industry snapped up Nazi scientists, pilfered their research, but concealed or discredited the Nazi research on carcinogens).

Davis quickly dispels the myth that increases in the rate of cancer can simply be explained as the cost of living longer. Why, for example, is brain cancer five times more prevalent in the U.S. as compared to Japan? Why, in a single decade, has testicular cancer increased by 50 per cent in men less than 40 years of age? Why are younger women

experiencing twice the rate of breast cancer seen in women of the same age a couple of generations ago? Why are black women more likely than white women to become victims of breast cancer? And an aging population definitely has nothing to do with the rise in leukemia and other cancers among children.

Financial concerns are of course the principal motive for hiding or minimizing the causes of cancer, and for failing to clean up toxic land. Racism has also been a factor, and in the U.S., higher rates of cancer among blacks were often blamed upon genetic differences rather than the dirty and dangerous occupations in which they have worked.

North American society is awash in known and potential carcinogens (including the hormone disruptors that many people inadvertently ingest or apply to their bodies on a daily basis) but industry has been allowed to create this situation because governments in the U.S. and Canada have failed to enact and enforce laws that ensure workplace safety and limit consumers' exposure to carcinogens.

The Reagan era in the U.S. was particularly regressive, as it pursued a program of less government control, and therefore had little interest in monitoring carcinogenic substances. The legacy of this free-for-all mentality continues to this day, and Canada's situation is not very different: while the European Union has banned many potentially harmful substances from personal care items, for example, these same chemicals can be found in North American products, including bubble baths and shampoos for babies.

(Davis's book was published before baby bottles containing BPA were removed from store shelves in Canada, but the BPA issue illustrates the government's failure to seriously limit the public's exposure to potential carcinogens. Ostensibly protecting cuddly babies from carcinogens makes for good public relations, but BPA is still being used in reusable water bottles and by the food industry to line tin cans.)

In terms of Canadian relevance, Sarnia, Ontario, earns special mention. Davis portrays it—owing to the effects of the asbestos industry—as a cancer hotspot. Though asbestos is banned in many countries, Canada continues to mine and produce the carcinogen.

Individuals victimized by cancer may also find themselves victimized by the legal system. Legal manoeuvring makes it almost impossible to sue corporations that use and produce carcinogens. According to Davis, "before you can collect damages, you must . . . show that someone already got [cancer] from the same things you did, prove that you had specific exposures to a particular agent, find the firm that caused your harm . . . and prove that they knew the exposure was harmful" (42-3).

In effect, the legal standard for proof of harm is impossibly high. According to Davis, even though, as mentioned above, it was known in the 1700s that chimney sweeps were subject to scrotal cancer, a modern-day chimney sweep who develops this disease would be unable to sue an employer, as it would be impossible to determine which *single* carcinogen, among the hundred or so carcinogens found in soot, actually caused his particular cancer.

Davis uses epidemiological and animal research in helping to determine which substances are likely to produce cancer in humans. She also highlights a legal double standard in the application of animal studies: they are acceptable for testing the safety of pharmaceuticals that are later used on humans, but are not accepted as proof of harm in the case of carcinogens. Even though substances may cause cancers in rats, for example, governments, industry, and the courts do not consider it to be proof that humans may be at risk.

This reviewer, however, sees Davis's reliance on animal research as problematic. Apart from ethical concerns (animals are supposedly different enough from us that we can subject them to whatever tests we wish, but similar enough to us that animal research findings are applicable to humans) such tests may simply fail to indicate that a substance is harmful to humans.

The Canadian Coalition for Health and the Environment, for example, questions the value of animal tests that study exposures to single chemicals in isolation, under completely artificial conditions. In an open letter regarding the testing of herbicides, they cite findings suggesting that rats, the favoured species for laboratory tests, actually have an innate protection from some substances that are harmful to humans: "extrapolation from studies in rats may be inappropriate, because rats have genes that do not exist in people, for detoxification of chemicals."

Davis herself makes reference to erroneous tobacco research on rats that failed to produce cancer in the animals (and was thus cited by the tobacco industry as proof of its product's safety) simply because the physiology of the rat respiratory system was not taken into account. Are we, perhaps, allowing ourselves to be exposed to substances that produce cancers in humans because they failed to do so in animals? This points to the need for a much more sensitive measure of safety; cell cultures, perhaps?

Nevertheless, Davis presents us with issues that should be a call to action. In preventing cancers, we need to demand more accountability and openness from industry, better regulation and enforcement by government, and willingness by both entities to clean up toxic waste sites.

In addition, she underlines the need for an independent and objective body to research cancer risks (though, I must add, one which does not rely upon inappropriate and outdated animal studies).

Well written, engaging, and drawing upon a vast amount of personal and professional knowledge, *The Secret History of the War on Cancer* is a must-read for anyone concerned about human health and the health of the planet.

The Secret History of the War on Cancer is published by Basic Books. ISBN-13: 978-0-465-01566-5. ISBN-10: 0-465-01566-2.

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DO NOT GO GENTLE: MY GRANDMOTHER'S RAGE

Jennifer McNeil



This article originally appeared January 25, 2008, in issue 1604.

"What am I to do now?" This has become my grandmother's refrain.

It was shocking when I saw her again after she had been moved from the Alzheimer's care centre to the nursing home. My mother had tried to warn me, but I was still unprepared for the vacant eyes, the crooked body, and the guttural repetition of, "What am I to do now?"

At first, we had answers for her. We talked about the weather and about what was happening in our lives. We read her favourite Scottish poems and sang songs to remind her of her youth in Glasgow. We attempted a humorous rendition of "Happy Birthday" and opened her cards. "Oh, look at this one from Auntie Dorrie. You remember Dorrie, don't you?"

I thought I saw a glimmer of recognition in her empty eyes before she continued her questioning. With an exasperated sigh, I said, "Nothing. You're just going to relax."

Of course, this disease won't let her do that. Her failing mind and now her failing body hold her in a constant state of fear and pain.

Apparently, we're not the only ones bothered by my grandmother's questions. The nurses keep her door shut most of the time because she's so loud, shouting her confusion until she's hoarse with the effort. I want to get angry with them. How dare they treat my grandmother like this? This is my gran, I want to say, the woman who used to make me toast soldiers and hot chocolate, and who always had a comforting word and cuddle to share. This is the quiet woman who spent most of her life in a loveless, abusive marriage and faced it all without question, without ever raising her voice.

This, above all, is a human being. How can you shut her out? How can you leave her to suffer alone? But then I remember my exasperation in the short hour we spent together on her birthday and, despite the lingering indignation and my own feelings of guilt, I understand.

Seeing my grandmother suffering that day and learning about her isolation, I realized that throughout her life, my gran has always suffered alone. It was the way she chose to survive, perhaps something she had learned from her own mother who was also a survivor in a much different way. My great grandmother was sharp-tongued and feisty, raising three children almost entirely on her own after her husband returned crippled from the First World War. Even near the end, when she suffered from dementia and her 92 years of hard living had left her body shrivelled and useless, her spirit was obvious in the way she rolled up her newspapers and tried to swat the male residents at the home.

She was a fighter, and so, in her own way, is my grandmother. Quietly and unassumingly, she fought her way through a life of hardship and pain. Now she is fighting death with a loudness that is startling, as if she has finally found her voice after all these years. She shouts and questions. She makes her presence known.

This new feature of my grandmother, whether brought on by the disease or some long-hidden aspect of her own personality, makes me simultaneously uncomfortable and proud. During the birthday visit, I tried to shush her, to keep her calm and quiet by stroking her hair and hands and reading her favourite poems in a soft and soothing voice. When nurses passed in the hallway and caught my eye, I felt inexplicably embarrassed, as if they were judging me because of this loud and obnoxious woman in their care.

Now that I am away from that place, the nursing home with its clinical smells and surfaces, I am pleased by my grandmother's behaviour. I want her to fight, to heed Dylan Thomas and "rage, rage against the dying of the light." I want her to be heard and to force us all to think about life and death, the important questions.

"What am I to do now?" she asks. Indeed, what are we all to do when faced with mortality in this way?

Perhaps that is why the nurses shut the door and why we all want my grandmother to stay quiet. When confronted with her refrain, we realize there are no conclusive answers. Instead of encouraging her rage against the coming night, we try to hide or soothe it away because we are afraid and we don't want to face her questioning for ourselves.

Maybe that's okay. Maybe that's how we all survive. But the next time I visit, I am determined to let my gran shout, to listen to her questions without fear. I will hear her newfound voice and I will celebrate her fight to "burn and rave at close of day."

AU Profiles:

AU Profiles: Sara Windross

Christina M. Frey

This article originally appeared November 14, 2008, in issue 1644.

Athabasca University students come to the "classroom" with different life situations and different challenges. First-year Bachelor of Arts in Humanities student Sara Windross's particular challenge is studying while dealing with cerebral palsy. But despite any difficulties her condition has sent her way, she's focused, organized, and thrilled that distance education with Athabasca University has allowed her to rediscover the joy of learning.

Cerebral palsy is a physical condition affecting the muscles and joints. For Sara, classified as having spastic cerebral palsy, certain muscles and joints have become rigid and cannot relax. This means that, for example, Sara is not able to type with both hands, and needs a wheelchair to get around.

However, she doesn't feel that her cerebral palsy is affecting her educational experience significantly; in her mind, it's no different than any other personal or family issues students might face. "I don't see CP as a disability, it's just a challenge," she says.

Physical limitations do require her to move at a slower pace. “I type with one hand,” she says. Putting together an assignment may take a few weeks, but Sara is steadily working through the program, taking one course each term.

Currently, she has been studying with AU for more than two years and is nine credits into the program. Since she hopes to work as an editor someday, she’s planning to change her major to English to gain the background she’ll need for that career.

Sara has found a good resource in AU’s Access to Students with Disabilities office (ASD), which works with eligible students to streamline their education process. “ASD has made it very easy,” Sara says. For example, she can go through ASD to request a free course extension. “I never worry about getting behind in my course load,” she explains.

Sara discovered AU when she began looking at education options. Distance learning was an easy choice; Sara was familiar with independent study after having been homeschooled for several years. Better still, the delivery method was well-suited to her needs.

“I always wanted to go to university,” she says, but the local university wasn’t a possibility due to accessibility concerns. “[It] is on a hill, so that presents challenges for me,” says Sara, who uses a motorized wheelchair.

AU and distance study were a good solution, and so far, it’s worked well for Sara. “I’m a very dedicated student,” she says. “I don’t have a nine-to-five office job . . . [but] I take my course work just as seriously as one takes a job.”

To stay focused, she approaches things very methodically, dividing courses into subsections to compartmentalize the work. “I like doing that so I don’t feel overwhelmed,” she says. Sara also knows the importance of having a dedicated space: she does her classwork in a private room, which minimizes distractions.

One challenge she finds easy to deal with is procrastination. Keeping her sights on a long-term plan helps. “When I want to procrastinate I think about how much I really want to earn a degree and the feeling disappears,” Sara says.

For Sara, the strongest motivator is the fact that she’s now able to enjoy studying again. When she attended public school as a child, her interest in learning declined when she fell behind.

“The grades were moving too quickly, [and] I couldn’t keep up with the work,” Sara says. “[It] led me to resent learning.”

. . . cerebral palsy is just another challenge on the road of life. It’s certainly not going to get in the way of her learning.

As an AU student, she’s now able to control the pace of her studies, giving her the chance to appreciate and enjoy school for its own sake. “AU has helped me rediscover my love for learning,” Sara says. She’s enthusiastic about her studies and hasn’t ruled out graduate school in the future—“if I still enjoy school!” she says.

To Sara, cerebral palsy is just another challenge on the road of life. It’s certainly not going to get in the way of her learning.

FICTION

Erik Ditz



Ante Up

This article originally appeared April 18, 2008, in issue 1616.

They sat and played their game in a bright and busy park; the old men could always be found there when the weather was good.

The game changed from time to time, sometimes rummy or crib or euchre, but they liked poker most of all and it was around this game that the most severe bets took place. The hand was dealt, their faces serious and composed. I leaned nearby on my cane, quietly observing.

"Ante up!" cried the dealer. There was a pause. Slowly, the man to his left spoke up.

"Our fifty-seventh anniversary," he said, "that was the last time Jeannie and I ever danced." He sighed and paused, while the others let him take his time. "My brother was there too. Glenn Campbell was on the record player, and we danced all night . . ."

After a moment, the next man spoke.

"Hey, Barney, remember when you and me was kids and we found that watering hole? We nearly drowned your sister goofin' off in that hole, swimmin' for hours on end and building forts. I'm gonna toss that summer; that's the best one I got left and if that won't win this hand for me, I'm better off without it."

Barney cackled toothlessly across the table before gumming out a reply that suggested—mostly through vigorous nodding—that he was putting that memory on the table alongside his friend.

"All right," said the dealer, sounding more like a circus ringleader than an old man. "Twelve years old," he said, "beating the snot out of Jimmy Nicholls."

"Who's Jimmy Nicholls again?"

"He's the first kid that ever tried to steal my bike. I laid him straight out, boy."

Barney shook his head vehemently, baring his gums like moist and shapeless fangs.

"Tom," Barney's friend said to the dealer, "as usual I'm with him. That's not nearly as valuable as what we've wagered here. George's last dance with Jeannie and our childhood memories are worth more than a lousy fist fight over a bike."

At this, Tom got rather flushed and I'm sure I must have too, for it was at that moment I finally understood; these poor, sad old men were betting with their own dreams and memories. This game was literally worth the very thing that raises us above instinct, that makes a person more than the sum of the parts: the ability to remember who you are.

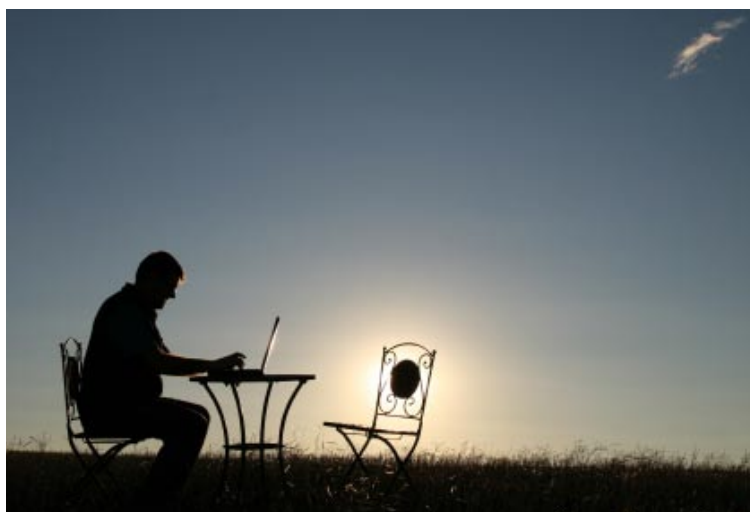
"You guys have cleaned me out and you know it," argued Tom. "You're lucky I haven't anted my memory of how to deal these stupid cards. Take it or leave it."

I suppose it's best to cut the majority of the game from this account. The technical details are uninteresting at best—the game consisted mostly of similar bickering—but in short, Tom's wager of a teenage brawl was accepted, and they played it through.

Nobody really won.

THE LONELINESS OF THE LONG-DISTANCE LEARNER

Adam Thackeray



This article originally appeared August 22, 2008, in issue 1633.

The time on the computer screen reads 11:18 p.m., and the loneliness sets in. (In truth, the accuracy of this time is questionable as my computer is often many hours ahead, and the date setting is often many years behind; 1982, to be exact.)

Regardless of chronological inaccuracies, there is still the slightest twinge of melancholy that this distance student feels tonight.

Were it actually 1982, the closest approximation of academically related gloom would be the depressingly unreciprocated love for my fifth-grade classmates, Amy Carter and Cara Bell. Needless to say, these adolescent lamentations have long since passed, but this evening there is an undeniable sense of isolation within me.

The feeling doesn't come often, but at such times I must remind myself why I have been hunching over this battered laptop and countless textbooks for the past five years: I have persevered in order to redeem the mediocrity of my educational past, to improve myself intellectually in the present moment, and more importantly, to broaden the future for myself and for my family.

As I begin to dwell on the embarrassing scholastic ineptitude of my youth, our family's ancient tabby, Boo, begins her long, drawn-out, ritualistic caterwauling from the basement. Her intermittent howls break the silence of the house for the next few minutes, and under my breath I curse her seeming immortality. My disdain for the cat is only temporary, of course, and I must remind myself to sympathize with her apparent dementia.

While I am attempting to put myself in the emotional mindset of an aged, slightly overweight feline, it suddenly occurs to me that Boo has been in my life almost as long as I've been pursuing some form or other

of post-secondary education. With this reflection, it also occurs to me that for all the good my lacklustre intellectual pursuits had done me, I may as well have let the cat do my homework all along.

Hyperbole aside, I am so very thankful for the second chance that distance education has now given me. If not for AU, I would still be stuck in a professional rut, most likely involving a polyester uniform and a plastic name tag.

If not for AU, I would not currently be surprising myself with my own studious achievements. If not for AU, I would not have the opportunity to be both a student and a stay-at-home dad, rewarding myself with knowledge both academic and precious.

***If not for AU, I would
not have the
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home dad, rewarding
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At the thought of my children, I shut down my computer for the evening and quietly ascend the stairwell leading to their rooms. (With ninja-like precision, I manage to avoid the numerous squeaks, pops, and moans so characteristic of slipshod, builder-grade construction.)

I enter my daughter's room at the top of the stairs and, in the pink glow of the night light, I see her stretched out like a starfish, snoring softly into the worn belly of her favourite stuffed bunny (dubbed "Bunny," appropriately).

I draw near and kiss her between her eyes, where faint blue veins suggest the shape of a butterfly taking flight. It is at this moment that I am reminded of my purpose. Indeed, whenever I begin to wonder why I fight to keep myself awake into the wee, lonely hours, chipping away at a degree with no apparent end in sight, all I have to do is watch her sleep and I am reminded.

I visit my son's room next. By this time, my eyes have become accustomed to the darkness, and I can distinguish his long, scrawny limbs positioned at the oddest of angles. As I brush the bangs from his uncharacteristically calm brow, I smile to myself and am reminded once again of my purpose; he fills me with such pride, and it is this same feeling that I wish him to have of me.

I kiss his small nose and, in return, my son smacks his lips, turns to the wall, and farts loudly into the small, still room—a blast of surprising amplitude for such small buttocks. It is a poignant moment, to be sure.

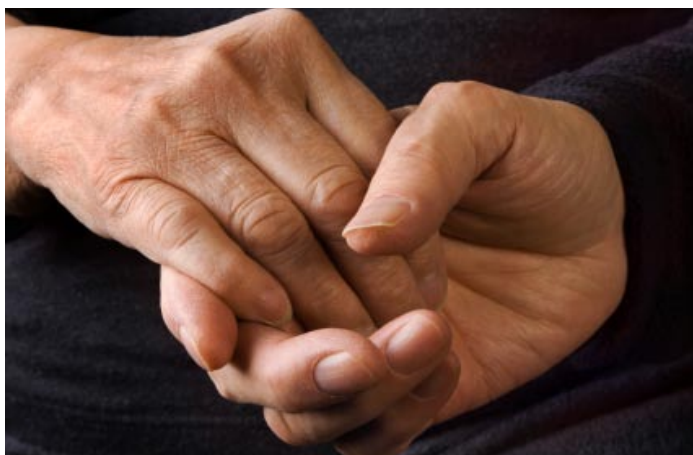
At this point in the evening/morning, I long only to be horizontal, preferably in a bed of some sort. After a drowsy, negligent display of dental hygiene technique, I lumber through the darkness toward the sweet release that only my pillow has to offer. As I hit the mattress, every spring and coil groans in protest of my collapsing weight, and I momentarily disrupt the sleep of my beautiful wife.

She soon drifts back to unconsciousness, and my final waking thoughts are of her: she, who has sacrificed much so that I may continue my education; she, who works tirelessly to earn our single income; she, who reminds me that I am not alone in my struggle.

The burning, red LED of the clock radio reads 1:32 a.m. The loneliness has passed, and all is well.

SLICE OF LIFE

Barbara Godin



Goodnight My Love

This article originally appeared March 21, 2008, in issue 1612.

He sat in the corner of the room, looking out the window. From his hospital bed he could see the crimson leaves waiting to drop to the ground. It was late fall and he knew this would be his last season on this earth. Though he struggled to hang on, his life was slipping away.

As the familiar footsteps grew louder, closer, he knew his wife was here for her daily visit. He hated to put her through this. She smiled as she saw the frail, shrivelled body of the man she had loved for the last 25 years. She also knew his life was slipping away. She sat on the bed and asked how he felt.

"Pretty good."

She knew he would say that; he always did, even after the rounds of chemo and the blasts of radiation, he never complained. Sometimes it made her frustrated, even angry. She wished he would tell her how he felt—cry, yell, share his pain with her. He didn't want her to be concerned. How could she not be concerned? The doctor told her he only had "days to weeks" left. That was three days ago.

They sat together talking about nothing, though every word would become etched in her mind for eternity.

"Help me."

"What do you need?"

"I want to go home."

"You can't, the doctor said you need to be here."

He looked away from her. They both knew he would never go home. They had talked about it, but hoped they had more time.

"I'm tired."

"I know."

"I'm going to lie down."

"I'll help you."

She held his tubes and IV lines while he got comfortable. He looked into her eyes.

"Will I be all right?"

"Yes, they'll take good care of you here."

She sat beside him holding his warm hand as he closed his eyes. She thought of a short time ago when his hand held hers and they walked together in the woods near their home. She remembered how he gently caressed her feet as they lay in his lap each evening while they sat together watching television or talking and sharing their dreams for the future. These were the hands that gently touched her as they made love.

His breathing changed. She touched his brow and kissed his soft lips.

"Good night, my sweet gentle husband."

Grief

My world is silenced

I do not hear your voice

I do not feel your touch

Where you sat is empty

Where you slept is empty

You are no more.

My heart aches

My eyes weep

Where are you?

I wait for you

But you do not come.

I want to go to you

But I cannot.

No one would understand.

I have to wait here

Until it is time to be with you again

I hope it will not be too long

As I cannot bear the days and nights of nothingness.

LIFE AMONGST THE BOUGAINVILLEA

Greg Ryan



This article originally appeared July 18, 2008, in issue 1628.

In Tegucigalpa, summer lies over the palm-shrouded streets like a blanket some torpid god has thrown carelessly upon the slovenly city.

The courtyard's metal gate crackles when opened. It's early in the a.m. The day's heat will build, until my nostrils fill with a metallic smell.

I hear the water vendor's groaning cart roll

downhill toward the creek at the bottom of the ravine, where the mule will push his muzzle beneath the water's surface and drink.

The night watchmen sit outside the *tiendita* where they sip Coke and watch the gringos pass by in the morning light. I hear the church bells of Santa Maria call the faithful to Mass. A tiny, yellow taxi traverses the cobblestones and spews a cloud of noxious fumes that hang in the still air.

Over the mountains north of the city I see storm clouds rising. The rainy season is here. It's raining up there in the mountains where I don't live anymore. A silver aircraft passes overhead and banks north away from the black clouds piling up along the horizon. Foreigners heading stateside, I expect. A flock of multicoloured parrots land in the bougainvillea bushes beside the terrazzo porch and begin a cacophonous squawking.

On the cul-de-sac where I live, the *casas* are beginning to stir. Families are collectively shrugging out from under the lethargy of a comatose night's sleep. The water vendor cries "*agua, agua.*" On the next street over a *perro* barks, another answers, and the burro standing knee-deep in water brays his displeasure with the neighbourhood dogs.

Hondurans, Nicaraguans, and Miskito Indians haul their wares from door to door attempting to cadge coins from the indolent housewives who examine with practiced eyes the bananas, papayas, pineapples, and household goods for sale. The daily cycle begins anew and slowly but inexorably time slips through my fingers.

I myself am assaulted on my way home from the *grocereteria*. The streets are in deep shadow with darkness hovering over the rooftops. I hurry along trying to outrace nightfall. Two young men come leaping from the shadows, knock me over, grab my hat, and leave me prone amongst a scattering of broken bottles and spilt milk. Other than my cap and pride, nothing else is taken. I sit on the curb a few moments gathering my thoughts before continuing toward home.

Then, a week later, a *Federale*, my Blue Jays baseball cap in hand, appears at my door. My name and address are scribbled on a shred of notepaper hidden in the hatband. Those who attacked me were captured conducting a minor crime spree and when the cap was examined the hidden note came to light. I'm bewildered that an official would go to the effort to return a well-worn cap, but he's curious.

"You have visas to live here?" asks the *sargento*, playing with the holstered pistol hanging by his side.

Ah, think I, reaching for my wallet: the dreaded *mordida*.

Suddenly, the *lempira* isn't worth much anymore. How to survive on funds drawn in local currency? I see defeat in every co-workers' face. Inflation decimates savings. Property values plummet. But the cyclical nature of this country is what it's all about. As do the rains, everything has its season. To be paranoid is to be in country; it is to go native. This is the beginning of the end.

A sad fact: as a foreigner I see things coming that I know I'll never adjust to. I have a different perspective. There are problems that I worry like hell about. I make provisions, take precautions, and tell myself I'll change and adapt.

Only I can't. It's too late. I know my time is past and that what I fear has already taken place. Suddenly my life amongst the bougainvillea is over; I miss it.

CROSSING THE FLOOR

Lonita Fraser



This article originally appeared July 4, 2008, in issue 1627.

Now, we all have the right to change our minds. I do it frequently. I like a nice, fresh mind, with an ocean scent and clean sheets. Presumably, changing my mind harms no one except me, and possibly a few of my friends, and perhaps the guy at the pizza shop if I decide that dieting isn't such a bad idea after all.

But then there's Canadian politics.

For example, what harm might be done by a party member who, after being elected to office in the Plaid Party, suddenly changes his mind and joins the Paisley Party? Is Plaid Party person now acting in my best interest, or are they acting in their own?

In good faith, I voted to have a Plaid Party person running my business for me because I like Plaid Party principles. I did not ask for Paisley Party principles; in fact, I just voted against them.

So what good is it doing me, or my vote, if the person I chose has suddenly become a switch hitter in the middle of the ninth inning, bases loaded, two men out? It doesn't do much good for my political ideals, or the way governments conduct people's lives; or, rather, "orchestrate."

And I think it's long past time for there to be consequences.

If a person crosses the floor to the Other Side (by which I do not mean the much-lamented former drinking haunt of me and some of my friends during our misspent youth), that person shouldn't be able to continue reaping the benefits of the things that put them in power to begin with, i.e., the votes of me and my aforementioned drinking buddies.

(Most of us gave up paisley when we discarded being '80s-era mods and adopted a more plaid-like outlook on life, becoming '90s-era Madchester and grunge addicts and devotees of the god-like Pixies.)

All kidding aside, though, don't you think your vote should count in the place you put it, given that we have a party system in this country?

I don't believe any of us should be put in the position of having to vote against ourselves (sounds naughty), which is essentially what a floor-crossing would equate to. Sure, you vote for a person, but you don't *just* vote for a person.

Voting for the party is like religion in this country: a good chunk of the time people don't give a flying tinker's toy box whose name is on the ballot, so long as they belong to the right party. So how 'bout some recourse when a person divorces that party?

It seems to me that the best way to affect someone in government is to threaten either their status or their wallet—or both. So here are a few choices for payback:

If you decide to cross the floor, you must repay all the money you reaped from the party that got you elected. Furthermore, you automatically lose your seat. So, really, you win—a battle of personal conscience that reaps you no actual benefits.

And now that you've done so, there's also the joy of facing the judgement of those who followed their conscience when they elected you, and will follow it when they hand you your hat. Don't cry foul, matey; they're just doing to you what you did to them: asking for their conscience to remain *intacta*.

You are also ineligible for any potential by-election that happens in your riding because of your move, and must wait until the next full election to run again. Or, if you wish to run, the party in whose bosom you now rest must foot the bill for said by-election. The people already paid for their choice; they shouldn't pay twice. (We have the GST for that.) Oh, I can just about smell the love this would generate.

There's really only one major flaw in my theories of punishment: people who don't cross because they don't want to face the storm it would kindle, and who then fail to work in the interest of the party that got them elected. Or worse, even go so far as to work to its detriment.

We'll call this double-dealing, mole-type bullshit, yet how this would be different from a good bit of what goes on in the political forum now I'd be hard-pressed to figure out.

I'd like to say I had a vehicle for effecting some kind of political alteration but I don't, and anything else I might add right now would leave me sounding preachy; I would have about as much popularity as the jerk at the back of the bar who keeps shouting for the band to play "Freebird."

Yet whatever the consequences might be, and despite its rarity and the fact that we don't ever seem to question it when it happens, crossing the floor of Parliament shouldn't go unnoticed, or garner only a little ill will as its punishment.

I made a choice at the polls and I'd like to have at least some modicum of my integrity held up. If they can't do it, I'll happily send them packing, but they'll go bare-handed—not with the contents of the mini-bar in the hotel room of my political ideals.



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

This column originally appeared February 8, 2008, in issue 1606.

CD: Sam Baker, *Pretty World*

Release date: 2007

Label: BlueLimeStone Publishing

Produced by Walt Wilkins and Tim Lorsch of Bull Creek Productions

In *Pretty World* Sam Baker presents us with a grittily beatific vision of the saints and sinners of Texas, which turns out to be a rich microcosm of the world at large. Kudos to the producers and musicians; this CD is a masterpiece. The music is mesmerizing, and so evocative of the wide open prairie that you can almost hear the wind whistling and the tumbleweed bouncing by.

Baker's lyrics are almost cryptic in their modest handling of weighty subjects. Such simplicity is rare among singer-songwriters; even though economy of language is typical of the best writing, many songwriters can't resist the urge to become self-indulgently rhapsodic and complex. Baker deliberately guards against such excesses.

The title track is a dawn song, part of a lyrical tradition that stretches at least as far back as the Middle Ages; the poet has spent the night with his beloved and is expressing regret at having to leave her.

The modern twist that Baker gives his *alba* is that within romantic intimacy a whole new world has sprung up, an oasis in a desert of industry. Eros is the heaven we are forced to leave for our daily vale of tears.

In "Odessa," Stephen Foster's "Hard Times Come Again No More" is a musical backdrop to the tale of a spoiled son of an oil baron.

The strong character and intense spirituality of old-time homesteaders is juxtaposed against the modern dilemma of money spouting from the ground with nothing but empty hearts to gather it in; the honest labour of the early settlers is set against a devil's playground of idleness.



Oil is king, the individual is a dry blade of grass on a windswept plain, and ego has banished love.

In "Orphan" we see the effects of love's banishment; a young girl who, having been rejected by her mother, is unable to live in relationship. These are lives of quiet despair, and in "Juarez" we see a man who exemplifies Kierkegaard's dictum that being unconscious of one's despair in no way nullifies the despair itself.

***"Before the sun
Before the heat
Before we untangle from our
sheets
Before this summer day unfurls
Pretty world"***

Sam Baker from "Pretty World"

"Broken Fingers" seems especially poignant once you learn that it was written in memory of the young German boy who befriended Sam on a train in Peru in 1986, a boy who died with his parents and Sam's friends when a terrorist's bomb blew up their train car. Sam himself emerged with multiple injuries and a low expectation of survival.

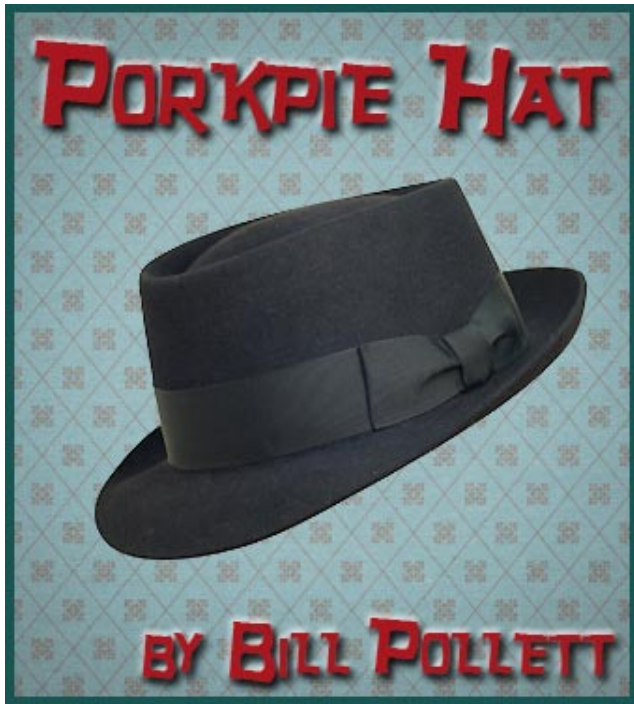
After many rounds of surgery his shrapnel-damaged left hand still presents him with challenges (he learned to play guitar left-handed because of it) and is an ongoing reminder of his traumatic closeness to the violent and senseless death of an innocent.

A renewal of American culture will not be possible without careful attention to the thoughts and memories of Sam Baker. Carrying in his body the wounds of a country long at war with the unknown, he is processing his experience with a sweet spirit, shunning rage, bitterness, denial, and the temptation to divorce himself from the past.

Unspeakable damage has been done to victims of terror, yet no redemption lies in assigning blame or lashing out against an unseen target. We would all, including our leaders, do well to listen attentively to such survivors of terrorist acts with a view to building a world in which, as in Sam's dreamscapes, we are all so lovingly aware and accepting of each other in all our beauty and baseness that violence is unimaginable.

Pretty World lives up to seven of the Mindful Bard's criteria for music well worth listening to: 1) it is authentic, original, and delightful; 2) it enhances an awareness of the beauty and sanctity of creation; 3) it reveals an attainment of true self; 4) it renews my enthusiasm for positive social action; 5) it makes me want to be a better artist; 6) it displays an engagement with and a compassionate response to suffering; and 7) it provides respite from a sick and cruel world, a respite enabling me to renew myself for a return to mindful endeavour.

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 [here](#). If I agree with your recommendation, I'll thank you online.



How You Can (Accidentally) Become an Artist

This column originally appeared September 19, 2008, in issue 1637.

One day you're in the classroom, in the fifth grade maybe, and you spend too long staring out the window. You notice the flickering light of an approaching storm, the faces of angels or gargoyles rising and falling in a cauldron of clouds.

You turn your attention back to the inside of the classroom (the outside of your mind) because the teacher is saying your name and the other kids are snickering.

You notice everything has changed. Desks are no longer desks, pencils not pencils; all things are charged, crackling with beauty and menace.

Walking home after school, a crow falls dead at your feet. There is meaning here.

A few years later, it's twilight and you are sitting on the window ledge of your bedroom. You have the radio turned up loud to drown out the sound of your screaming parents. Someone is singing about a girl with an orange silk dress. You hear a dish or maybe a glass smashing against a wall.

The kids in the house next door are putting on a shadow puppet show. They have a sheet strung across a clothesline, a school overhead projector plugged into an extension cord. You watch as fabulous-terrible shadow creatures take shape and dissolve on a luminous screen.

That night you have a strange dream about an owl circling above your head. You are holding a green gardening glove, and it is the funniest thing you have ever seen. You wake up at four a.m. with tears of laughter rolling down your cheeks.

Many years later, you are on a business trip midway across the Great Plains. There is a strange light in the night sky, hovering above the cornfields. You pull your car off to the side of the road. The crickets are deafening; moths swirling like black snow. The light floats above your head for a few seconds, turning everything a frozen blue, then disappears. A hundred feet away, there is a coyote gnawing on the remains of a house cat.

When you check into the motel that night, you phone your wife to tell her what you saw. She tells you she is pregnant. In another room, someone is singing an aria. You think the beauty of cheap motels is the way one thing just leaks into another.

You take out a pad of motel stationery, and begin to draw.



From Where I Sit

Hazel Anaka

If Only It Was Hair in the Drain

This column originally appeared June 20, 2008, in issue 1625.

Thursday night Roy was shaving before a late shower. Before long, with the air of a beaten man, he announced the sink wouldn't drain. We assumed the culprit was hair in the trap.

Removing all the products under the sink, finding an ice cream pail to catch the water, and getting the tools to loosen the connections all took time. That would've been fine if it had worked. Sure, there was gunk in the pipes, but two more attempts at taking it all apart didn't do a damn thing. Today's ABS pipe is virtually trouble-free. The 49-year-old copper pipe is not. A horizontal piece was corroded and had a chunk missing.

I'll spare you all the gory details. Suffice it to say that when we finally went to bed at 2 a.m. the problem was not solved and in fact had taken on a life of its own.

We're not quite sure how water ended up coming through the light fixture in the basement bathroom. At this point, we have some ruined ceiling tiles, water damage to the paint on one wall, and a wrecked light fixture downstairs. Roy was quite the sight in his boxers, standing barefoot in water yanking on the fixture. I kinda think at that point electrocution was looking like a good way out. I can see the personal ad now: Recent widow looking to meet a plumber.

Because of much craziness in our lives right now, it's nearly a week later and this is the routine: Wash your face and hair and do your teeth in the kitchen sink.

Take a bath. Find your deodorant, etcetera, in the vanity drawers that are either in the office or the bedroom. Do your makeup and hair at the kitchen table. Our personal hygiene is starting to suffer because the bathroom has become a gut job.

The new granite countertop we bought a week earlier and stored in the basement for "when we had time" has now been dragged upstairs. I repainted the walls and ceiling and gave the old vanity two fresh coats of paint.

We'll have to switch the faucets from a four inch to an eight inch. And if we've done all this, we might as well replace both the ceiling fixture and the light bar above the sink. Hey, and Roy never did like the old mirror, so I guess that's gone too.

Once the vanity was yanked out (its new home is in the kitchen) it only makes sense to replace the flooring while we're at it. Luckily we had picked up a few boxes of vinyl planking at ReStore a few months ago, so that's ready to go.

That also means the toilet will need to be lifted. Might as well replace the wax ring and water hook ups while we're at it. The total for all this is nearing a thousand dollars and counting. And we're still nowhere near having it done. Though I did re-hang the shower bar and curtain, so showers are now possible again.

In time, it'll be a thing of beauty, from where I sit.

This column originally appeared November 7, 2008, in issue 1643.

The Interviewer

It is the ninth decade of the twentieth century...

written and illustrated by Wanda Waterman St. Louis

Caramel Baby: Final Chapter

He remembers the day his mother brought home the little caramel baby.



Reuben, he's gonna love you, 'cause all boys love their big brothers, so you gotta be the best brother you can be, y'understand?

His goodhearted stepdad had let him hold it.



As a baby Wendel would turn to look whenever he heard Reuben's voice...

When Wendel was leaving for Montreal with his band their mother had cried from her soul.



...and later, when he was older, followed Reuben everywhere and did everything Reuben did.



He'd listened to all of Reuben's records and then taught himself to play the guitar. Like a wizard. No lessons.

Come on, now, Mum. Don't worry. I'll be okay.



Really. I'll be fine.

Pub Murder

Montreal Gazette 12 July 1978

ape Breton Nova Scotia musician Wendel Gagnon is murdered last night

a preliminary investigation resulted in the interview of several suspects with ties to racist organizations in the city. After

Had she somehow known?

The End

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THE VOICE

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