

# THE VOICE MAGAZINE

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## Holiday Romance

Christmas classics

## Water for Water

Courage Brothers

## Giving Back

Student service awards



*Plus: The Mindful Bard, From Where I Sit,  
Dear Barb, and much more...*

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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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## COURAGE BROTHERS' POLAR BEAR DIP

Sandra Livingston



### Water for Water

Boating, fishing, and swimming are just a few of the ways people rely on Lake Ontario's 1,640 cubic kilometres of fresh water.

But the lake plays another role—one that could mean the difference between life and death in a country halfway around the world. It's home to the Courage Brothers' Polar Bear Dip, an event that sees thousands of "dippers" plunge into the lake's icy waters each New Year's Day for charity.

Trent Courage, co-founder of the Polar Bear Dip, recently shared how the dip has grown from humble beginnings to become the largest charitable event of its kind in Canada.

"This event started 25 years ago when Todd and I were in our twenties," Trent says. "After New Year's, we were hanging around our mother's house and I guess she got tired of us being there with nothing to do—so she told us to go jump in the lake. At that time, our house backed onto Lake Ontario, so we took her up on it."

From there, the event "quickly became a tradition. Each year, more and more of our friends would participate with us and it eventually grew so much we started to collect pledges and give the funds raised to charity. At the start, we'd give to a different charity each year. However, once the event grew to the point that we were having hundreds of dippers and tons of spectators, we decided that we should form a lasting relationship with a single charity. We've had a relationship with World Vision for at least the last 14 years now—and it's been great.

"The Courage Brothers' Polar Bear Dip for World Vision turned into an event that supports water projects because we're a bunch of people throwing ourselves into freezing cold water to raise money for fresh water. It's 'water for water.' There's a great connection there."

In North America, where access to clean water is usually as simple as turning a tap, it can be hard to envision spending hours each day simply gathering enough water to survive. But for millions, it's a life-or-death reality. The Courage Brothers' Polar Bear Dip for World Vision helps change that, with over \$450,000 raised so far toward clean-water projects "in countries such as Rwanda, Sudan, [and] Kenya."

As Trent explains, "the funds help with building of water towers, laying pipes, installing water pumps, among other things. The significance of fresh water can't be understated. Clean water is the 'essence of life.' It can relieve disease and death, can sustain life and livestock, irrigate crops for food, and enables clean clothes and cooking."

This fall, Trent and his brother Todd visited Rwanda to see firsthand the results of their fundraising.

"It really provoked a lot of mixed feelings," Trent says. "It made [us] thankful for what we have and also thankful for all the support that participants in the Courage Brothers' Polar Bear Dip have given us. The support from all our dippers and spectators has allowed us to make a practical difference in so many countries. It just goes to show what a group of people can do when we all pull together."

The urgent need for those efforts was plain to see, as Trent explains.

"We saw children spending many hours and much effort transporting water to their families," he says. "We saw a woman washing clothes in water from a mud hole that had overgrown plant life and was used by cattle. When I asked her if any of her family had gotten sick from the water, she began to cry and told us that the baby on her back had bloody diarrhea—a sure sign of cholera."

In a recent press release, Todd Courage added his own impressions of the visit. "Visiting Kahi, Rwanda, and seeing life there with my own eyes has changed everything for me," he says. "The image of watching hundreds of children carrying big yellow buckets full of water, walking literally miles to bring it back to their towns and villages, has been permanently etched in my mind—it's like a human pipeline."



New Year's Day 2010 will mark the 25th anniversary of the Polar Bear Dip. And the Courage Brothers, along with some 500 other "dippers," will be in Oakville to dive into Lake Ontario's freezing water to support the Kahi Clean Water Project. They'll be dressed in "just about anything from bikinis, tartan skirts and clown outfits to costumes designed with such imagination that it can leave you awestruck," and they raise funds by having people sponsor their dip.

The water temperature is usually "just around or just below freezing." A few times, organizers have even had to break the ice on the lake. But as Trent explains, braving the cold is well worth it.

"We hear time and time again from World Vision how much they appreciate the Courage Brothers' Polar Bear Dip," he says. "Not only does the dip raise funds to help communities get fresh water, it raises a large amount of awareness about the projects World Vision takes part in around the world. This event generates a huge amount of publicity throughout December and on New Year's Day. We always make sure that representatives from World Vision are at the event so they can talk about the organization and the projects."

"It's not just a bunch of crazies jumping into a freezing cold lake," he adds. "It's a fun way to raise money and have an impact."

For some participants, the connection goes well beyond the main event. "Many of the people who participate in the Courage Brothers' Polar Bear Dip sponsor children through World Vision," Trent says. "Participants can visit the World Vision booth at the event on January 1 and find out about sponsorship opportunities too."

If you're brave enough to take a dip on New Year's Day, or want to find out more about the event, you'll find everything you need at the [Polar Bear Dip](#) website.



## SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE (OLD) MOVIES

Christina M. Frey



## A Classic Christmas Romance

Whether it's the warm holiday spirit, the festive food and drink, or the hanging mistletoe, Christmas is often a time of romance. It's no surprise, then, that a number of the classic Christmas films revolve around love affairs. Although many holiday movies involve romantic elements (for example, *Miracle on 34th Street* and *It's a Wonderful Life*), the following five classics focus specifically on romance, and Christmas is a lesser, but still important, player. They can give a refreshing pause during frenzied mid-December, when a satisfying love story is a welcome respite from the holiday stress.

Love and laughter meet in the 1940 romantic comedy *The Shop Around the Corner*. At work, two sales clerks engage in constant verbal battles, but neither is as cold-hearted as one might think. He's carrying on a letter-writing love affair with a pen pal, and she's similarly involved. What is the likelihood that they're unknowingly falling in love, via mail, with each other, just in time for Christmas? It's a predictable story, but the ending is sweet.

*Trivia:* Does the plot seem familiar? It should; *Shop* was remade 60 years later as *You've Got Mail* (and updated to use email rather than traditional letter writing!). In this original version, you'll probably recognize the legendary Jimmy Stewart, who plays Alfred Kralik; also familiar might the blustery Mr. Matuschek, who was the bumbling title character in *The Wizard of Oz*.

Another romantic comedy, *Christmas in Connecticut* (1945) also involves writing, but of a different kind. Housekeeping columnist Elizabeth Lane is known as the best housewife in America. Writing from her "farm in Connecticut," she pens mouth-watering recipes and housekeeping tips while tending to the farm, her husband, and young child. What better place for a wounded, lonely war hero to spend a traditional Christmas? That's what her publisher thinks, and he decides to accompany a veteran to enjoy an old-fashioned holiday. But there's a catch. Elizabeth really lives in a New York apartment, where she barely even cooks for herself. She's not married. There's no farm. And she doesn't even know someone with a baby! Her long-time boyfriend and close city friend help her spin an elaborate hoax, but even Elizabeth is no match for what ensues.

*Trivia:* Contrary to what you might think, not all Christmas films were made to coincide with the holiday season. Oddly, the holiday-focused *Christmas in Connecticut* was originally released in July 1945!

Also not to be missed is the 1949 romantic comedy *Holiday Affair*. Connie, a war widow, finds herself torn between two men: the successful but pompous lawyer Carl, and Steve, an ambitious drifter with a good heart. The love-hate relationships among the love triangle are comically played out during the whole Christmas season, culminating with Connie's final decision on New Year's Eve.

*Trivia:* The celebrities of 50 years ago could be just as troubled as those of today. A year prior to *Holiday Affair*'s release, Robert Mitchum (Steve) was arrested for, and convicted of, possession of marijuana (although the conviction was later overturned on legal grounds). At the time, Mitchum's film roles tended to be in the film noir or western genres. Allegedly, the studio that held his contract placed him in the role of the charming Steve in order to rehabilitate his public image. It was apparently a successful move, as Mitchum continued making pictures for decades.

Despite its darker overtones and bittersweet ending, *Remember the Night* (1940) also has its place in a canon of Christmas romances. It's a few days before the holiday, and a beautiful but troubled young woman, Lee, is on trial for shoplifting a bracelet. Prosecutor John Sargent asks for a delay in the proceedings to keep the Christmas-spirited jury from "going easy" on the pretty crook. This means Lee will be in jail over the holidays, and Sargent takes pity on her, posting her bail so she can enjoy her Christmas before the trial reconvenes. Several mishaps and misunderstandings later, Lee arrives at Sargent's family home for the Christmas holidays. Romance is in the air for the prosecutor and the thief, but the trial looms in the near future. How to reconcile duty and love?

*Trivia:* I've noticed that directors of the past tended to duplicate successful film pairings in later pictures. For example, the chemistry between Barbara Stanwyck (Lee) and Fred MacMurray (John) was good enough to inspire several more Stanwyck-MacMurray movies, most notably 1944's *Double Indemnity*.

Finally, for Christmas romance and carols by the snow, it's hard to beat Irving Berlin's Christmas musical *White Christmas*. In a heartfelt tale, two army buddies-turned-entertainers, cynical Bob and overstressed Phil, take their show on the road to a small town in Vermont, where their former commander owns a failing ski lodge. The lack of snow forces the lodge into bankruptcy, and the general feels old and useless. Can Bob and Phil, together with an ambitious duo of singing sisters, Betty and Judy, bring back the Christmas cheer? Love, misunderstanding, and enthusiastic music-and-dance numbers propel the story to a happy ending for everyone.

*Trivia:* If you've heard the *White Christmas* soundtrack, you might notice some voice discrepancies between the soundtrack and the movie itself. Rosemary Clooney, who played and sang Betty's parts (and some of Judy's musical numbers), was under contract with Columbia Records at the time the movie was produced. Because the soundtrack was made by a different studio, Decca, Clooney couldn't record it; her songs were redone by a different singer.

Christmas films warm the heart and appeal to the soul. Next week—the final instalment before Christmas break—we'll examine a few of those heart-warming classics that define the spirit of the season. In the meantime, enjoy a good dose of Christmas romance with this instalment's recommendations. Warm and happy watching!



## IN CONVERSATION WITH . . .

Wanda Waterman St. Louis

## Cynthia Sayer, Part II

*Cynthia Sayer is a New York-based jazz banjo phenomenon whose latest album, Attractions, on Plunk Records, was recently reviewed in the Voice.*

*She recently took the time to talk with Wanda Waterman St. Louis about her influences, music as a career, and teaching via Skype.*

## Influences

I was deeply influenced by several artists. First and foremost was the historic jazz banjoist Elmer

Snowden. When I heard his album *Harlem Banjo!* I was absolutely dumbfounded. He could swing like crazy, and played with such musical integrity! There was no hint of any of the corniness that other players seemed to assume with a banjo.

That recording is what made me decide to try to play jazz banjo. It showed me that the instrument's natural abilities for driving rhythm and articulating single string work were great jazz tools. I also was heavily influenced, like countless others, by the legendary gypsy guitarist Django Reinhardt, as well as by the great Louis Armstrong. The specific instrument doesn't matter at all; it's about the ideas, the approach.

## My Life in Music

Working as a musician has given me the opportunity to live the kind of life I dreamed of when I was a kid. Of course I didn't know then what the day-to-day realities would entail. The creative and business challenges range from exhilarating to unforgiving. I am amazed and delighted that I have been able to do it for so long, and I hope it will never end.

I have only recently come to appreciate the special joys of teaching. I used to limit the number of students I would take, and considered it better to do it for real than to teach. Now I get it about teaching, and for the past few years it has become a priority equal to performing. I try to maintain a good balance between the two.







It helps that Skype is now popular, since that has opened up a whole new avenue of teaching online. Now I can teach someone no matter where they live. I recently had some of my students come and sit in on one of my gigs. A couple of them had never played in public before. They did great, and I was proud!

My eyes have been opened to the whole idea of not only practising an art, but of helping to pass it on so that others can continue it in their own way.

### **On *Attractions***

*Attractions* was heavily reviewed after its release, and I was thrilled by the raves. But the music business is impossible to predict; in spite of the press, sales were okay but not great. The usual road for a new CD is for it to get reviews and attract most of its sales within six months to a year of its release, and after that it tends to fade away.

But *Attractions* was very unusual in that it sustained some press interest after that initial release period. My sales have actually risen slowly and steadily over

time. I am guessing this has been due to a more organic response, i.e., word of mouth as opposed to press-driven sales.

### **The Company You Keep**

Most of my friends, and also certainly my partner BG, can be described as smart, accomplished, creative, well travelled, fun, and liberal. But I also enjoy odd, interesting characters.

### **Personal Convictions**

I believe in personal responsibility, tolerance, and equality. And I believe in the inspiration, beauty, and power of nature and art.

## STUDENT AWARDS

Bethany Tynes



### Student Service Awards: AUSU Recognizes Outstanding Contributions

AUSU's Student Service Award is "designed to recognize members who have made outstanding contributions to their community," including "members who volunteer their time to AUSU, AU or to any other community or organization." Three winners were recently chosen for this award: Tyler Nagle, Lorie Craig, and Sarah Beamish. All three were kind enough to discuss their contributions as a volunteer.

Tyler Nagle is an AU program student who is "only four courses away" from completing his Bachelor of Commerce. Nagle serves as "the student representative on the School of Business program council," and also as the Vice President (Canadian Region) for the International Graphic Arts Education Association (IGAEA).

"I've held this position since 2006," says Nagle. "This year, I was awarded the President's Award for Exceptional Service to IGAEA—in recognition of my work in creating a new content-managed website for the organization, supporting hundreds of users."

Nagle says, however, that his largest volunteer time commitment is his work with the WorldSkills organization. WorldSkills is an international not-for-profit association that aims to promote vocational education and training, and holds a biannual international competition to showcase incredibly skilled tradespeople. Nagle served as the Canadian National Expert for Offset Printing in the 2009 WorldSkills competition.

Nagle is also highly involved with Skills Canada, WorldSkills' Canadian subsidiary. He is the Chair of the National Technical Committee for Offset Printing for Skills Canada, and has been a judge of the Skills Canada National Graphic Design Competition for the last three years, as well as a committee member for the Provincial Graphic Design Competition.

"It is a wonderful feeling to have my contributions recognized in a formal way," Nagle says. "Thank you to AUSU for honouring me with this award. I appreciate the recognition."

Lorie Craig, meanwhile, is both an LPN and a single mother of three children aged 24, 21, and 19. "My 19-year-old son was involved in an alcohol-related car crash in 2004 at the age of 13," Craig says. "He sustained a very severe brain injury."

Seven months after her son's accident, Craig decided to begin caring for him at home. Through her daily struggles "living in a small rural community with a severely disabled family member," Craig became an advocate for the disabled.

"I am dedicated to turning my son's personal tragedy into a strong voice for youth safety," Craig says. "I have been actively involved with teenagers in my community and have a deep concern for their need to make safe, sensible decisions with risky activities and to stop drinking and driving."

Because “the only cure for brain injury is PREVENTION,” Craig has “made focused and targeted efforts to assist communities throughout southwest Saskatchewan to increase youth safety in key injury areas.”

Most notably, Craig initiated and coordinated “a well-respected, nationally recognized Prevention of Alcohol and Risk Related Trauma in Youth (P.A.R.T.Y.) program” in her home community. She has worked to extend P.A.R.T.Y. programs to several other communities throughout southwest Saskatchewan.

Craig has also advocated for handicapped parking access, wheelchair accessibility to stores and recreation, appropriate handicapped public transportation, and special educational resources and advancements. Craig has furthermore “raised community awareness to the needs of people with disabilities” and “assisted teachers, school children, and youth to understand and include students with disabilities,” as well as challenging her local “school and health programs to deliver programs in a seamless, coordinated client-centred manner.”

Craig says that she is “thankful that this award is available to recognize the hard work of volunteers.”

Sarah Beamish’s volunteer work, finally, “has spanned a number of organizations and themes,” but for the past 10 years has primarily been with the human rights non-governmental agency Amnesty International.

“I began as an individual member writing letters,” Beamish says, “then became the coordinator of a high school group, and since then have worked at a number of tasks on the national and international levels.”

Beamish says that highlights of her work with Amnesty International have included “sitting on a number of national committees, monitoring the Ipperwash Inquiry into the police killing of indigenous land rights protester Dudley George, [and] attending the International Council Meeting (Amnesty’s highest decision-making body) in Mexico as Canada’s first voting youth representative.”

Beamish also serves as a “coordinator for Amnesty’s Colombia file,” a position she has held since 2006. “In this role, I develop and support activism on this file by our members across Canada,” Beamish explains. “Recently my work has been particularly focused on pushing for a human rights impact assessment of the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement.”

“This spring I was also elected to Amnesty Canada’s Executive Committee (board of directors), and I am now completing a two-year term as director, with a particular individual focus on international strategy, finance, and planning and evaluation of our long-term work.”

Beamish describes her volunteer work as “a fundamental part” of her life; one that is both “intensely challenging and intensely rewarding.” She says that to her, this award is “particularly meaningful,” and proves that “good marks and paper achievements are not the only important thing or the most important thing. Awards like this are an act of recognition that we can achieve and contribute in many ways, and that learning and leadership should happen simultaneously.”

***“Awards like this are an act of recognition that we can achieve and contribute in many ways, and that learning and leadership should happen simultaneously.”***

AUSU and *The Voice* congratulate the winners of the Student Service Awards, and thank them for all of their volunteer contributions!

## ERAS IN EDUCATION

Jason Sullivan



### Darkness to Light: Helen Keller's Education Life

"Teach them to think and read and talk without self-repression, and they will write because they cannot help it." These words, written by a woman named Anne Mansfield Sullivan, could apply to any teaching situation. As students we express ourselves most completely when we are guided in a direction that stimulates our creative desires. This desire for education-for-liberation rather than education-for-restraint is also clear when the subject is differently abled.

Helen Keller, blind and deaf since the age of one, was aided and tutored by a recent graduate of a school for the blind named Anne Sullivan. The process and outcome of Keller's education illustrates

the importance of personal interactions for enriching the learning process.

Helen Keller was born in 1880 and died in 1968. In early childhood she suffered from a "brain fever," likely scarlet fever or meningitis, which left her unable to hear or see. At the time, a likely outcome was a life in an institution, especially because she behaved in seemingly uncontrollable ways and "would kick and scream when angry and giggle uncontrollably when happy."

Fortunately, Anne Sullivan was brought in as a tutor. Despite their shared status as "disabled" the relationship between teacher and pupil did not begin auspiciously. "Helen was curious, then defiant" and it was only when the two of them spent time in isolation in a cottage at the Kellers' cotton plantation that progress was made.

Understanding language as a semiotic system consisting of connections between symbols and objects seems to come naturally when children can see and hear. For Keller to connect objects and words her other senses came into play. Sullivan taught Keller the first word she truly understood, water. She did this by pumping water from a hand pump onto Keller's hand while tracing the letters "w-a-t-e-r" onto Helen's other hand. This epiphany triggered Keller's inborn desire to know and learn, and she proceeded to "pound the ground demanding to know its 'letter name.'"

This process of learning within the context of one's personal reality is crucial; without the caring personal attention of her tutor, Helen Keller might never have learned to express herself in ways others could comprehend.

Following mastery of "several methods of communication, including touch-lip reading, Braille, speech, typing, and finger spelling" Keller attended the prestigious Radcliffe College from 1900 to 1904. (She wanted to attend Harvard but women were barred from entry.) Thereafter she became politically active. She fought for public awareness of blindness and malnutrition in addition to helping found the American Civil Liberties Union. She also advocated for women's right to birth control.



Hellen was also a supporter of the American Socialist Party's presidential candidate, Eugene Debs. Her political and social enemies did not see her as an equal; in an attack upon her socialist politics a right-wing newspaper called the *Brooklyn Eagle* stated that her "mistakes sprung out of the manifest limitations of her development." The fact that women of every ability or "disability" were being attacked using similar language is important. Marginalization of "others," meaning women, minorities, and differently abled people, was rampant throughout Keller's life.

Keller and Sullivan remained close friends for 49 years, until the latter died in 1936. When Keller had attended college, Anne remained at her side "interpreting lectures and texts." Even when Sullivan married a man named John Macy, Helen Keller went to live with them. Gradually, however, "Anne and John became distant to each other as Sullivan's devotion to Keller continued unabated." When Anne's marriage ended, she and Helen continued to live together.



Helen and Anne's bond is perhaps axiomatic from a feminist perspective of how people marginalized by mainstream culture adapt and cope. One feminist theorist named Dale Spender argues that "women constitute a muted group in society because meaning has been controlled by men." The feminist theorist Adrienne Rich speaks of a "lesbian continuum" which is not necessarily sexual so much as based on organically arising solidarity amongst women. For Rich, "woman-identified experience, including sharing a rich inner life" is based on an understanding that the prevalent methods of communication and levers of social power exist for the benefit of some at the expense of others.

As an educated young person, Helen Keller was aware that she lived not only in a male-dominated world but also one that was able-dominated. Speaking of men later in life she opined that "men would always be more fascinated by her than women—perhaps because the tactile world in which she lived was, for many males, intimately linked with their own eroticism."

Another feminist theorist, Luce Irigaray, picks up this thread but suggests that it is in fact women who carry a physiological "autoeroticism" in their consciousnesses, a trait that allows women to naturally bond with one another. Put eloquently though perhaps a tad bluntly, Irigaray states that "the two lips of the vulva speak a language more complex, subtle and diversified than that of male desire." Although Keller did not live to experience the second-wave feminist theory of the '70s, it is interesting to imagine what her response would have been in light of her uniquely marginalized position in society.

The concepts of "self" and "other" tend to produce feelings of belonging or alienation. This is especially true in educational situations. In this way Keller and Sullivan's relationship, based as it was on Keller's education, provides insights into marginalization as an outcome of education and culture. We learn our culture and its symbols and meanings just as we learn our language itself.

In a recent PhD dissertation, a student of Duke University in North Carolina named Abigail Lauren Salerno discusses Keller as a “perceptive other.” A “perceptive other” is someone who “mediates modern aesthetic experience as both visual and not-visual.” For instance, whereas most of us learn to read with our eyes and ears, Helen learned to communicate in other ways.

Keller’s educational process of first learning to understand words and then to communicate is paralleled in the development of cultural institutions such as the cinema. Cinema developed from “simple reproductive technology, in a kind of pre-linguistic phases” followed by a “narrative phase, which requires language and syntax.” As spectators we first learn to see what is happening, and then learn how to interpret action according to social rules and expectations.

In school, codes of normality are learned. Keller and other “perceptive others” are in a unique position to experience firsthand what the critical theorist Walter Benjamin refers to as “new modes of organizing vision and sensory perception, a new relationship with ‘things,’ different forms of mimetic experience and expression, of affectivity, temporality and reflexivity.” It is this position of relative privilege, compared to those who are normally abled, that is reflected in the concept of a “perceptive other.” Perceptive others can be, see, and feel in ways beyond what the rest of us might ever imagine.

Helen Keller’s ability to transcend what to some would seem insurmountable challenges is a testament to her own will and to the strength of her bond with her tutor, Anne Sullivan. Just as modern feminists write of “woman as unrepresentable within existing linguistic structures,” Keller also found herself outside and beyond the normal bounds of education and communication. She personified the “perceptive other” who is marginalized by what “normal” people feel yet at the same time is liberated from ordinary preconceptions about reality.

The poet Grace Nichols, speaking of feeling emboldened by her contact with other people with whom she felt an affinity, wrote: “I have crossed an ocean / I have lost my tongue / From the root of the old one / A new one has sprung.” Keller’s growth from frustrated child, alienated from everyone around her, into confident activist adult reflects the process of rebirth so vital to worthwhile educational pursuits.

## DID YOU KNOW?

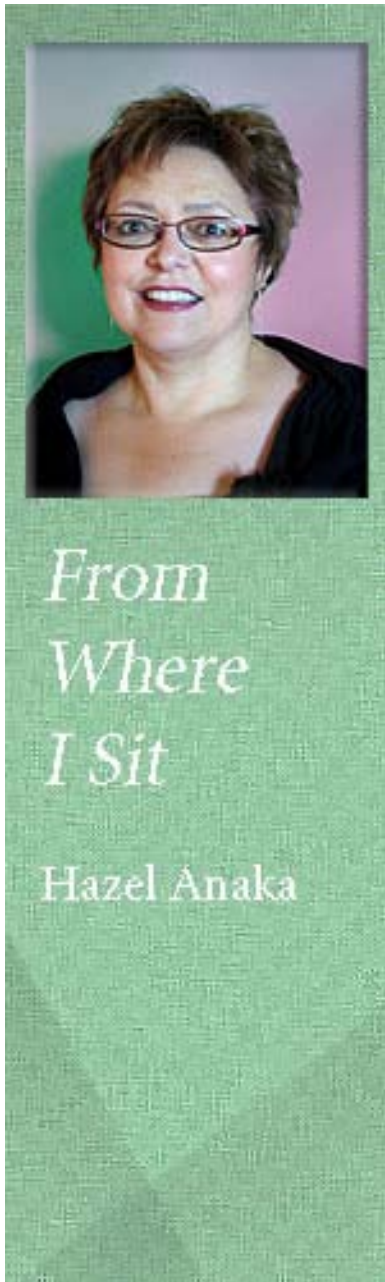


### Academic Earth

Sometimes, a different explanation is all it takes to make a difficult concept stick or bring a dry subject to life. If you’re looking for a little academic inspiration—or just love learning—you may want to check out [Academic Earth](#).

The site offers free video lectures from leading universities, including Berkeley, Princeton, MIT, Yale, and Harvard, and its goal is to build “a user-friendly educational ecosystem that will give internet users around the world the ability to easily find, interact with, and learn from full video courses and lectures from the world’s leading scholars.”

You’ll find lectures on everything from Architecture and Astronomy to Psychology and Religious Studies, with plenty of subjects in between, and you can even search for lectures by individual professors.



## Possibilities

In the space of three days I attended two prayer services. I suspect that among the hundreds of mourners many of us had similar thoughts as the priest officiated, the cantor sang, and the families mourned.

I suspect we thought about our connection to these two men and the last time we saw them. We may have consoled ourselves with the belief their earthly suffering was over and blessed eternal life awaits. We might have concluded each man led a good life, loved and been loved, made a mark on those they knew; that 61 and 79 years was enough time to do what needed to be done in this life.

We likely marvelled how someone with an October diagnosis of lung cancer could be gone in late November. Some of us wept knowing he didn't live long enough to see his first grandchild born; a child due any day now. All of us remember his ability to make anyone laugh, usually by sprinkling just the right Ukrainian words into an otherwise English sentence.

In the other instance the farmers in the crowd understood the pain of selling the precious cattle herd two days before the stroke that led, weeks later, ultimately to death. Was it foreshadowing or the more practical realization the demanding work was becoming impossible? I wept because all three of his sons had served the priest through countless Sunday and special services and that evening they were served. I cried because the son-in-law's deep and resonating voice filled the funeral chapel as the mournful songs unfolded. How many times had he sung those words for others?

I cried at the sight of distraught wives, children, grandchildren, and siblings trying to cope with their grief because I know the pain has only begun. I cried when hundreds of unprompted voices sang the traditional "Memory Eternal" in Ukrainian and then English. Even if I haven't shed a tear to that point, inevitably that hymn is my undoing.

Between Friday and Sunday nights I watched a TV movie, *Last Holiday* starring Queen Latifah. In it Georgia May Byrd cashes in her life savings for a spectacular last holiday in Europe after discovering she has three weeks left to live. "You wait and wait for something big to happen . . . and then find out you're gonna die."

She forgoes Lean Cuisine for gourmet meals, she tries extreme sports, she gambles and gets pampered. She regrets how most of us "keep our head down . . . hustle, hustle . . . sometimes what we care about is pretty worthless." She wishes she'd laughed more, loved more, seen the world, not been so afraid. In a letter about funeral arrangements she writes "I spent my whole life in a box. I don't want to be buried in one." A misdiagnosis provides the happy ending as envisioned in her Possibilities Book.

I can't presume to know if these two men died with regrets but I can use these recent words and images from real life and TV to re-examine how I want to live and die. To try to turn possibility into reality, from where I sit.



# Sister Aurora

*There's a rainbow dancing in the sky tonight, and I think I'm gonna go outside . . .*

#  
22

Why do you have to be so hard on her, Jodi? Put yourself in her shoes!

Uh, that's something I definitely will NOT do.

It could have been you, and you know it.

NO! It could NOT have been me!

That guy had the chance to come after me, but he knew how to pick his victim. I would have given him a couple of black eyes and maybe castrated him.





## Rekindling Christmas Spirit

*Dear Barb:*

*It's almost Christmas and I just can't get into the spirit. I can't find anything good about Christmas to celebrate. Everybody spends too much money, eats too much food, and drinks too much alcohol. Every year somebody in my family gets mad because somebody didn't visit them, but instead went to visit another sister or brother. My parents are getting older, and I just wish this would stop and we could all be together. I'm just tired of the whole thing. How does someone who feels the way I do get into the Christmas spirit? Bah humbug!*

*Craig*

Merry Christmas, Craig! Many share your sentiments. For lots of people, Christmas reminds them of what they don't have, as well as people and relationships they have lost. Christmas can be especially difficult for seniors and people on fixed incomes. They just don't have the extra money for gifts, specialty foods, etc. They often spend Christmas alone, without family members because of age or their inability to visit family and friends who are far away.

There are still many people who celebrate the spiritual/religious aspect of Christmas, as evidenced by the numbers who frequent churches on Christmas day, although there seem to be fewer

people doing this nowadays. Others view Christmas as a time to reconnect with friends and family that they may not have seen for a long time. The bottom line is that Christmas really is what you choose to make it.

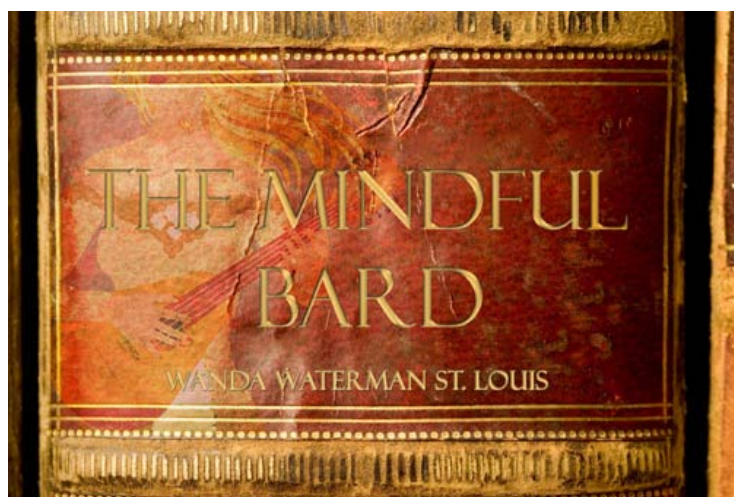
I do agree Christmas has become too commercialized. Parents spend tons of money giving their children mountains of toys that they probably will never play with. Frequently, Christmas debts last long after Christmas is over. And with high interest charges, people end up paying twice as much as the gifts originally cost. It really does get out of control.

All I can suggest, Craig, is for you to find your own personal way of celebrating the holidays. Try not to get caught up in the commercialism. If you can't afford to buy a gift, then don't (and don't use credit to pay for gifts). If someone really cares about you, they will accept what you give and be happy to spend time with you. I know that sounds clichéd but it really is true.

Also, don't become a victim of the social politics of the day. Spend time with the family members you want to. If they can't all be together, try to spend a little time visiting each family.

Although Christmas should be a joyous occasion, I agree the day really has lost a lot of its meaning. Try to enjoy and thanks again for writing.

*Email your questions to [voice@voicemagazine.org](mailto:voice@voicemagazine.org). Some submissions may be edited for length or to protect confidentiality; your real name and location will never be printed. This column is for entertainment only. The author is not a professional counsellor and this column is not intended to take the place of professional advice.*



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

CD: Gordie Tentrees, *Mercy or Sin*

Label: Yukon Roots

Release date: 2009

Blues

Yukon Muskeg Mule Train Blues

If you're a roots fan, and I know you are, Gordie Tentrees's third album will bring you many hours

of bliss. And don't just give it one listen—it really does grow on you, transport you, even. These are aimless north country drifter songs, redolent of wood smoke, gasoline, pine needles, moss, beer, and river water, with lyrical substance and thoughtful, joyfully executed musical arrangements.

There is a virile energy in blues when it's done right, a rugged, pared down, carnal essentiality by no means confined to the male sex. It can be tempting to put out too much of it and that's when it loses its salience to become monotonous, but in this album the virility is part of a spectrum that also includes introspection, tenderness, fun country licks, and rollicking rhythms. The contrast is mutually advantageous.

Tentrees played four instruments on this one; vocals, guitar, dobro, and harmonica. Several members of his band are also multi-instrumentalists; together they have great chemistry and a musical fervour that never seems to lag.

Four particularly engaging songs are "No Integrity Man," "Carpenter Girl," "Rambling's Gonna Be the Death of Me," and "Devil Talks."



*"It would be so easy  
You could kill a man  
He that took the rest of  
All that you had  
Just drowning in your river  
You think what you could do  
You all done feeling sorrow  
That's when the devil talks to you"*

**Gordie Tentrees, Matt King, Ken  
Hermanson in "Devil Talks"**

In January the Yukon-based performer is beginning a lengthy North American tour of concerts (including an appearance at the Olympic Games), radio appearances, and CD release parties.

*Mercy or Sin* manifests six of The Mindful Bard's criteria for music well worth a listen: 1) it is authentic, original, and delightful; 2) it confronts existing injustices; 3) it displays an engagement with and compassionate response to suffering; 4) it inspires an awareness of the sanctity of creation; 5) it is about attainment of the true self; and 6) 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](mailto:bard@voicemagazine.org). If I agree with your recommendation, I'll thank you online.*

## CLICK OF THE WRIST – Christmas Lights

Incandescent or LED, snowflakes or baubles, simple string or computerized display. The choice in Christmas lights is bigger than ever and it seems that everybody loves them. If you haven't put yours up yet, you may find some inspiration in these sites.

Cinderella Castle Christmas Lights - If you enjoy Christmas lights but not the work of putting them up, just be glad you're not decorating Cinderella's castle at Disney World. It takes six weeks, 200,000 lights, and 18 miles of cable to create the shimmering display. But the real magic is that it only uses enough power to run three clothes dryers.

Pedal Power Christmas Lights - In Copenhagen, everyone has gathered around for the grand lighting of the Christmas tree. The difference is, these lights are powered by pedaling. Each section of the tree is connected to a bike, and everyone from school children to professional cyclists will take a turn at powering the lights.

Ultimate Christmas Lights - There's no end of incredible Christmas light displays out there, many of them set to music. This video gives a behind the scenes peek at the hours it can take to create a display—and the reason one couple keeps putting the work in year after year.

Christmas Lights from Around the World - From Boston to Colombia to the UK, these Christmas light displays are amazing (if only for the amount of lights they require!). Along with the photos is the interesting history of just how the illuminating Christmas tradition got started.

Coca-Cola Christmas - The lights aren't electrical but this Coca-Cola commercial from the '70s is a classic. And the candles, Christmas tree, and message of hope are still a wonderful sight.

## AUSU UPDATE



### New 2010 AUSU Handbook/Planners

The new AUSU Handbook/Planners are in the final stages of creation, and should be available within the next couple of months. We had great response on it being full colour, so we'll be doing that once more. Also, numerous suggestions for improvements have been heard and we're fitting in what we can while still keeping the book at a convenient, compact size.

Watch the AUSU front page for the pre-order form, which should be up in early December!

### SmartDraw Program Renewal

Some of you who took advantage of our program to provide SmartDraw software to members have been getting notifications that your software license will soon be expiring. Fortunately, AUSU will be continuing this program, so if you haven't already, go to the AUSU home page to download the newest version.

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.

### Think AUSU for Christmas

If you haven't already, take a look at our [merchandise catalogue](#) on the front page. Show your AUSU colors on your tree with one of our glass ornaments, and the hoodies and baby jumpers are great gifts for those important people who are supporting your pursuit of your degree.

We also have a selection of other items, such as *Voice* mugs and USB hubs, when you want to show where you get your student-focused news from.

### Lock Loan Program Cancellation

Not everything is good news. And unfortunately, due to continued loss of loaner locks that was well beyond our expectations, AUSU has determined that it simply cannot continue to loan locks out to students at the Edmonton and Calgary Exam Centres. However, the locks are still available for purchase, and their popularity attests to their use and convenience. Used locks are being sold for \$2, new ones for \$4. Contact [ausu@ausu.org](mailto:ausu@ausu.org) for details.



The locks themselves are small and allow you to set your own three-digit combination, good not only for lockers at exam centres but also for the gym or anywhere that lets you use your own lock to guard your stuff.

### AUSU Council Down to Eight

AUSU will be starting the New Year with only eight council members. Heather Fraser was removed from Council as a result of repeated absence from Council meetings. It is always a hard decision for Council when we have to remove someone the members have elected, but without full participation it gets more difficult for Council to move forward. Council does hope, however, that this gives her more time for her many other endeavours, and wishes her the best.

### Election Policy Changes

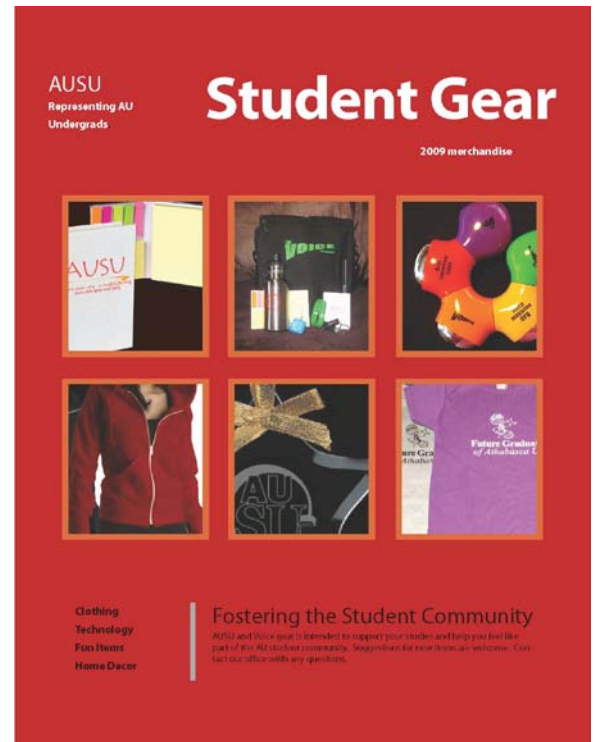
AUSU has made some adjustments to the timeline of the elections. Last year we had a number of complaints that the election period was just too long. People lost interest between when it started and when the voting period rolled around. The new policy shortens the timelines for nomination and campaigning considerably, although we have left intact the four-day voting period to be sure that all members have an opportunity to make their voices heard. Full details on the changes will be released on the AUSU website shortly, and Council has set the date of this upcoming election to March 7, 2010. Voting will be until March 11, 2010, with more details as to how you can participate to be available shortly on the AUSU website.

### AUSU Scheduling Meeting with Tutors' Union

By far the most common complaint we hear from members is that some tutors take far too long to respond and that there is too little communication between certain tutors and students. With more studies emerging that show the likelihood of students completing a distance-based course can be directly related to the amount of contact they have with their instructor, AUSU views these complaints as particularly grievous. To attempt to address this, AUSU is seeking a meeting with the tutors' union to try to discuss some ways that the Students' Union and Tutors' Union can work together to ensure that both tutors and students get the support they need to make sure students get the contact they need to get them through their courses.

### AUSU Thanks Minister Horner—With Odd Results

AUSU took the opportunity earlier last month to write a letter to Alberta Advanced Education Minister Doug Horner to thank him for holding firm to the regulated limits on undergraduate tuition, even though the government is under increasing budgetary pressure. Unfortunately, shortly after the letter was sent, Minister Horner announced that they were considering changing the regulation to allow significant increases to tuition beyond the regulated amounts.



## INTERNATIONAL NEWS DESK



### At Home: Time (capsule) slips away in Prince Rupert

It seems that the one thing everybody's short of these days is time. And in Prince Rupert, BC, even a time capsule has gone missing.

Back on July 20, 1971, a metre-long capsule was "buried and enclosed in cement." The only problem is, no one bothered to permanently mark the spot. Now, less than three months before the scheduled reopening of the capsule, the hunt is on to find it.

The opening is scheduled for March 10, 2010, as part of Prince Rupert's 100th birthday celebration. As the *Globe and Mail* reports, officials have put out an appeal to help locate the missing capsule in time for the festivities.

The best guess is that the capsule is buried "somewhere on a hill across from the local hospital." But two months of searching have failed to turn anything up. Officials are now hoping that local residents might be able to recall where the time capsule was buried.

However, they'd prefer that any digging is left to the authorities. "It would be best if they could contact me directly," Joan Cameron, the city's executive assistant, told reporters. That hasn't stopped some people from using probes and metal detectors to try to locate the missing capsule.

If the capsule is found, it's expected to reveal items such as a centennial dollar, catalogues, newspapers, and cans of salmon, as well as predictions from politicians of the day.

### In Foreign News: Scottish secondary pupils absent three weeks a year

Education authorities in Scotland are urging parents to get their children into the classroom after it was revealed the average secondary student is "absent for more than three weeks a year." As the *Telegraph* reports, as many as 6,000 students are absent on a typical day, adding up to over "a million lost days per year."

Since 2008, the number of students with a perfect attendance record has risen from 35,000 to 47,400. In spite of that improvement, there was no change in the average absentee rate of approximately three-and-a-half weeks. In poorer areas, the average student was absent for an additional 14 days.

The numbers have prompted Scottish ministers to produce new guidelines for parents. The guidelines acknowledge that learning problems and bullying can contribute to a child's absence, but stress that allowing children to stay home will not benefit them in the long run. Keith Brown, the Schools Minister, noted that "If young people are to reap the benefits of their education and get the skills they need for life and work, they need to be in school."

Parents were also advised not to pull their children out of school to go on family holidays. During the 2008-09 school year, there were an average of 43,000 children off school each day, including absences for illness.

# CLASSIFIEDS

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Classifieds are free for AU students! Contact [voice@voicemagazine.org](mailto:voice@voicemagazine.org) for more information.

## THE VOICE

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