Volume 18 Issue 01
January 8, 2010

THE VOICE MAGAZINE

Unveiling Egypt

Napoleon's scientists

Have Tickets . . .

Won't travel

Double-Double

Drive-through decorum

Plus: From Where I Sit, Dear Barb,
In Conversation With, and much more...

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The Voice is published every Friday in HTML and PDF format

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Special thanks to Athabasca University's *The Insider* for its frequent contributions

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

THE VOICE BEST OF 2009

Welcome to *The Voice Magazine*'s Best of 2009 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.

Regular *Voice* readers will enjoy selections from favourites such as "The Mindful Bard," where Wanda Waterman St. Louis introduces an eclectic mix of thought-provoking films, books, and music. Her astute social observations are also showcased in "The Interviewer" and we think you'll enjoy revisiting Reuben and his friends.

This issue wouldn't be complete without the ever-popular "From Where I Sit," a column that's been offering Hazel Anaka's perceptive and refreshing viewpoint on life since 2003.

John Buhler is here as well, a writer who always brings his book and film reviews to vivid life and pulls readers into the tale, whether it's haunted houses or Napoleon's scientists.

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 air travel just as much as the first time it appeared.

We've got highlights from Bethany Tynes, too, a versatile writer who brings the straight goods to "AU Options" while providing thoughtful insights in her feature articles.

The past year also saw the return of "Dear Barb," featuring Barbara Godin's sensible advice, along with many new and talented voices as well as the occasional visit from familiar ones—far too many to list here, so feel free to wander through the Best of 2009 and enjoy!

LOVE: MADE FOR TV? A.K. Flynn

This feature originally appeared October 9, 2009, in issue 1738.

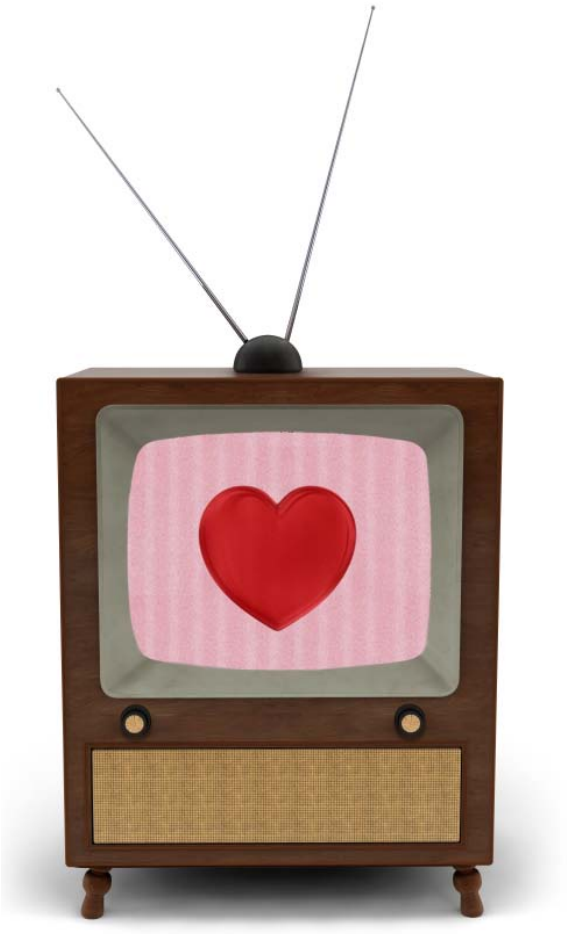
Hollywood runs on love. Every TV show and movie involves some kind of romantic entanglement and every magazine cover is flooded with photos of happy and not-so-happy couples. Considering that all I know of romantic love comes from what I've seen in the movies and on television, it should come as no surprise that I have some very skewed ideals when it comes to prospective partners.

Recently a representative for a company that cleans floor mats and uniforms hit on me, and when I say hit on me I mean flirted with me so shamelessly that even I, the girl who could find Don Juan frustratingly vague, could deduce his intentions.

As he leaned across my desk and complimented my hair and told me how it was a travesty that I'm not yet married and downright unbelievable that I don't have a boyfriend, I startled myself with the realization that if he should ask me out on a date, I would probably say yes.

Why was this quick, flickering thought so stunning? He doesn't fit the idealized image of the perfect man that I had always carried with me, that's why.

He isn't the boyishly handsome, slightly dorky but smart and snappishly funny romantic comedy male lead that I am subconsciously waiting for, nor is he anywhere in the ballpark. He is far from boyish with lines threatening the corners of his eyes, his cornball lines do not snap, any dorkiness is overshadowed by his over-exercised body (he is muscled enough to warrant the term "beefy") and—*shudder*—he has the distinct orange glow of one who tans. Truth be known, I have an unfounded mistrust of all men who tan. Sorry, George Hamilton.



Ross and Rachel, Harry and Sally, these are the modern age's archetypes of romantic love. A funny and charming man falls for a lovely, beguiling woman. So perfectly matched are they that the term soul mates is bandied about but alas, the hero and heroine must blunder through hilarious misunderstandings and heart-rending tiffs (enough to fill two and a half acts) before finally realizing what the audience knew all along: they are in love.

I wish real relationships could be that simple.

Imagine a world where that cute guy you've had your eye on likes you back and everything you say to him is witty and charming. Also, you're always lit in the most flattering way and a fan is hidden out of sight in order to tousle your hair just so.

In real life my experiences with men have been far less sweetly romantic and more awkwardly tragic.

For example, there was my third grade crush who I believed too childish to be ready for my affections, or anyone else's.

Like a Mack truck careening out of nowhere, one day in the hallway of our elementary school, he offered a little gold-painted ring to a painfully pretty classmate of ours, committing himself to her with such passion as to put grown men to shame. I was, and remain, gobsmacked.

That was the first time, and by no means last time, I considered that *I* was the problem. That I had indeed chosen the right boy but that *I* was not the right girl—that *I* was not wanted.

Cut to middle school, where I alternately pretended the Backstreet Boys were my boyfriends and gleefully waited for high school. Even Screech had a girlfriend on *Saved by the Bell* and if one show gave an unerringly accurate depiction of high school, it was *Saved by the Bell*.

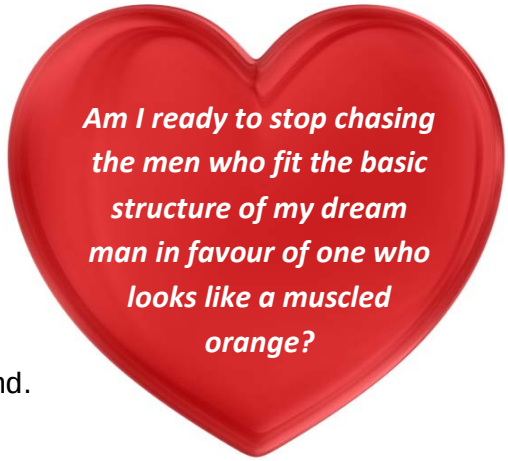
High school was not what I hoped it to be, although it was an improvement over all the years before it: boys were actually talking to me now. One boy in particular stood out; let's call him Joe.

Joe went out of his way to talk to me. He asked to borrow my notes, he asked for help with homework assignments, he got me in trouble for talking in class. He was funny and weird and perfect. And he had a girlfriend.

My friends, as friends do, assured me that Joe really did like me and the moment that he and his girlfriend broke up, he would be mine . . . Who could've figured that they would date all through high school with me pining all the while?

What was different about Joe as opposed to the crushes that came before him, including the Backstreet Boys, was that I could talk to him. I wasn't a shy, mute mess with him. Yes, he gave me butterflies in my stomach and I would blush just from seeing him but I was myself around him and he seemed to like me even still.

I should've taken that as a boon to my self-confidence but, like any other teenage girl, I managed to interpret it as a slight. If he liked me as much as he seemed to, why wasn't he leaving his girlfriend? Why wasn't he asking me out? Why was our time spent together confined to the four walls of the classroom? Why wasn't I *enough*?



Much hasn't changed over the years. I find someone to spend weeks or even months yearning for only to have things fizzle out or, more depressingly, stop just as quickly as it started—often by finding out the guy had something or someone else entirely in mind. Again, I am just not enough.

Have I given up on my ideals in favour of harsh cold reality by envisioning myself with the hackneyed cleaning rep? Am I ready to stop chasing the men who fit the basic structure of my dream man in favour of one who looks like a muscled orange?

You may think I'm being a bit extreme here, equating a single date with a man I find unattractive as a fundamental shift in ideals and ambitions, but take it from a girl whose total list of crushes in her entire life (not including the Backstreet Boys) numbers under 10, that even picturing myself with this beefy fellow is highly disconcerting.

Maybe, I thought as I gawped at Mr. Orange, *I'm enough for him.*

After he left, and the hazy glow of finding out someone thinks I'm hot dissipated, I began to wonder, is he enough for me?

What made Ross and Rachel and Harry and Sally so perfect was that they were perfect for each other. They had that magical spark, that mystical balance of chemistry and biology; they could not be any more or any less perfect for each other.

Sure, I could go out with this man and all the while have my fingers crossed hoping someone better came along. Or I could do as I've been doing and wait for the perfect match.

It may be a naive, romanticized, and lonely choice but if it took Harry and Sally 12 years to get it right and if Ross and Rachel managed to find each other after decades filled with miscommunication and famous hairstyles, at least I know I'm in good company if I don't settle for second best.

Perfect romance may only be in Hollywood scripts, but how will I know for sure unless I wait to see how my third act turns out?

ON THE HILL

Sandra Livingston

Lest We Forget

This editorial originally appeared March 27, 2009, in issue 1712.

As the *Globe and Mail* pointed out this week, Canadian taxpayers "shelled out nearly $270,000" last July for the change-of-command ceremony that bid farewell to General Rick Hillier, the country's former chief of defence.

Details of the expenses include $4,035 for a 21-gun salute, $23,101 for an aerial display by the Canadian Snowbirds, and $3,137 for a military parachutist team, as well as "$6,597 for shipping a tank to the Ottawa Uplands Reception Centre so Gen. Hillier could ride away from the ceremony on it."

Detractors were quick to cry foul, including New Democratic Party defence critic Dawn Black, who labelled the spending extravagant. "The word excessive doesn't seem to cover it, especially when we learn this during a time of restraint, when more and more Canadians are out of work," she told reporters.

It's a great sound bite, but doesn't even come close to telling the whole story.

First, when it comes to being careless with our tax dollars, a quarter of a million dollars pales in comparison to the wasteful track records of far too many of our elected leaders—especially when it comes to honouring the men and women who are out there fighting real battles instead of trading insults with each other across the Commons floor (not only an embarrassing spectacle, but one that translates into a lot of wasted time and taxpayers' money).

Second, more than a third of the total bill was used to pay the travel expenses for the families and spouses of wounded and dead soldiers. As General Hillier told reporters, the ceremony not only marked a change of command and acted as a recruiting opportunity, it also served to reaffirm the military's "commitment to support families in their toughest days, [to support] wounded soldiers and [to] recognize valour."

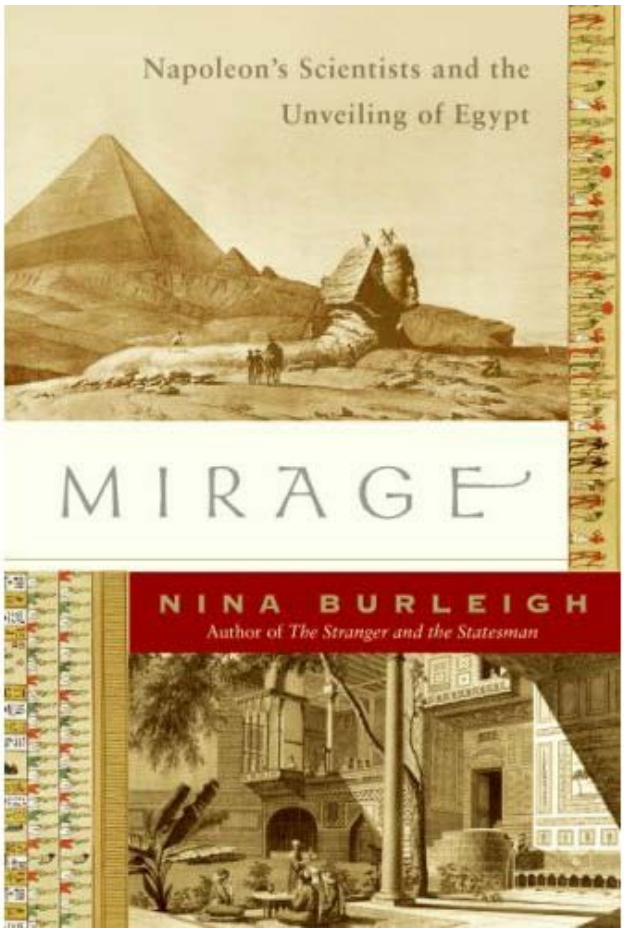
So should we begrudge a quarter of a million dollars out of a total $18.2 billion annual budget to mark such a major event?

No. Because whether you agree with Canada's presence in Afghanistan or not, the truth is that the men and women in our armed forces have stepped up time and again to do the hard work in the ugly situations that international relations create. Regardless of the politics of the day, they sacrifice families, lives, and mental and physical health to keep the peace and defend this country.

From Vimy Ridge to Korea to the hellish fields of Passchendaele (and other battlefields too numerous to mention), Canada's soldiers and sailors and pilots have paid the price—and are still paying it today, whether as veterans or on active duty far from home.

Is there wasteful spending in Canada's military? Undoubtedly. Is every member of the armed forces a saint? Hardly. But when it comes to loosening the purse strings to honour their sacrifices, boost morale, and bid farewell to a respected commander, we must never, ever forget how dearly our soldiers have already paid.

PAGES **John Buhler**



Mirage: Napoleon's Scientists and the Unveiling of Egypt

This review originally appeared April 10, 2009, in issue 1714. An interesting note is this recent Times article on the move to have the Rosetta Stone returned to Egypt.

In *Mirage: Napoleon's Scientists and the Unveiling of Egypt,* New York-based journalist Nina Burleigh recounts the invasion of a Muslim nation by a Western military force, giving the reader a sense of *déjà vu*.

It seems so familiar: the story of Napoleon Bonaparte's incursion into Egypt bears at least a few striking parallels with George W. Bush's disastrous invasion of Iraq.

In each case, the ostensible justification for the invasion was pure fiction. The Bush administration's 2003 invasion of Iraq sprang from the "War on Terror" declared immediately following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, but had morphed into a hunt for Iraq's alleged "Weapons of Mass Destruction."

Having found no evidence to link Iraq with international terrorism, or any sign of the elusive WMDs, the invasion was finally repackaged as "regime change." What, then, was the real objective? As Canadian journalist Linda McQuaig wrote, *It's the Crude, Dude;* the real impetus for the war was control of the region's oil reserves.

Similarly, France, according to Burleigh, claimed that its incursion into Egypt would deliver "French-style culture and democracy to Arabs ruled by non-Arab tyrants." As with the US's war in Iraq, the real objective had little to do with democratic ideals. The 1798 invasion of Egypt was in fact intended to give France control over trade, resources, and territory.

Furthermore, in the US invasion of Iraq, as with France's invasion of Egypt, the foreign military presence was highly unpopular among the very people the Westerners claimed to be liberating.

As philosopher George Santayana warned, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

There is, however, one important difference between these two ill-fated offensives: the intellectual climate within each of the aggressor nations. The modern would-be conqueror, former US President George W. Bush, was famously "incurious."

He drew much of his support from the anti-intellectual religious fundamentalist movement that accepts the Biblical description of creation as science, while dismissing global warming—in spite of overwhelming evidence—as groundless speculation.

In stark contrast, Revolutionary France—after the Terror—encouraged discovery and enquiry. Napoleon's invasion force included 151 carefully selected *savants* with specialties ranging from natural science to musicology. These scholars would measure and sketch Egyptian ruins, study Islam and the Arabic language, dissect mummies and the Nile's aquatic animals, advance the nascent fields of biology and archaeology, and produce *La Description de l'Égypte* (The Description of Egypt), a 23-volume encyclopaedia of their observations of what Europeans thought of as an exotic and mysterious land.

Mirage *also includes a wonderful selection of illustrations. They portray some of the important individuals who took part in the expedition, as well as exotic Egyptian landscapes, half-buried ruins, and Cairo street scenes.*

In *Mirage*, then, Burleigh interweaves two remarkable and engagingly written stories; a disastrous invasion of a foreign land and alien culture, and a visionary scientific expedition that helped develop a wide range of human enquiry.

That the French expedition was disastrously ill-equipped for this undertaking is a recurrent theme throughout Burleigh's book. Aside from the lack of drinking water, they were unprepared for the heat, tropical diseases, and war with the combined forces of England and the Ottoman Empire.

Dysentery, insects, sandstorms, blinding eye infections, and armed insurgents were additional sources of hardship. Bubonic plague would also stalk the French during their time in Egypt.

In spite of these adversities, Napoleon then led an unsuccessful attempt to invade Syria, and during the withdrawal had his wounded soldiers euthanized with opium. After returning to Cairo, and with his soldiers nearing mutiny, Napoleon cowardly slipped away, boarded a French ship under cover of darkness, and returned to France.

Most of the scholars finally returned to France two years later, in the fall of 1801, after the French were forced to relinquish control of Cairo and Alexandria, and admit defeat. "Of the 151 French civilians who had arrived in Egypt in 1798," writes Burleigh "twelve left before surrender, twenty-six died in Egypt, and five more died shortly after returning to Europe."

Stunningly, this number does not include the "several hundred officers' wives and other female camp followers" that Burleigh mentions earlier in her book. Like a mirage, they have simply vanished. The fact that the French women who travelled with the expedition are treated by Burleigh as nonentities is a glaring and frankly bizarre oversight.

Burleigh's examination of the extraordinary scientific expedition, however, and its influence upon numerous fields of study is an impressive work. We learn about many of the prominent scholars who took part in the expedition, and who, in spite of overwhelming adversity, produced groundbreaking theories and opened new areas of study as a result of their time in Egypt. Indiana Jones has nothing on Napoleon's Egyptian archaeologists.

Mirage also includes a wonderful selection of illustrations. They portray some of the important individuals who took part in the expedition, as well as exotic Egyptian landscapes, half-buried ruins, and Cairo street scenes. The zoological studies, rendered in exquisite detail, are from the hands of the expedition's naturalists Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire and Marie-Jules-César Lelorgne de Savigny. The images even include a couple of contemporary British cartoons ridiculing the work of the French scientists.

This book is a must-read for anyone with an interest in French or Egyptian history, the history of science, or the history of European-Muslim relations. Nevertheless, it is meant to appeal to a very broad audience.

The account of the French expedition in Egypt, the author tells us, is taught in French and Egyptian schools and studied by Egyptologists, but outside of these realms, it is little known. What a shame. Fortunately for us, Burleigh sheds some light on this fascinating episode in history.

Mirage: Napoleon's Scientists and the Unveiling of Egypt is published by Harper. 286 Pages, ISBN-10: 0-06-059767-4, ISBN: 978-0-06-059767-2

FICTION

Clare L. Booth

Meghann and Fiona

This item originally appeared April 3, 2009, in issue 1713.

"There's culture on the streets too," Fiona said defensively. "You don't need to be in f-ing Carnegie Hall to hear Ginsberg echo off the walls. He was *ours* long before he was yours."

She stood tall, erect, and full of mock grandeur. "I have seen the best minds of my generation—that was *us,* not you."

Meghann grimaced as a rat—or was it a mouse?—scurried over her peep-toe pumps. All the rage in Europe, she thought, and wondered what the street people there were wearing. Prada rip-offs?

"Fiona—come back inside, we can talk about this later," Meghann pleaded.

Fiona sighed and took a drag of her cigarette. "You don't call me Truth."

"Not this again. It sounds so puritanical." Meghann shrugged. "It's just . . . not you."

Down the street a bit an old lady was singing her dead dog to sleep under a piece of cardboard. Fiona listened for a minute. "La la la la," the old woman sang to the tune of "Rock-a-Bye Baby."

"It's my name. When you weren't there, they were. *They* gave it to me. *They* christened me Truth."

Meghann couldn't stand the way Fiona said *they.* It sounded like a cult: the unknown, like the Others on *Lost.*

"You don't get it," Fiona continued. "The second you're off the streets for good, you stop fitting in. You don't fit in where you came from and you don't fit in on the streets. It's unsettling. Your friends, your family no longer recognize you. To them you're a stranger, but you have nothing in common with your old family either. Say it."

"No," Meghann whispered. When Fiona was 17 she'd had a back alley abortion done by a Dr. Alice on a nameless street in Harlem, behind the strip club, by the dumpster, at half past midnight. She almost died. The doctor said Fiona could never have children; a week later she was gone.

Three years later, when Dr. Alice was caught and arrested, they were unsure whether to charge her solely with performing illegal abortions or with serial murder.

Meghann, four years Fiona's senior, was supposed to protect her. Protect her from boys, drugs, alcohol, the streets, improperly done abortions. Girls from the Upper East Side didn't wind up on the streets. They went to private schools, played the cello. They dripped with prestige and elitism. They married into wealth and had children with posh names in their late twenties. They had the best of the best, everything money could buy.

"I failed you," Meghann whispered. "I won't call you Truth because it's like admitting that over and over again. Come back inside, it's your birthday. You used to love the cello."

Fiona smiled. When she had slept in doorways in Harlem, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens, she had dreamt of playing the cello again; had snuck into music stores to pinch classical CDs and a Discman; had crowded at the stage door at Carnegie Hall and the Met to listen to the cellos.

"I used to read Kerouac. *On the Road* was written line by line in the tunnels. It became a game—where was the next line? I would ride the subway with the change I panhandled for, around and around listening to the cellos and reading. It was—peaceful."

Meghann smiled, thinking about Fiona sitting on subway trains listening to a Discman, her knees tucked up under her chin.

"I never told you," Fiona said, "but my favourite place to sleep was this abandoned building on Third. The ceiling on the second floor was painted with odd winged creatures like in *3 Women.* It was like our own Sistine Chapel; I felt safe there."

When Fiona was seven, the family had taken a trip to Rome, ending their trip in Vatican City to see the Sistine Chapel. As luck would have it, however, the chapel was closed to the public the entire two days they were there and Fiona was inconsolable.

"This place backs onto Third, doesn't it?" she asked excitedly. "Come on! Come with me!"

"You're going to miss the cellos," Meghann protested meekly, but she found herself climbing over garbage after Fiona anyway.

"Come on!" Fiona called as she rounded the corner and ran up a flight of stairs.

Meghann sighed—what a bad choice of footwear. A flight of stairs and a broken Jimmy Choo heel later, Meghann stopped dead next to Fiona.

"Look up," Fiona whispered.

Light shone through holes in the walls and floor, illuminating the ceiling. Meghann raised her head and inhaled sharply.

A moment of silence passed between them.

"I want to hear the cellos," Fiona said finally. "Let's go home."

HAVE TICKETS, WON'T TRAVEL

Christina M. Frey

This feature originally appeared September 18, 2009, in issue 1735.

What has two legs and flies?

If I can possibly help it, the answer is "Not me." As far as I'm concerned, the age of air travel is officially over. It's just not fun anymore.

It starts when you walk in the airport and see the line stretching across the terminal. You notice that the *one* ticketing agent is processing one passenger every five minutes. At this rate, the plane will have arrived at its final destination before you even get to security. That's when the agent goes on coffee break, leaving no replacement.

Even when the line starts moving, it's a hassle. For every step, you pick up your suitcases, your kid's bags, and all your carry-ons, move up two feet, and then put everything back down. Again. And again. And *again*.

That's one of the biggest problems with flying: the bags. Stringent airline baggage restrictions and fees cause immense stress while packing (will this extra sweater put the suitcase over the limit?) and, especially, at the ticket counter, where you devoutly hope and pray the agent won't notice that the sweater (and the hair dryer and the book) in fact *did* put the suitcase several pounds over. (She doesn't.)

Then, because you're being charged for every bag you check, you decide to max out your allowable carry-on bags because it's free, and you still haven't learned that free is not always best. Both you and your child, age three, are allowed one carry-on and one personal item. Since a three-year-old can't (or won't, I'm not sure which) drag her own bags through the airport, it falls on you, of course. So you head to security, carrying umpteen bags which weigh more than you do.

Do you need all those bags? My husband always challenges this. And the answer is always, "Are you crazy? Of course I do!" For example, one bag is usually crammed with meals and snacks. And I *do* need it. One day, tired of arguing with my husband over the food question, I capitulated. I was flying alone with my then two-year-old from Washington, DC, to Alaska, and I had a two-and-a-half hour layover in a sizeable airport. I brought our lunch but not our supper; we'd "live a little" this time and get dinner out.

Uh-uh. Our plane was delayed for over two hours on the tarmac due to a tornado-spawning storm that rolled through just before takeoff. Our plane in our layover airport was almost finished boarding by the time we rushed up to the gate, bags and strollers flying. I dug a forgotten energy bar out of my purse as sustenance for the six-and-a-half hour flight north. My daughter got Cheerios. From then on, bags of food were a must!

Another bag has activities and books for the plane. As a rule, kids mostly enjoy climbing on the seats and annoying the passengers around them, but what if you end up needing those books and crayons and don't have them? The longer the flight, the larger the books, the heavier the bag . . . and the bigger the chiropractor's bill.

And that's not all. There's always your purse, and a coat if it's cold, and the carry-on filled with whatever you had to bring but couldn't squeeze into your already overstuffed and overweight suitcase. And then there's usually a tote bag filled with travel necessities, like the multiple changes of clothes to be used in the event that your potty-trained preschooler stands in the restroom stall and deliberately wets herself because she's too afraid of the automatic flushers to use the toilets.

I can't forget my pharmacy-in-a-bag. Because of my daughter's allergies and asthma, I can't travel anywhere without a duffle bag full of her regular meds, emergency breathing treatments, and a seven-pound nebulizer. The weight's bad enough, but the bag is also a security nightmare: it's full of liquid medications and a nebulizer that looks like a bomb. They have to set it up and run it before they'll let me through, which means a long holdup.

Speaking of security, the only thing worse than being at the back of a long line at the checkpoint is feeling the evil stares behind you while you hold up a long line at the front. This happened frequently when my daughter was a baby. But what did people expect me to do? I couldn't collapse the stroller with one hand, regardless of what the directions claimed. And I flat-out wouldn't put my nine-month-old on the conveyer belt while I removed my shoes with one hand, put our bags in the bins with the other, held our travel documents in my teeth, and somehow collapsed the stroller using my knees.

You finally pass security. Next up: a mad dash to your gate, bags happily bruising your back and arms, brain in a million places as you alternate between threats and bribes to get your child to *run* because the plane started boarding five minutes ago. Not that being late for boarding matters, since "special needs passengers" apparently no longer covers parents with young, unruly charges bumping Santa Claus sacks of stuff down narrow airplane aisles.

Once you're on the plane and ready for takeoff, forget about relaxing. Do you get bored while sitting for hours in a cramped space, where your only burst of freedom is a marathon between gates at layovers? I do, but I can deal. My daughter can't.

I'm glad she's finally old enough to do some quiet activities, though. When she was nine months old, we flew from Alaska to Toronto. Twelve glorious hours of travelling, in which nothing held her interest for more than two minutes. Nothing, that is, except the opportunity to crawl up and down the filthy aisle for hours. My reputation as a good mom was destroyed beyond repair. So, by the way, was her outfit.

That reminds me of the best piece of advice I ever heard for flying with kids: dress them cute. That way, when they inevitably crack, people will see the sweet outfit and the twisted, screaming face and think that, on the average, your kid is normal.

At last, your child is engrossed in a book, and you decide to close your eyes for those precious five minutes you have before she starts whining to get off the plane. That's when the beverage service starts. Everyone traditionally complains about airline food, but I fondly recall the days when you actually got served reheated leftovers. Nowadays, you're lucky to get a beverage. The amount depends on the airline: some are required to measure it out by teaspoonfuls into a cup crammed with ice. Don't think you can fool me with your high-flying application of the Archimedes' principle! I *know* that ice leaves less room in the cup for my drink. Then there are some who are quite free with the beverage service, giving you the whole can (and slipping me an extra one because they realize how badly mom needs caffeine). So I'm not sure what to think.

Reflecting on how you really, really need to fix the broken wheel on that one bag, you drag your burdens like an exhausted pack horse toward the main terminal.

I do wish they wouldn't start the beverages so early, though. On a four-hour flight, you get thirsty midway through, not in the first 15 minutes. By three-and-a-half hours, you're dying. And serving drinks early on a long flight means the longer you need to, well, you know, unless you want to use the tiny closet at the back of the airplane. Adults can be reasoned with. But try explaining to a preschooler that she can't drink her entire apple juice in one gulp because you only brought two changes of clothes for her and she already ruined one two hours ago.

As for the airline snacks, I usually decline them since I already pack my own food. Even if I liked mouldy peanuts, I'd refuse them so that I didn't have to spill peanut dust into the air, to be breathed in by my peanut-allergic daughter sitting next to me. This is something I really don't understand. Kids can't bring peanut butter—sticky peanut butter that doesn't fall off the bread and roll around under the seats as an attraction to bored kids—to a huge school, but peanuts are freely served on a closed-in, tiny aircraft, where passengers pay $500 for the pleasure of breathing peanut pollution for a four-hour flight. Oh, and first class isn't much better: instead of mouldy peanuts, you get mouldy almonds. And my daughter's allergic to those, too.

When the flight is finally over, and you've spent 20 minutes standing in line waiting to get off the plane, bags in hand and child on the aisle floor wound around your shoes trying to drag you down, you plod toward baggage claim. There, you watch in vain as the roundabout delivers 50 black suitcases identical to yours. Naturally, your bags aren't among them.

If you're very unlucky, you're flying into an airport where baggage claim is inside the secure part of the terminal. When you finally do get your suitcases, which were in a different spot because they were rerouted through Utah for some reason, you add two 50-pound suitcases to your already ridiculously heavy load.

Reflecting on how you *really, really* need to fix the broken wheel on that one bag, you drag your burdens like an exhausted pack horse toward the main terminal. There, the party meeting you greets you with happy smiles: "So, did you have a good flight?"

ON ASSAULT (AS COMMITTED BY A TWO-YEAR-OLD)

Bethany Tynes

This feature originally appeared May 15, 2009, in issue 1719.

In all my time spent as a childcare worker, I had never received a parent complaint about my performance.

Not until near the end of my childcare career, that is, when the father of a child in my care lodged a complaint against both my co-worker and myself.

We had failed in our duties, he said. A young girl was harassed, assaulted, and compromised while under our supervision.

While this occurred, I stood by and, worse than idle, encouraged the offences. Why would I encourage such an atrocity? What had happened to enrage this father so?

A two-year-old boy simply hugged a two-year-old girl.

Hugs are shocking and indecent acts, I admit, especially between toddlers. On this particular morning it was raining when the little girl arrived at daycare.

She'd been home sick for a few days, and it was clear when she walked into the room that she would rather be at home still. As soon as her father began to step out and shut the door, tears rolled down her cheeks. She silently cried.

It was then that innocent little Michael approached with his big blue eyes full of concern. He quietly said, "It's alright. He'll come back and get you later. You don't need to be sad." As he hugged her, I told him that he was a very nice little boy.

Michael smiled, took the hand of the girl (who was no longer crying), and offered to play blocks with her. She smiled. Little did we know that the girl's never-before-unreasonable father had witnessed the scene as he peered in through the classroom window.

He immediately returned, went straight to the director's office, and remained there for nearly an hour. As a result of "the incident" our director informed us that hugging must now be "strictly forbidden," since it is known to "cause problems." Children who hug are to be told that they must keep their hands to themselves because it is *not* nice to touch their friends in *any* circumstances.

Ironically, though I must act so swiftly to end gentle hugs, it is considered "too harsh" to use the word "no" when one child hits another. After all, when a larger, stronger child pins a smaller one to the ground and proceeds to whack their victim in the head (repeatedly), the primary concern in the matter is to validate the feelings of both children involved, rather than ridiculously protecting the physical well-being of the weaker.

We can't forget the emotional damage we could do by neglecting to validate the feelings of a developing child. We must always swiftly empathize and validate to assure children that we value their individuality.

Using the word "no" with children is mentally and emotionally damaging. Children who hit need to be reassured, not reprimanded.

Not like children who hug. Comforting a sobbing classmate "causes problems." Hugs must be "strictly forbidden." Damnable acts, hugs are.

That's not to say I worked in a bad daycare. It certainly isn't. In fact, it's not only licensed by the local children's authority, it's also accredited as a "Centre of Excellence" by an independent province-wide organization. It has a deservedly spotless reputation. The director is genuine, warm, and caring. Each of the staff has been handpicked for his or her qualifications and ability to encourage and facilitate children's physical, social, mental, and emotional development. Children at the centre receive maximal praise and minimal discouragement.

Unless they hug, that is. Hugging must always be discouraged.

And somehow these children of the daycare era manage to grow into adults. As children, they are taught that it is wrong to hug, but are reassured and validated when they strike or lash out at others. Suicides abound throughout North America, but children are taught never to hug a crying friend. Children bring weapons to school, sometimes even killing fellow students, but children who hit others are reassured.

Perhaps it's time that we take a careful look at the messages we're sending to the next generation in North America. When a two-year-old boy kindly hugs a teary-eyed friend and suffers worse consequences than the three-year-old who deliberately strikes another, something is very wrong in society. We wonder why some young adults display so little compassion: it's time to review the lessons we're teaching children.

And maybe if we're progressive, take chances, and live dangerously, someday we'll even be able to loosen up to the point that innocent little two-year-old Michael can hug a crying two-year-old friend.

IN CONVERSATION WITH . . . Wanda Waterman St. Louis

Alex Kajumulo, Part I

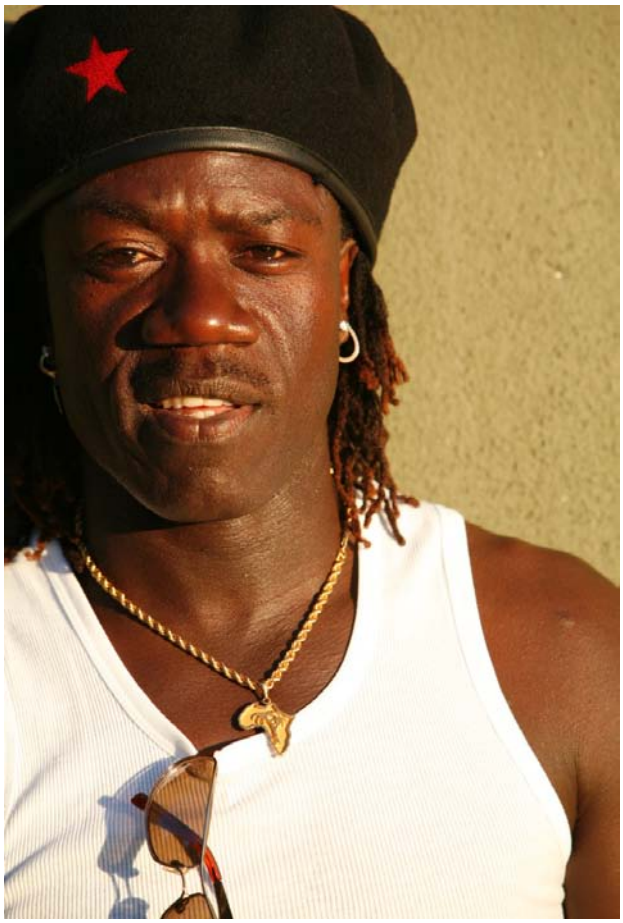
This article originally appeared November 6, 2009, in issue 1742.

Alex Kajumulo is a Seattle-based recording artist and producer at Babukaju Records. His song "Maza Africa" was a finalist in the 2007 International Songwriting Competition.

His songs and live performances are vibrant and joyful celebrations of love and justice. Kajumulo freely mixes musical genres in his songs and actively seeks collaborations with musicians all over the world.

He is currently getting ready for an African tour that will include stops in his home country, Tanzania. Recently he took the time to chat with Wanda Waterman St. Louis about his life and his music.

A Maple Leaf in the Tanzanian Bush



I became interested in music because I had an uncle who played the guitar. He was the only one who paid attention to me. He left Tanzania to come to university in Toronto. I didn't know why but he left and never came back. After he left he sent me a T-shirt from Canada, with a Canadian flag. I was in the bush; I knew about Canada before I even knew about my own country.

Early Years

My childhood was terrible. I was a product of gang rape. My mother was only 15. The people in our village in Tanzania didn't believe she'd been raped, so she was punished. After that, she ran away and I was raised by my grandparents.

The people in the village called me "the bastard kid." The British had been there, and the Church, and they had made people feel that it was shameful to be born out of wedlock. Some people think that if you aren't born the way you're supposed to be born then you have no right to exist.

I grew up fighting for justice. I fought almost every day, but nobody gave me any credit. Because I was a bastard I was just a troublemaker. My grandfather died when I was 10 and then I was on my own. I had to fight to stay alive.

Motivational Speech

Before he died my grandfather said to me, "Those people aren't lying—you are a bastard. That's reality. But if you give up on life you will prove them right. Prove to those people that they are wrong. If you have hands and feet and are not handicapped you can turn your life around. Don't sit and wait for other people to help you out."

Sung Desire

What I sing is real. I don't pretend. I started singing about love and respect because that's what I was looking for. I have to preach that or be a hypocrite.

Perils of Independence

It's not easy to raise yourself up and teach yourself how to do things. A lot of people don't make it. The trouble with having to raise yourself is that you don't know how to open up for other people, and you become too complicated for other people. Relationships are difficult.

When people complain, "I need you for this!" I just say, "No, you don't—you can do that yourself."

I like documentaries. I don't watch movies; I think they're a waste of time. I really liked reading Abraham Lincoln's biography. He had to fight hard to exist, and no matter what happened he kept moving. The only way to stop him was to kill him.

DRIVE-THROUGH DECORUM

Kimberley Sanders

This article originally appeared April 24, 2009, in issue 1716.

Am I correct in thinking that in 2009 there is nothing *common* about courtesy?

Like most of you, I am a dedicated distance learner transitioning from part-time to full-time studies.

To make it happen, I left a full-time corporate career for a part-time café career. I assumed it would be a fairly easy transition; I did, after all, know people.

Or so I thought.

The first time my alarm went off at 3:45 a.m., I reluctantly rolled out of bed and fought the urge to crawl back in. Thankfully, it really does take only 21 days to build a habit, and for seven weeks now I've been contentedly (more or less) starting work at five in the morning.

I welcome the dark embrace of the morning, its stillness rife with birdsong. Maybe five a.m. inspired Rabindranath Tagore when he wrote, "Faith is the bird that feels the light and sings when the dawn is still dark."

Anyway, back to the café. It's a pretty nice environment. Jazz music provides an ambient backcloth that dusts the periphery of my world. Up front, it's a fascinating world of personalities—from Zen to zealous, café patrons provide me with endless fodder for thought. Mostly, however, I marvel at how mean people are—particularly at the drive-through window.

I'm keeping statistics now, and although it is by no means scientific, I have noticed that the majority of "mean people" are women around my own age (40-plus). This, in itself, comes as a shock to me. I get the distinct feeling that these women assume most of us work in a café because we aren't well educated. For shame.

The Friday leading into the Easter weekend was anything but "Good." For six hours, café staff worked non-stop. Although we greet people with a hearty "Hello and welcome to . . . " it was after 11:00 a.m. before a single customer said "Good morning!" to us. I realize coffee addicts need their fix. What I don't get is how they can be so disrespectful to the people who feed their need.

Let's modestly assume that my colleague and I served over 75 coffees between nine and 10 a.m., and that many of them were specialty requests requiring milk steamed (at 142 degrees, if you please), extra shots of espresso, and the like. And let's also assume that we were not doing one order at a time, but three. For this to work, the process needs to run like a pendulum—perfect synchronicity between my colleague and me.

Well, guess what? Inasmuch as I love the idea of "perfect synchronicity" my colleagues and I are human and we do make mistakes. Whether you are a solicitor, a microbiologist, a non-profit ED, or a custom carpenter, I suspect you make the occasional mistake at work too. And maybe, just maybe, we filled the previous 74 orders *perfectly* before we did yours *wrong*.

Moreover, it is difficult to hear everything that is said to us at the drive-through order box; not only do we have loud café noises behind us, we hear the cars driving past you, we can't hear you when you don't look into the camera/box, we can't hear you over the music you are listening to, or, worse, you're still talking on your cellphone and expect us to differentiate between what you say to us and your important caller.

If you can't demonstrate common courtesy, civility, and the spirit of friendship at your local drive-through, what chance do we have of creating an internationally respectful 21st century world?

There are a thousand reasons why we don't always hear correctly, but does that give you the right to berate us for missing your "extra foam"? Does it give you the right to speak in a condescending manner or pitch a tantrum because we didn't hear "non-fat" and used 2 per cent milk instead?

Really, does messing up a simple coffee order *really* entitle you to belittle us?

In fact, my colleagues *are* dedicated to providing a superb coffee experience for you. The people I work with are kind, witty, and incredibly unique: many of them have another job; most of them are in university; all of them have community commitments. They are, in short, just like you!

During the few minutes you're at the window paying for your joe (that may have been made wrong the first time) I would invite you to think of the people who serve you as mirrors of yourself. And I challenge you to make a different choice in how you interact with them. Think about Craig Kielburger.

In their book, *Me to We: Finding Meaning in a Material World*, Craig and Marc Kielburger offer a blueprint for creating a better world: one action, one small step at a time.

So, in the spirit of human kindness, why not try a different approach: common courtesy.

The choice is yours. You can choose to let your "little-self" rule the moment, or you can let your "big-self" stand tall. If you can't demonstrate common courtesy, civility, and the spirit of friendship at your local drive-through, what chance do we have of creating an internationally respectful 21st century world?

So, whether you're getting a triple tall, extra-hot, extra-foamy, 142-degree caramel latte or a double-double and a cruller, whatever neighbourhood coffee shop you frequent, please do the hardworking staff a favour and show some kindness.

Take a breather from the self-absorbed "It's all about me!" approach to life, and take the proverbial high road (even if you are right). We're all part of the same community, each serving a different set of customers: your family, your friends, your neighbours—and you.

Since it's your coffee, it really *does* start with you!

AU Profiles:

AU Profiles: Eloise Campbell

Christina M. Frey

Andrew and Eloise in front of buckled sea ice by the shore

This profile originally appeared February 13, 2009, in issue 1706.

When her boyfriend—now fiancé—took a teaching job in Nunavut, Athabasca University student Eloise Campbell moved from Moncton, New Brunswick, to a remote northern community of 350 on the shores of Hudson Bay.

A huge culture shock? Definitely. But according to her, absolutely worth it.

During our chat—disconnected several times by the 70-k.p.h. blizzard conditions there—she explained how distance study means she can experience a new culture and lifestyle while pursuing her educational goals. She also described life in the far north, and why she loves living in such a remote area.

For Eloise, enroled in AU's Bachelor of Arts in Psychology program, distance learning is all about flexibility. When she first moved north, she expected jobs would be scarce, and decided to take the opportunity to earn her degree. Given the remote location, distance study was an obvious choice, and AU's reputation made the decision easy. "I heard from many people who had taken AU courses that it was an excellent and challenging school and that they offered complete programs," Eloise says.

She began intending to study full-time, but found that the opportunity to work wasn't as limited as she had thought. "I have cut back my studies to part-time because I am now working full-time," says Eloise, who works at the community's equivalent of the town hall.

Working full-time while studying can be a challenge. "I find procrastination to be a huge problem for me," she says candidly. "I find it tough to hit the books after a long day at work."

To help self-motivate, she'll remind herself how much easier it is to work a little at a time rather than dealing with the stress of cramming as the course contract date approaches.

She's also become more conscious of her limits. "I have . . . learned to take on only as many courses as I know I can handle and no more," she says. "[I am] enroling in only one course at a time, but I would like to finish them in two or three months." She adds, "I just try to do as much as I can."

Looking to her longer range goals is also important. "I would be happy to finish five or six courses every 10 months," she says. "My long-term goal is to complete an education degree and work as a resource teacher."

Getting around by dogsled on the vast tundra

While living in New Brunswick, she worked with autistic children, a job she found "very challenging, but extremely rewarding."

In fact, that's the direction she's hoping to eventually pursue. "My true passion is working with children with special needs," she says.

Finally, preserving a sense of balance is essential. "I usually keep my Friday nights for me to prevent stress and to decompress after the week," she says.

Any challenges, however, are secondary to the opportunities distance learning has opened up. "I do find the non-traditional method to be more of a challenge, but I . . . appreciate the freedom and luxury to pursue my education at my own pace," Eloise says. Best of all, studying via distance is allowing her to experience northern climate and culture first-hand.

What is it like to live in Nunavut? Well, of course, it's cold. "I have a touch of frostbite on my face from a walk last weekend when it was 'nice' out!" Eloise says.

The weather wasn't the only thing that required adjustment. "It was a huge culture shock," she says. "You really have to come up here with an open mind and a willingness to learn." But if you do, she says, you'll be rewarded.

A traditional Inukshuk

Eloise, who's lived in the area for just over a year now, loves it. She finds the tight-knit community inspiring.

"People are . . . willing to help others in need in any way they can," she says. "For example, several homes are without power right now, and other families are opening their homes to them until they get power again."

It's an attitude that embraces newcomers, too, and she didn't feel like an outsider when she arrived: "Everyone is always eager to see a new face in town!" she says.

The area is also rich in cultural history. "Learning about Inuit culture has been a pretty incredible experience," says Eloise, who's studying Inuktitut and participating in traditional crafts. "I . . . am learning

how to make sealskin kamiks (boots)," she says. She's also considering taking AU's course on Inuit culture, although she points out that she's already learning it by living it!

How long will she stay in the far north? As of yet, she's not sure. She'll be getting married this summer and hopes to start a family soon, and raising her children in such a culturally rich area is appealing.

"We are eager to have our children exposed to the culture and would love for them to grow up with three languages (English, French, and Inuktitut)," Eloise says.

One of the many incredible sunsets in Nunavut

Regardless, she's not in a hurry to leave Nunavut. "We have no real timeline," she says. "We both love the adventures and learning up here."

AU OPTIONS

Bethany Tynes

Master of Arts - Integrated Studies

This article originally appeared October 23, 2009, in issue 1740.

Athabasca University's Master of Arts - Integrated Studies (MAIS) degree offers "a unique opportunity to engage in a program of study that spans the arts, humanities, and social sciences," and allows students to design their own learning plan which is "comprehensive in scope but specific in focus."

This ability to integrate multiple areas of study was one aspect of the program that caught the attention of student Amanda Nielsen. "I had dappled with studies in a couple different areas: political science, philosophy, human resources, conflict resolution, and risk management, to name a few," she says.

"The MAIS program is integrated, and allows me to explore many different disciplines and apply my varied knowledge. This is exciting, and I feel it allows me to gain a more holistic understanding of the different research questions that I am interested in exploring."

Nielsen is actively involved in the Graduate Students' Association and the Journal of Integrated Studies, and enjoys the ability to interact with her classmates even when separated by great physical distances. "My favourite part [of the program] has been learning from my fellow students from our online discussions," she says. "The diversity of student experiences and insights is a real strength of the program."

Dr. Angela Specht, a faculty member with the Master of Arts - Integrated Studies program, also feels that the diversity of the student body is a great strength. "The people (students, faculty, and staff) really make MAIS and Athabasca University a great community of which to be a part," she says. "Our students in the MAIS program bring a wealth of personal and professional experience to the table."

Nielsen says that "everyone from the MAIS program has such a different background . . . Owing to my classmates, I find myself considering angles that I would never considered on my own!"

When asked if there are any weaknesses in the Master of Arts - Integrated Studies program, Nielsen notes that "student services are, in my opinion, sometimes lacking. The MAIS program seems a bit understaffed, so it sometimes takes way longer to get back to phone call and email inquiries than what seems necessary."

Dr. Specht admits that "the most significant challenge" for the program is its incredible growth rate. "Rapid and sustained growth can put a lot of strain on your resources. So at times, it's hard to keep up with issues like staffing, administrative and financial resources, keeping apace of program development and so forth."

In spite of the strain, faculty and staff "have done a really good job of addressing these issues, looking for productive solutions, and also actively planning and managing for the future," Dr. Specht says. And though it presents logistical challenges, the "tremendous growth is encouraging because it shows that Athabasca University and the MAIS program are doing things right."

The success of MAIS graduates certainly also indicates that the program is "doing things right." According to Dr. Specht, graduates with this degree have successfully pursued "advanced degrees (e.g., PhDs) and professional degrees (e.g., Law, etc.)."

While Nielsen hasn't yet decided what she plans to do after graduation, she says that she would "one day love to complete a PhD!"

"I think the program provides a lot of benefits for students' future studies or employment," Dr. Specht says. The program can not only be used as a stepping stone to further education, but also "provides academic credentials that can advance students' career goals.

"The MAIS program helps students to develop critical and creative thinking and research skills, as well as writing and communication skills that employers and other academic institutions value . . . The distance, asynchronous nature of our courses, as well as the reality that many of our students have full-time work and family commitments, mean that our students learn how to manage their time, and work closely with other students in order to successfully complete their courses. These kinds of management skills are very relevant in today's workforce."

Nielsen would recommend the MAIS program to any prospective students considering studies at Athabasca University. "I've enjoyed my time as a MAIS student," she says, "and suspect that it is a good option for many others out there who are interested in pursuing a graduate degree."

ERAS IN EDUCATION

Jason Sullivan

Muses and Modernity

This article originally appeared July 10, 2009, in issue 1727.

Education has existed for as long as people have been raised by their elders. The idea of formal schooling goes back thousands of years, yet school as a mandatory part of growing up is a recent phenomenon. For instance, many of us know of or can remember a relative who attended few or no classes because they were needed on the family farm.

Today the idea of "going to school" carries with it a certain weight, a sense of predictability and homogenization. Still, for a lot of people school was (and may still be) a miserable, oppressive experience. This led the social theorist Michel Foucault to rhetorically ask "Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prison?"

Society has changed since Foucault's work titled *Discipline and Punish* was published in the mid 1970s, yet questions around education remain. Have students always found it to be an arid, institutional experience? Where does distance education fit in?

Being Athabasca University students gives us a unique opportunity to actively control our interaction with the subjects that we study. Perhaps the AU experience is, in some ways, closer to other historical educational periods, times when pupil and teacher each had ample opportunity to express their individuality. By using the sociological imagination (seeing individual experience within the social whole) we can take a look at education in different historical periods—and just maybe find some answers.

In ancient Greece a woman named Sappho was known far and wide for an all-female school of the arts on the Island of Lesbos in the Aegean Sea. Sappho's poetry and persona led her to be thought of very highly by various figures of her time. Plato, for instance, called her the "tenth Muse," a high honour indeed considering Muses were immortal, angelic creatures.

Today Sappho is remembered for her poetry, replete with love and yearning for the students she taught. By modern standards, a teacher in love with her pupils is considered inappropriate to say the least. Yet in ancient Greece, where nonsexual, platonic love was prized as the highest form of solidarity, Sappho's elegant expressions of desire for her pupils arose as naturally as the turquoise surf of the Mediterranean.

On the other hand, Sappho's poems of yearning passion sharply contrast with stolid Socrates, who "urges the control and domination of the same desire that Sappho's poetry celebrates." Just as 2500 years later Foucault was questioning the passionless and oppressive nature of modern education, Sappho, by expressing her love for her pupils, embodied another way of learning, one where the subject itself became not only something that was to know but also something that was to be loved.

It is a matter of historical dispute whether Sappho had physical relations with any of her students. Today such desires make us nervous because they imply predatory tendencies. Recently an English schoolteacher named Leonora Rustamova published a book with references to her students and sexuality. She was subsequently suspended, despite protest from her pupils who endearingly called her "Miss Rusty." The purpose of her book was to encourage students to read by writing about them and thus making them the subject rather than the object of the learning process. Instead of dusty William Shakespeare or distant Joseph Conrad, Rustamova's writing seemed natural and immediate.

As distance education students we are in the delightful position of engaging directly with our course material . . . We may fall in or out of love with the subject matter yet we always learn it on our own terms.

Sappho had written poems to be accompanied on the lyre, the better to interest her young pupils in becoming better poets and musicians. Rustamova wrote of how the smile of one of her students felt like "such a blessing" in order to encourage them to embrace literacy. Yet by exposing her feelings about her students, Rustamova had crossed an invisible line, one that fences education into a non-emotional and non-expressive framework.

A sociologist named Norbert Elias wrote his most important work, *The Civilizing Process,* about how the "shame frontier" is pushed back such that "walls are being erected between people." One of his most cited examples is how books of etiquette ceased to implore readers to not pick their noses at the dinner table, presumably because such a practice was now widely considered inappropriate and therefore not worth a mention. In his section on Elias in *Modern Sociological Theory,* George Ritzer discusses how people's "instinct is slowly but progressively suppressed."

In an educational context this means that many thoughts, opinions, and feelings are not dealt with in school. This alienation of feeling from education serves to "suppress the positive pleasure component" that ought to make learning a joyful, creative process. Instead, school becomes boring for many students. Just as in grade school we all learned to sit conscientiously at our desks, in later years we are expected to restrain ourselves from becoming too emotionally involved or too critical of our educational surroundings.

In Elias's study, he found that the mediaeval aristocracy were the arbiters of fashion and taste. Likewise, in today's society, teachers play a major role as "specialists in the elaboration and moulding of social conduct." From an intellectual perspective this means that some ideas and feelings are more acceptable than others. That Sappho's love for her students could be akin to a modern teacher's feelings for her pupils becomes a disturbing thought because we have come to believe that there must always be a barrier between teacher and student and, far more importantly, between student and subject matter.

As distance education students we are in the delightful position of engaging directly with our course material. Our tutor, though important, plays a much lesser role than a traditional instructor. We may fall in or out of love with the subject matter yet we always learn it on our own terms. In this way, distance education provides something outside of normal schooling: the opportunity to learn without "being taught" and to absorb information in a non-coercive manner.

The way students have learned throughout history reveals a variety of learning methods. It seems to me that there is no better place to investigate different historical and cultural contexts of education than as a distance education student. As a character in the Ralph Ellison novel *The Invisible Man* states, "sometimes a man has to plunge outside history" in order to see or experience things differently. I think it is reasonable to say that AU students have all plunged outside education as it is normally imagined. With this separation we forge unique and valuable perspectives.

THE BLUE SCREEN OF DEATH

Greg Ryan

This article originally appeared April 10, 2009, in issue 1714.

I know the signs; I've seen them before. In the beginning the hints are subtle; there are slight hesitations before agreeing to do as I ask.

The hesitations last no longer than the taking of a deep breath, but they seem to last for an eternity.

It's not outright mutiny I'm facing, but an inclination to rebel that lurks somewhere beneath the surface.

When a relationship begins to slide into the abyss there's a plethora of emotions to endure: frustration, despair, hopelessness, and anger.

Why can't we agree to exist harmoniously? Let's try and work things out. Do I make too many demands? I don't know.

I tinker with the mechanics of our affair hoping for the perfect solution. Perfection is an ephemeral quality that many seek and never find.

Our time together is over when logging on to my computer the monitor mysteriously flashes on, off, turns black for a moment, and I find myself sitting before the "blue screen of death." I moan, yell, curse, kick the wall, and throw my hands in the air, but all to no avail.

I contemplate the possible alternatives now that it's time for a new beginning. I re-evaluate what it is that I'm seeking in a relationship. My conclusion is that I desire a sweet system that's difficult to find; it's speed as well as the basics that I yearn for.

Will it drive my peripherals and provide word processing and spreadsheets? Will I be able to enjoy music and movies? Questions, questions, questions, too many questions, but as a part-time student experience has taught me that diligent research provides answers.

Every university student understands the reliance that I place upon my computer in order to function academically. Whatever the age my electronic mate is, I need it to perform flawlessly in order to succeed. For instance, without my keyboard in front of me, I labour under a psychological burden when beginning a critical essay. I'm intimidated by the blank sheet of paper sitting atop my desk.

A computer only does what I tell it to do. Computers don't possess the cognitive abilities that I have, although they may in the future. An enterprising scientist in Europe has successfully fused "living brain cells

and silicon circuits." In years to come, my organic desktop system will advise me when our relationship needs intervention, such as a component replacement or a maintenance session.

Throughout these past two years, I've managed my affairs with a ubiquitous operating system I'll leave unnamed (though I quickly conclude that I'm a "V— victim"). I feel victimized and this recent bout of emotional turmoil convinces me to sever our partnership.

Budgetary constraints decree how exotic my new partner will be. A trip to the local computer store proves to me that purchasing off-the-shelf software and hardware isn't an option.

For one thing, I'm not certain what the root of our problem is. Did the disk fail? Is there a file corruption disabling the system? Is the CPU long past its prime? How am I, the computer illiterate, able to diagnose an electronic malaise?

I'm content and confident that this one will work. So confident, that I rescue an old laptop from the storage room, blow the dust from the keyboard, purge the hard drive, and install Puppy Linux on it.

The first thing I attempt to do is reinstall my old operating system. However, after a frustrating afternoon I turn to other sources for help. Perusing the Internet, I'm offered several possible solutions; there's an abundant amount of advice available, but some sources are questionable and caution is therefore advised.

Hours later, after attempting several fruitless procedures, I quit. I don't count these spent hours as a loss, because I'm now more computer literate than I was before.

I hit on the notion that replacing the hard drive, even if the problem isn't solved, will be a worthwhile investment. The installation is straightforward and simple. I note how the old drive is connected and duplicate the same with the new drive, taking special care to avoid electrical shock (you can never be too careful when working with electrical equipment). Furthermore, nothing is gained by frying sensitive electronic components.

Harm to myself and the computer circuitry is avoided and the installation is accomplished without incident. The drive is formatted and ready to receive the operating system. However, when I try to install my old system, numerous messages tell me that a particular file is corrupted and must be replaced.

The previous forced shutdowns and restarts, cursor hangs, indecipherable error messages, and other idiosyncratic behaviours have turned me into a thoroughly disgruntled customer already. I now pledge never to return to the fold. I turn to the Internet again.

And I discover Linux. There are numerous Linux-based operating systems available, and it's a matter of choosing which one best meets my needs. And they're legally free for the asking. I learn that Linux Ubuntu is available by download over the Internet or by ordering the disk. The disk is mailed free of charge. A disclaimer advises a 10-week wait, but my disk comes within 10 days.

I'm a neophyte when it comes to the Linux-based systems, but there are numerous Ubuntu sites with plenty of information to help me along. I now have a complete system that meets my needs. Not all is perfect, however. There are a few nagging problems for me to contend with.

For example, configuring my printer to work with Ubuntu appears to be straightforward, but isn't. Although my Brother laser printer is listed in the installation guide, the printer refuses to print. By searching through and trying other printer drivers, I discover an alternative that works. Problem solved.

However, I learn that configuring a wireless device is more problematic. A few devices exist that are Linux compatible right out of the box, but it appears that these aren't available in North America. There are alternative installation methods, but a perusal through numerous web sites and blogs convinces me that configuring a USB wireless device will be brutal, exasperating work.

I'm not ready for that task yet, but will be one day. Is there perchance a reader out there who can offer a simple solution? This wireless hassle is an unfortunate glitch in an otherwise rewarding experience.

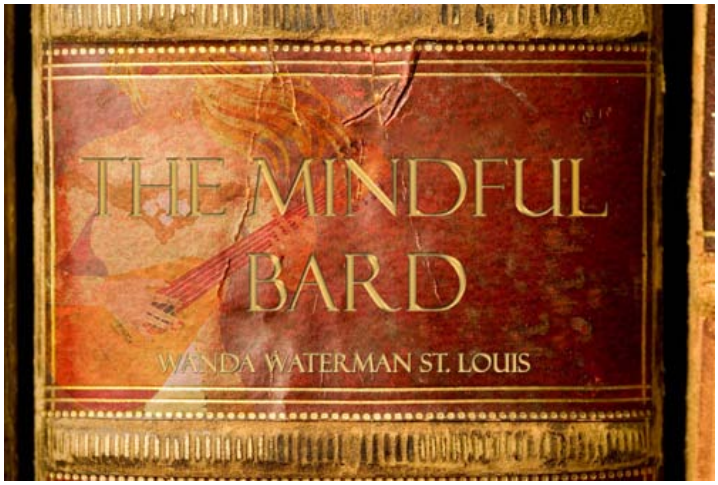
Still, I'm a realist. The honeymoon is barely over, so I'm guarding against my expectations being too high. A month has passed and my new relationship is growing stronger. I'm content and confident that this one will work. So confident, that I rescue an old laptop from the storage room, blow the dust from the keyboard, purge the hard drive, and install Puppy Linux on it.

Puppy is a small distribution, 100 megabytes, that packs lots of wallop for its size; it gives new life to an old PC. Like Ubuntu, Puppy has a full slate of features. The basics are included with the initial download and other complimentary "puplets" are available through the official Puppy Linux website. Like its brothers, Puppy is free. Puppy is fun to take for a walk and its speed is exhilarating.

Printer configuration is approximately the same as Ubuntu. I'm surprised to discover that my USB wireless device connects to my router automatically. Puppy is friendly to "newbies" such as myself and has all the applications that I want in an operating system. In my short experience with Puppy, I can attest that getting some of the features to work requires research and effort. There's a learning curve to contend with, but that's endemic to every new operating system whatever its profile.

Puppy is a slimmed-down, functional operating system. I'm happy with my new Puppy; it's helping me meet my career and academic goals.

I'm ready to tackle that essay now, but first I'll take my new puppy for a run.



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

This column originally appeared August 14, 2009, in issue 1731.

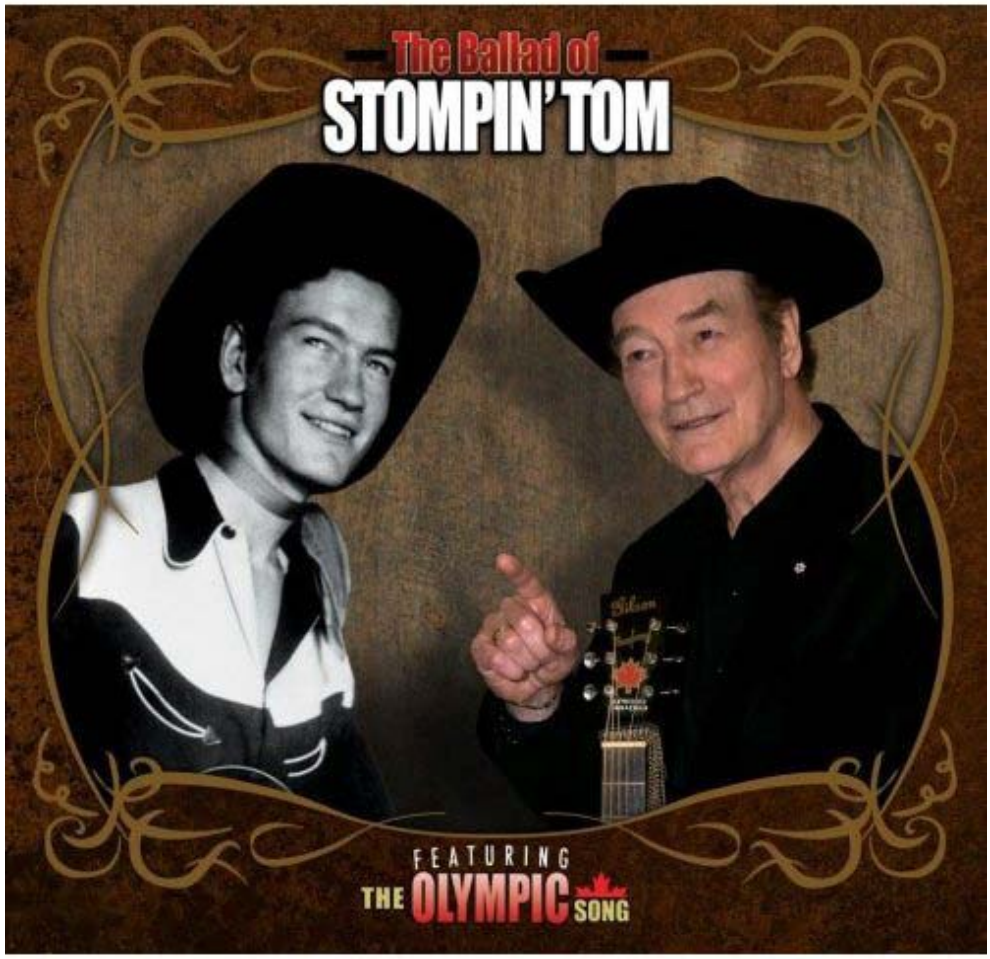
CD: Stompin' Tom Connors, *The Ballad of Stompin' Tom*

Label: EMI

Release date: 2009

Still Putting a Boot Through the Floors of Those Who Will Not Hear

"Then came Sudbury Saturday night, at the Gumboot Cloggeroo
They made me the Chairman of the Board, 'til I stomped a hole right thru
And like ol' Luke with his old guitar, my 'Song wasn't over yet'
Till I sang the Ode that I wrote for The Road and the Mom I can't forget."



Stompin' Tom Connors, from "Ballad of Stompin' Tom"

When Tom Connors was a little boy growing up in St. John, New Brunswick, he had to wait outside while his friends were called in to supper. He had no supper to go to, and it never occurred to any of these parents that this lone child could use a meal.

A few years later Tom accompanied his destitute young mother as she hitchhiked through Nova Scotia to try to get help from relatives. The relatives in question punctuated the long ordeal with a slammed door.

Soon the authorities were called, and instead of helping the poor woman house and feed herself and her child they incarcerated her and sent Tom to an orphanage.

The wonder is that in spite of all that (and much more) Tom became such a loving person. In fact, he dedicated his life to singing tributes to the places and people he visited, heard about, or just plain admired. If anyone could be expected to produce music that's dark, moody, and rails against society, it's this guy, who suffered unimaginable privations at the hands of neighbours, family, strangers, and the system.

After he became famous Tom not only treated his enemies with kindness, he defended the underdog and stood by his principles, often at his own personal expense.

It seems that Tom met enough decent, caring, generous human beings in his travels to turn his rig around. If it hadn't been for these people there would be no Stompin' Tom.

Once, while hitchhiking across country as a young man, not long after telling off an evangelical Christian who Tom felt was trying to shove religion down his throat, Tom had a spiritual experience. He made a kind of covenant with his maker: if God wanted him to give his life to music and was willing to make it happen, then, by Ned, Tom was ready to surrender. This experience granted him not only a firmness of resolve but also a sense of peace about the miseries to which his fellow humans had subjected him.

After he became famous Tom not only treated his enemies with kindness, he defended the underdog and stood by his principles, often at his own personal expense. He advocated tirelessly for Canadian musicians even when this meant earning the ire of several national organizations.

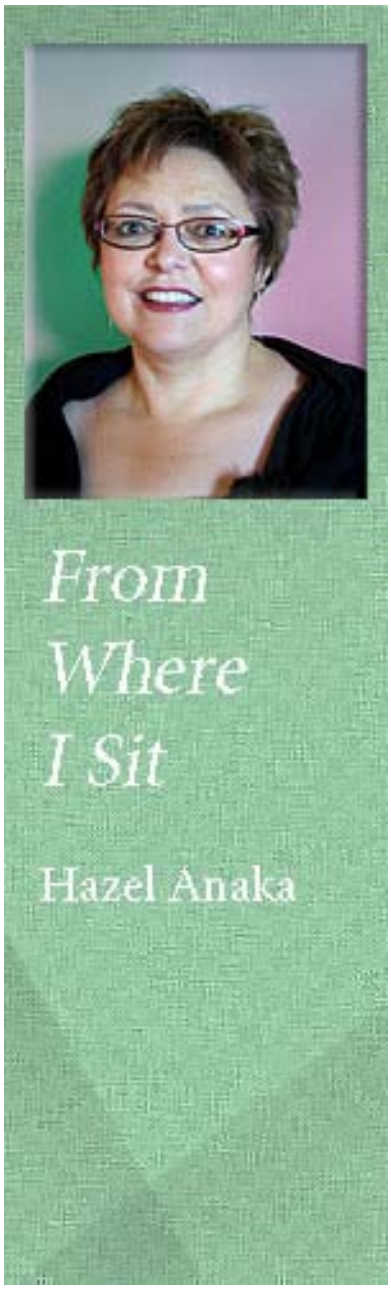
Tom Connors is the product of an era that wasn't exactly searching for a Canadian identity. But his music is as close as any to a typically Canadian musical genre, the music of all sorts of ordinary folks in kitchens, on farms, on fishing boats, on mountains and plains, in mines and fields and forests, in hockey rinks, in prisons, taverns, churches, and living on the streets.

If Tom had one lesson to teach this big sprawling land, what would it be? Being Canadian is about calling greed and injustice when you see 'em. It's also about forgiveness. And about folks. Lots and lots of different folks.

If you look long and hard enough, you'll always find some good ones.

The Ballad of Stompin' Tom manifests five of The Mindful Bard's criteria for music well worth a listen: 1) it is authentic, original, and delightful; 2) it confronts, rebukes, and mocks existing injustices; 3) it displays an engagement with and compassionate response to suffering; 4) it inspires an awareness of the sanctity of creation; and 5) it harmoniously unites art with social action, saving me from both seclusion in an ivory tower and slavery to someone else's political agenda.

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



Just for Today

This column originally appeared May 29, 2009, in issue 1721.

Anyone (and everyone) with email has received inspirational, motivational, tear-jerking pieces that tug at the heart strings. Often there is music or poignant images. Way too often there is the exhortation to send this along to ten or 12 people in the next seven minutes.

I admit that most of the time I read and delete. Sometimes I don't even open them for days or weeks because they are a huge time drain. I now have a folder that I save the exceptional ones in so I can reread them if I ever want to. Otherwise, they are gone.

Tonight as I write this I wish I had some trite, sentimental lessons for life to read and take comfort in. It is time for reflection, for pausing and taking stock, for making course corrections, for counting blessings. The reality is this: as much as we sometimes look longingly at other people's lives and luck or sometimes compare ourselves to others and find ourselves wanting, the life we have is the best possible life for us.

It is a mishmash of results of all the decisions we've made and the actions we've taken. It is the sum total of genetics, nature and nurture, karma, opportunities taken or missed, serendipity, dumb luck, and intention. Ideally, we are the heroes and heroines of our lives and the masters of our destinies.

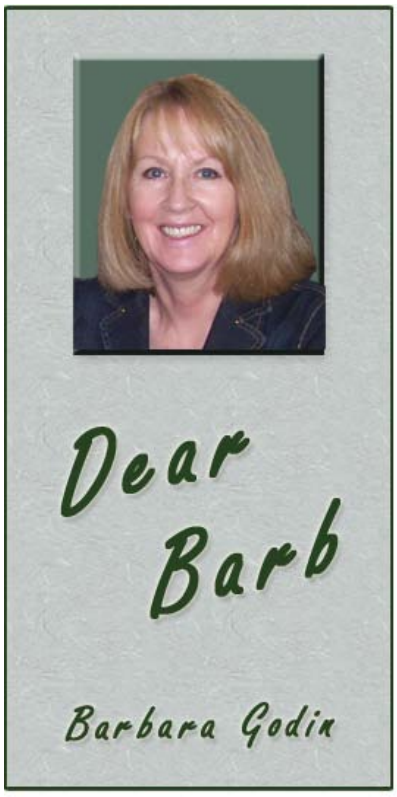
When I heard a few days ago that a woman I know, who's younger than me, is facing a double mastectomy I was stunned and saddened. It is another grim reminder that life can blindside us at any time without a moment's notice. And while I hope her journey has a happy ending I can't help but think about what I would do with such a diagnosis. I want to take the life lesson from her misfortune and reap the benefits for myself and those I care about without having to live through this terrible ordeal.

At the risk of repeating what we've all heard and read before: I plan to burn my candles instead of saving them for some special occasion. Likewise for the best bedding and dinnerware. I'm going to forgive more (and sooner) than I usually do. I'm going to spend more time this summer smelling the roses than weeding around them. I'm going to sleep when I'm tired and eat when I'm hungry.

I'm going to spend more time with family and friends. Laugh more, overanalyze less. Walk each day. Plan more mini getaways than the one big trip that may not materialize. Delight in the miracle of life as a grandbaby arrives. Bask in the job well done in raising two wonderful kids. Give thanks for my blessed life.

Never miss an opportunity to say thank you, to lift someone up with words of praise or encouragement. Shed those people, habits, things, and practices that don't enrich my life. Draw close that which does. Learn to accept what is rather than bucking life at every turn because today is the only day I'm sure of, from where I sit.

This column originally appeared January 16, 2009, in issue 1702.



Different Worlds Can Find Harmony

This column originally appeared October 30, 2009, in issue 1741.

Dear Barb:

I am a professional woman in my mid-thirties. I am single but would like to find the right guy and settle down and have a family. Recently I began dating a really nice man who is divorced and has two children. We have been seeing each other for a couple of months and get along great. Because he works in a factory my family and friends are cautioning me about becoming too involved with him.

They say we are from different worlds and won't be able to find any common interests. I'm not sure this will be a problem. I believe if two people love each other anything is possible. Am I being too idealistic in wanting to take a chance with this guy?

Maria

Hi, Maria. I agree that if two people love each other anything is possible, but you have to be prepared for the roadblocks.

Being a professional woman has probably exposed you to many more experiences than a factory worker, simply by the nature of your job. A large part of being a successful professional involves being able to socialize with people from diverse backgrounds, which may include CEOs of large companies, as well as middle- and entry-level employees.

As a person who has worked in a factory your boyfriend mostly likely has not had these same experiences, at least not within his employment situation. That's not to say he would not be able to conduct himself well in these situations, but he may not feel as comfortable as you do. Fortunately these are all things that can be discussed and worked out between the two of you.

As for common interests I'm not sure that where you work would have a great bearing on your interests outside of work. For example, hiking is an activity that can be enjoyed by everyone—as well as bowling, skiing, curling, etc. Together you can find and create activities that you both enjoy.

Just because someone works in a factory does not mean they are not intelligent or well read. Many people with university degrees find themselves working in factories for a variety of reasons.

If you have found someone that you have a connection with, I say go for it! Your friends may be making comments based on generalities; however, each person is unique in their own right, as every relationship is unique and dependent on the two people involved.

Take your time and enjoy each other. Thanks for writing, Maria.

Email your questions to 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.

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Publisher Athabasca University Students' Union
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www.voicemagazine.org

The Voice is published every Friday in html and pdf format

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Special thanks to Athabasca University's *The Insider* for its contributions