

THE

VOICE

MAGAZINE

Volume 18 Issue 25

June 25, 2010

Wordplay

Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious

Home Routes

Folk(s) on the road

Health Matters

Açaí berries

Plus:

*From Where I Sit, Sister Aurora,
The Mindful Bard, and much more ...*



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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.



YOU NEED TO FIND A WAY TO SAY . . .

Kimberley Sanders



Precisely What You Mean!

"When trying to express oneself, it's frankly quite absurd,

To leaf through lengthy lexicons to find the perfect word.

*A little spontaneity keeps conversation keen,
You need to find a way to say, precisely what you mean . . ."*

Mary Poppins

It's Monday, and it's a Mary Poppins kind of day. The sun is shining, the birds are chirping,

and I find myself singing along with Julie Andrews and Dick Van Dyke as they perform "Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious." Inasmuch as I find myself waxing nostalgic, I am also thinking about how much I love words.

Throughout my undergraduate journey I constantly absorbed new words. While I didn't come across the chemical name of titin, or borrow "honorificabilitudinitatibus" from Shakespeare, I did augment my vocabulary in a perfectly wonderful way: through reading. Every course, every lecture, every journal article, and every library book gave me an opportunity to develop my vocabulary.

Long before I embraced higher education, I was friends with a young woman who had both a B.A. and an M.Sc. Although my former teammate was an intellectual she was, sadly, not an educator. Instead of showing tolerance toward less educated folks like me (and perhaps gently correcting me in private), she brandished her alumna status like a bludgeon, taking random intellectual swipes at the unlearned. I recall (admittedly with some wincing) the time she humiliated me in front of our entire baseball team for using the colloquial expression "yous guys."

According to [Urban Dictionary](#), the phrase "yous guys," common in New Jersey, New York, and Chicago, is a colloquial reference for a group of men and women. Something one might say to a coed baseball team. Granted, it wasn't the best turn of phrase but it was an earworm that had somehow burrowed deep into my brain and for whatever reason, I couldn't seem to stop myself from saying it (much to my own amazement, I assure you).

The term earworm comes from the German word *ohrwurm*, and refers to a musical phrase that sticks in your head. According to [Earworm](#), "Do you know that sensation of having a tune or song fixed in your mind, repeating over and over? That is called an earworm!"

For better or worse, we all have earworms we would like to annihilate from our psyches. While culling phrases such as "yous guys" and eliminating superfluous word like "like" from my repertoire was a challenge, to this day I take comfort in knowing that I am not alone in my desire to purge inarticulate phrases from my memory and speech. In fact, wikiHow has pages devoted to learning how to stop saying "like" and how to stop being (like) so annoying.

Someone once said “laughter is an instant vacation.” As long as the joke is not at someone else’s expense, I agree. The difference between me and my former baseball buddy is that I don’t feel compelled to publically call out someone for poor vocabulary choices. We all learn in different ways and at different speeds.

However, if you do want to expand your vocabulary quickly, [LanguageLab](#) offers a succinct list of words that are sure to impress.

But for maximum impact, read. Read every day if you can. I suggest that you start with the dictionary (no, I am not kidding; keep it in the bathroom). I am what you might call a bibliophile. With over three thousand books in my home library, one of my biggest dreams is to build a floor-to-ceiling bookcase (with requisite rolling ladder, naturally). For now, though, my books will remain shelved on 18 Billy bookcases from IKEA.

As you can see, whether it’s a phonological memory loop or laziness, those irritating expression, songs, and jingles that refuse to disengage themselves from our heads can be as maddening as hiccups. Speaking of hiccups, thanks to my very bright niece I learned that a spoonful of sugar gets rid of them.

Now if I could just get rid of that song in my head.

... for maximum impact, read. Read every day if you can. I suggest that you start with the dictionary (no, I am not kidding; keep it in the bathroom).

CLICK OF THE WRIST – Shake, Rattle, and Roll

This week, Toronto welcomed G20 dignitaries with a . . . rattle? That’s right; on Wednesday afternoon, tremors from a rare magnitude 5.0 earthquake were felt from Ottawa to Toronto and as far south as Windsor, Ontario. It’s well known that earthquake activity in Western Canada is high. But earthquakes in Eastern Canada aren’t as unusual as one might think. This week, we take a look at some fascinating information about earthquakes in Canada. Steady yourself, and start clicking!

Earthquake Tracker - Seismologists and geophysicists at Natural Resources Canada are constantly tracking earthquake activity all over the country—and there’s a lot of it. If the dishes just rattled, check the “Recent Earthquakes” page to see whether Mother Nature was responsible.

East versus West - The US Geological Survey gives a good summary of seismic activity in the western Quebec area that spawned Wednesday’s quake—and explains how it’s different from activity west of the Rockies. Although Eastern Canada has fewer tremors than Western Canada, its quakes “can be felt over an area as much as ten times larger than a similar magnitude earthquake on the west coast.”

Quakes and Tsunamis - Surprisingly, Canada’s most devastating documented earthquake occurred in the Maritimes, along the Grand Banks. Although the 1929 quake caused some damage of its own, it also spawned a 13-metre tsunami that claimed more than 25 lives. Click to view relevant photos, newspaper clippings, and other old documents from the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador’s archives.

Big Quake - A 9.0 earthquake in Canada? Believe it. Scientists and anthropologists have evidence of a high-magnitude earthquake around 1700, off the coast of British Columbia. This intriguing paper explains how researchers used the oral traditions of First Nations peoples to determine when the massive quake occurred.

IN CONVERSATION WITH . . .

Wanda Waterman St. Louis



Home Routes, Part I

Home Routes is an exciting, new non-profit initiative creating music events that benefit musicians, consumers, communities, and the earth. Recently, Home Routes volunteer coordinator Ali Hancharyk took the time to answer some questions from Wanda Waterman St. Louis.

Home Routes was the brainchild of our Artistic Director, Mitch Podolak, a veteran of the folk music community for over 40 years, who founded the Winnipeg and Vancouver Folk Festivals, Winnipeg's

West End Cultural Centre, and the Stan Rogers Festival in Canso, Nova Scotia.

Through speaking with many professional folk music performers across Canada, it became apparent that it was normal for performers to do a cross-country tour and come home in debt rather than actually making a living. There was, and still is, a lack of infrastructure in Canada to support the wealth of incredibly talented acoustic performers. All we wanted to do was increase that infrastructure and provide a circuit of sequential gigs to touring professional acts so that they could take something other than experience and exposure home with them.

What makes Home Routes different is that we connect 12 houses on one circuit so musicians can play 12 intimate house concerts within two weeks. We limit driving distance between locations to four hours, and hosts provide the artist with dinner and sleeping arrangements for the evening of the show. The artist is supplied with a tour book with contact information, dates, and directions so that navigating is easy.

The only cost to the host is their time to spread the word, an extra plate at dinner, and a bed for the artist to rest for the night. The audience pays \$15 per person, all of which goes to the artist. Adding up 12 concerts at 30 people each can generate a decent wage for a folk musician!

The average folk musician makes approximately \$11,000 annual income. On a Home Routes house concert tour, it's normal for the performer to take home half of their annual salary in two weeks. These tours not only give artists money to put bread on the table, but they end up making friends for life with the people they stay with and meet, and it also brings them into communities that don't always get the chance to see live music because of their remote locations.

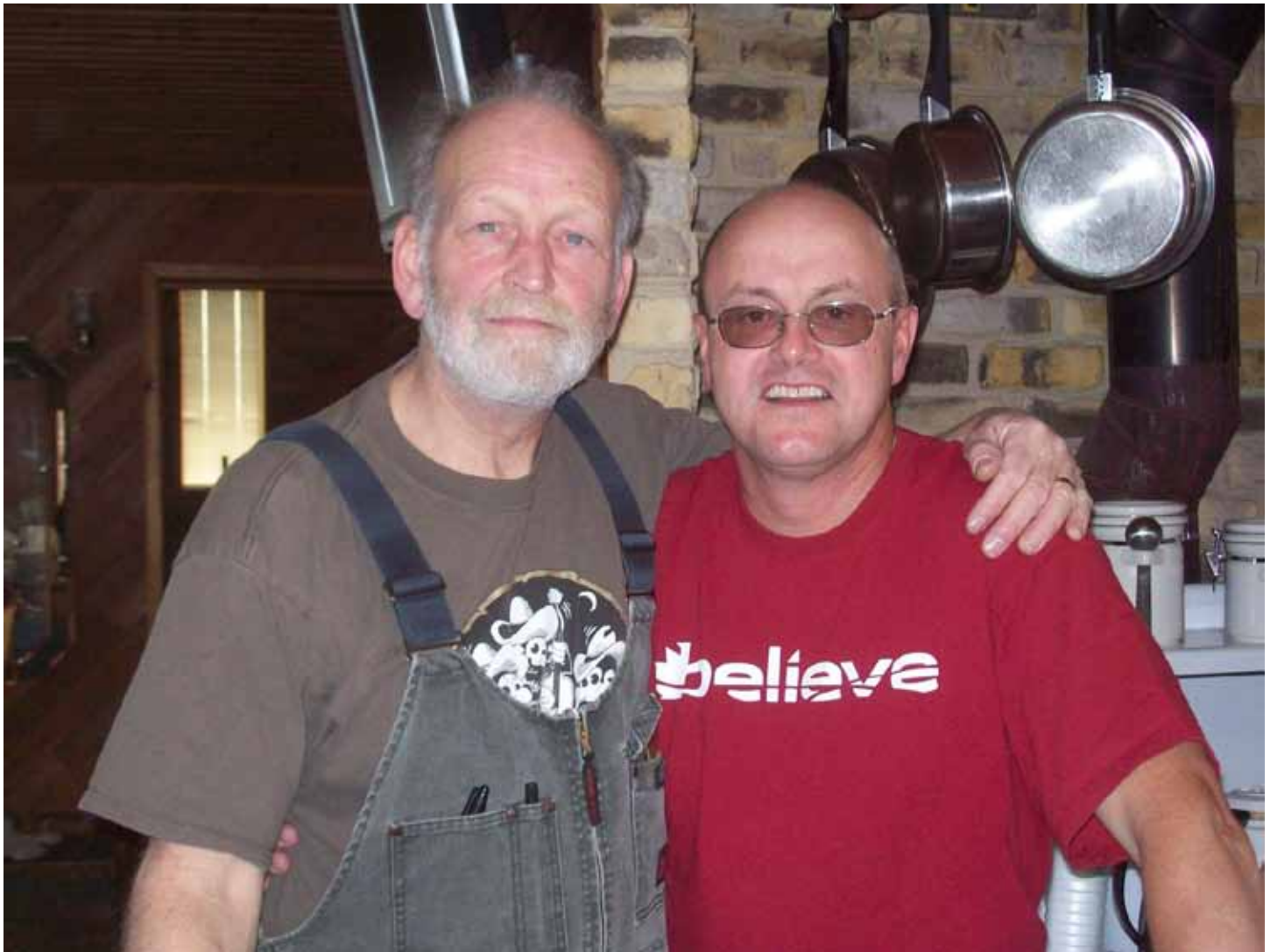
With dinner and accommodations being provided by the presenters, this drastically cuts down on touring costs, which are quite high in Canada because of the great distance between most major cities.

How I Got Involved

I started working at Home Routes in October as a Volunteer Coordinator through a training program funded by the Government of Manitoba. I have a B.A. in Communications from the University of Winnipeg, as well as a diploma in Creative Communications from Red River College. This led to a job at Manitoba Music, where I jumped headfirst into my career in the music industry—and haven't looked back since.

Harmonic Planet

Harmonic Planet is a world music series that showcases World Music-specific performances. The objective of Harmonic Planet is to musically celebrate and engender cultural solidarity between Canadians from different backgrounds, and to celebrate the depth of musical wealth that artists from everywhere have brought to Canada. Next season, running for six shows from September 2010 to April 2011, will feature performances from artists all over the globe, bringing people together to share each other's culture.



Valdy (left) with Tim Cameron, a presenter on the Manitoba Yellow Diamond circuit.

We also have a French language circuit called Chemin Chez Nous running in Manitoba, with a new second circuit in Saskatchewan that will start in September 2010.

How's It Working for You?

Home Routes has seen great success since its inception in 2007. Our audiences have been growing steadily; attendance has grown from approximately 10,000 to 16,000 people last season. Artists have finished their tours happy to have met new friends, create direct relationships with their fans, and come home with money in their pockets.



Jaxon Haldane on the Blueberry circuit in September last season

Volunteer hosts have discovered new music, built relationships within their communities, and made connections with the artists in an intimate, personalized setting.

Tales from the Front

We've sent Torontonians up to northern Manitoba and Saskatchewan with ensuing hilarity. There are tales of taking the Good Lovelies (an all-girl trio) out ice fishing in The Pas, [and] other stories about hosts emerging from squirrel hunting (or pest control, whatever angle you look at it), waking up the performers to gunshots!

In our first year, 2007, we had a late harvest and a lot of the farmers were still in the fields in early October. One of the artists from North Dakota, a farmer named Chuck Suchy, actually went out to the field before his concert and drove a combine to help out!

Hosts sometimes provide their own homegrown opening act, which gives emerging performers time to wet their whistles for live performance in a comfortable setting.

The most heartwarming thing about a Home Routes tour is that it's a part of the folk process, introducing new audiences to the culture and traditions of Canadian folklore. People have the opportunity to hear musicians' stories [and] their unique perspectives on all aspects of Canadian culture and its diversity.

HEALTH MATTERS

Katie D'Souza



Açaí Berries

*"Dear Dr. Katie,**A magazine ad showed amazing health benefits and testimonials of using açai berry juice. What is the açai berry, and is it truly beneficial for weight loss?"**Rachel*

Dear Rachel,

Yes, there has been quite a buzz about açai berries!

Native to both Central and South America, açai berries (pronounced "ah-sah-EE") are grape-sized, bluish-black berries (or green, depending on the variety) that grow in clusters of five hundred to nine hundred fruits, high up in açai palm trees.

The berries, which each contain one large seed, have been traditionally revered for their medicinal effects.

Here in North America, we hopped on the açai bandwagon in the 1990s, when claims of the berry's antioxidant power ignited our interest. (An antioxidant is a biochemical compound that counters the cellular damage caused by day-to-day living, pollution, and poor diet, to name a few). Although some antioxidant claims for the berry have been exaggerated, we do know that açai berries contain 15 to 20 times the antioxidant levels of red grapes. (That's pretty impressive; much of the hype about our "need" to consume red wine is due to the red grapes' antioxidant levels!)

So, are there any other health benefits to these berries, in addition to their antioxidant power? How about healthy omega 6 and 9 oils? Açai berries have been shown to contain biochemical fats that are used in our bodies to promote health. (Not all fats make you "fat"; the body does need certain types of fat to survive. For example, think of your brain—it contains a lot of fat!). The fats contained in açai berries include the healthy linoleic and oleic acids (also found in olive oil) and palmitic acid (also found in coconut oil). Another neat fact about these oils is that they act as storage for the berries' polyphenol content (polyphenols, also found in green tea, are a potent antioxidant, and are one of the reasons why green tea is "good for you").

In conclusion, the nutritional profile of the açai berry is excellent. However, you've probably noticed that there is a significant amount of hype surrounding the berry for health claims other than those we've already discussed (take weight loss, for example). Most of these claims have yet to be scientifically validated, so be discriminating; don't believe everything. Although it is possible that the berries could *indirectly* help with weight loss (for example, the more antioxidants you eat, the better you may feel, and the more energy you may have to burn at the gym), the scientific stamp of approval isn't on this claim yet.

Dr. Katie D'Souza

*"Dear Dr. Katie,**I'd like to give the açai berry a try. What is the best way to eat açai berries to gain the maximum health benefits from them?"**Curious*

Dear Curious,

Fresh, dried, frozen, cooked: yes, there are a lot of ways that açai berries are sold! The best way to consume them is, of course, in the fresh state. However, unless you're making a trip to the Amazon or South America in the near future, just-picked açai berries are a rare commodity here in Canada.

So, what's another excellent way to take the berries to optimize their health benefits? Most experts agree that the whole berry juice is the next best option. By consuming this, you're raising your antioxidant levels and gaining the majority of the health benefits offered by the fresh raw fruits. And because the whole berry juice is highly concentrated, you need only consume one to two tablespoons per day. However, a word of caution: ensure the whole berry juice really *is* whole berry juice. The label should state that it is 100 per cent pure.

Like the juice, the freeze-dried extract of the berries is also associated with positive health effects. This extract comes in an encapsulated form, so it's easy to take: a couple of capsules a day, and that's it. It's important that the extract indicates that the berries have been freeze-dried, since this is one of the few drying methods that preserves the açai berries' nutrients (mechanical or sun-drying, in this case, is not optimal).

Have fun exploring the açai berry!

Dr. Katie D'Souza

Katie D'Souza is an AU graduate and a licensed naturopathic doctor. She currently lives in Ontario.

The information contained in this article is for personal interest only; it is not intended for diagnosis or treatment of any condition. Readers are always encouraged to seek the professional advice of a licensed physician or qualified health care practitioner for personal health or medical conditions.

ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY CLOSED JUNE 28 - JULY 4



AU has announced that the university will be closed during the week of June 28, although some key services will be available. According to the AU website, the closure is necessary to help balance the budget and is scheduled "during a reduced period of activity," which should allow for the least impact on students.

The Information Centre will operate on reduced staffing levels during the closure. If you have an urgent inquiry, you can leave a voicemail at 1.800.788.9041 (Canada and the US) or 780.675.6100 (Alberta).

If you've got an exam scheduled, don't worry. AU's announcement notes that "all scheduled examinations will be conducted during the closure."

For more info, visit the [Exam section](#) of the online calendar.

The Faculty of Business Student Support centre will be operating as usual and can be reached toll-free at 1.800.469.6531 (Canada/US), 780.675.6338, or by emailing business-support@athabascau.ca. Tutor services aren't affected by the closure and you should be able to reach your tutor during regular hours.

AU will resume normal operations on Monday, July 5 at 8:30 a.m. (MDT).

Sister Aurora

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

#48 Of course after I kill Shane I have to show up in a public place where

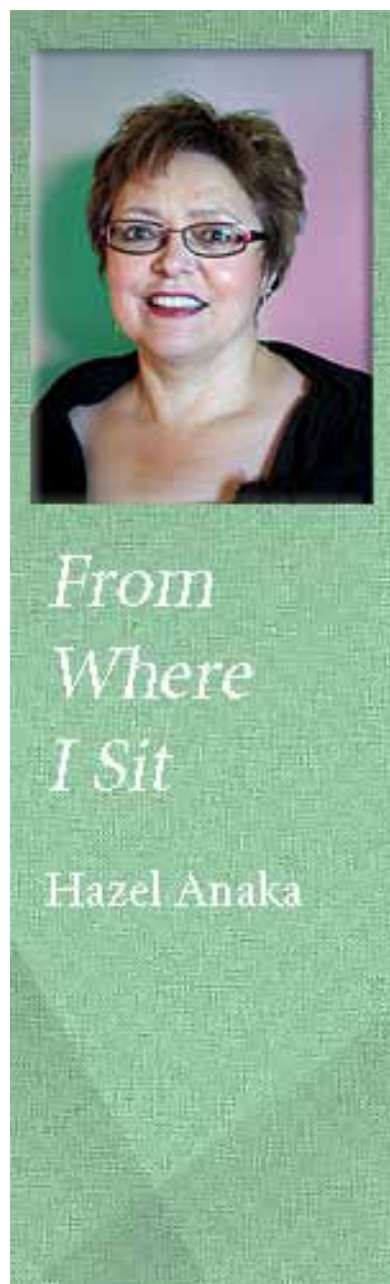
people can see me. . .

And we give you your alibi.

What if we all end up in jail?

I think we'd all agree that getting caught is not an option. That's why the whole thing has to be airtight. We'll need to burn our shoes.

But these are Capezios!



Don't Look

For the past few weeks, whenever I come home, I hurry from car to house. When I run errands or go to town, I do the same in reverse: house to car. It's been a busy time of moving from one project to another, from one long to-do list of reminders and obligations to even longer ones. Averting my eyes has been a coping mechanism.

By not looking, I've managed to avoid accepting the fact that the flower beds look like they belong in an abandoned farmyard. The quack grass that creeps into the beds is now 18 inches tall. Those suckers love moisture and the recent rain has given them the juice to flourish. In another area, I seem to be losing the battle with toadflax. If it isn't designated a noxious weed, it should be. It's kind of attractive with the delicate leaves and miniature yellow snapdragon-like blossoms but it is insidious in how it spreads.

Speaking of insidious, even plants identified as desirable can be invasive. And I've got lots of those. Years ago, when I was trying to establish and fill many, many perennial beds, I accepted whatever anyone else was getting rid of. Note to self: if someone is foisting chunk after chunk of greenery on you, run, don't walk in the other direction.

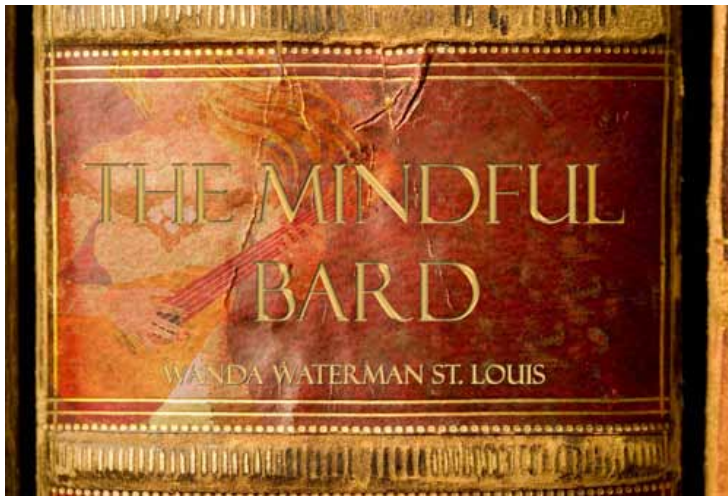
Deb was a master gardener who shared many gardening tips and plants out of her unbelievably beautiful and huge garden space near Sherwood Park. The heliopsis is welcome, the cranesbill is hell. Her love of Therese Bugnet shrub roses rubbed off on me and I have five. They are quick growing, very hardy shrubs with beautifully scented pink blossoms. With timely deadheading, they bloom over and over again through the season.

Joyce, another painter friend, is the source of the white anemones that are everywhere. An aunt gave me lamium.

Many of the things I bought with cold hard cash and nurtured over the years seem to be toast this year. Whether it was the ongoing drought or the peculiar winter, there seems to be a lot of winterkill.

My bee balm, Joe-pye weed, three ninebark shrubs, and purple coralbells have all gone to that big greenhouse in the sky. Four barberry shrubs are on life support and all the roses need selective amputation. The delicate soapwort plant I bought in a four-inch pot a few years ago has now spread through a lily bed but when we yank out the six-foot ninebark corpse, it will provide fill. On the other hand, the lilies and day lilies can't spread fast enough for me. The peonies are a source of joy.

I haven't stepped into a greenhouse or bought a single bedding plant so far this year, which means I haven't done up any patio pots. And it may not happen. The 25-year-old cotoneaster hedge we chopped down last fall with the intention of replacing it with a lattice fence is now growing like stink. I never should have looked, from where I sit.



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

Book: Symon Hill, *The No-Nonsense Guide to Religion*

Publisher: New Internationalist Publications Ltd. and Between the Lines, 2010

The Rigorous Apologetics of a Postmodern Spirituality

"In the light of such complexity, to ask simply whether religion is 'good' or 'bad' is to miss the

point. Religion serves as a reason for war and peace, love and hatred, dialogue and narrow-mindedness . . . The 'goodness' or 'badness' of religion depends on the ways in which it is used, applied, and lived out."

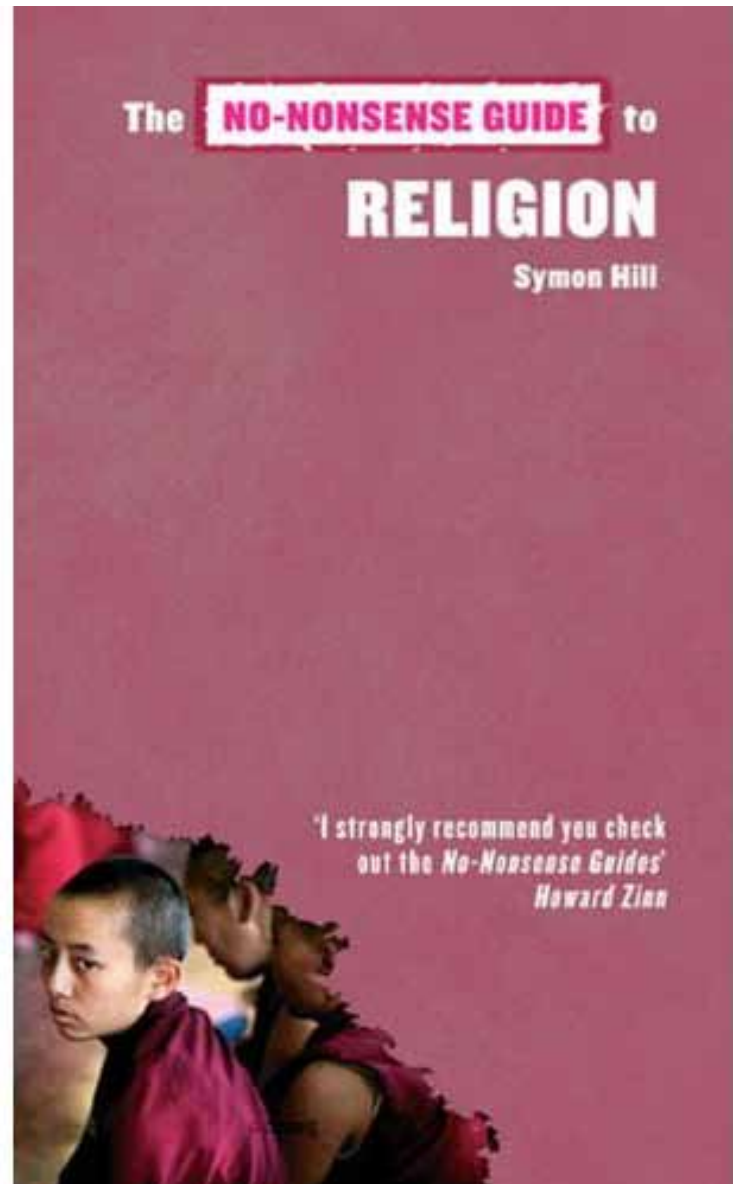
Symon Hill, *The No-Nonsense Guide to Religion*

Speaking of religion, I'm developing a bit of a religious fervour for these *New Internationalist* No-Nonsense Guides. This is only the second one I've reviewed but that's enough to know that these books are reasoned, well-researched catalysts for change. *The No-Nonsense Guide to World Music* actually set me on a path I still travel today, because of the fascination it instilled in me for the music of northern Africa. This one may well set me on another path.

Even though the author diligently avoids doing so, the fact of its existence would indicate that this book is essentially an argument in defence of religion. But he also avoids favouring or deriding any one religion.

Hill puts many current religious conflicts (including, commendably, Israel's occupation of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank) into compact nutshells, clarifying complex issues and pointing the clearest way out of the morass.

Such as, for example, introducing the idea of *non-factual* truth as a means of understanding myth, in which myth is seen as a higher form of truth distinct from the *factual* truth found in historical and scientific data. This notion renders debates like that between creationists and evolutionists



practically meaningless, which is a good thing—the arguments at the extremes of these debates are often instrumental in increasing the numbers (and the zeal) of fundamentalists as well as New Atheists (the new kids on the fundamentalist block).

Mystics have long argued that all religions espouse the same truths but that few are willing to divulge what those truths might be. Ironically, Hill finds that one of the most salient commonalities in all religions is the spectrum of disagreement within each religion, believers from every denomination representing broadly differing opinions on issues like equality, women's rights, the distribution of wealth, human rights, and homosexuality.

Does religion have a future? Hill bases his predictions on the premises that there are some serious flaws in the exclusively modern conviction that religion is on its way out. He also directs us to uniquely recent challenges to religion's power, autonomy, and doctrinal stability.

The No-Nonsense Guide to Religion manifests six of The Mindful Bard's criteria for books well worth reading: 1) it confronts existing injustices; 2) it displays an engagement with and compassionate response to suffering; 3) it inspires an awareness of the sanctity of creation; 4) it is about attainment of the true self; 5) it stimulates my mind; and 6) it poses and admirably responds to questions which have a direct bearing on my view of existence.

AU LIBRARY CATALOGUE—NOW FOR IPHONES!

Anne LePage

The AU Library is proud to announce that the library catalogue is now compatible with iPhones and Smartphones.

The library catalogue has been compatible with mobile devices for some time, but a new feature has been added to automatically detect and allow searching capability with iPhones and Smartphones.

To see the new version of the catalogue on your mobile device, go to <http://mcat.athabascau.ca> or visit the [main library site](#) and click "AU Library Catalogue."

Less advanced devices will be presented with a mobile version of the main library site and will have the "basic" and "advanced" choices for viewing the catalogue.

If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions regarding this new feature, please [contact the library](#).

AUSU UPDATE



Convocation 2010

AUSU wishes to congratulate this year's graduates, whether attending Convocation in person or by distance. We wish you the best of luck in your future pursuits. You are an inspiration to all AU students!

AUSU Executive Election

AUSU has recently held its internal election for the Executive. We wish to congratulate Barbara Rielly (President), Bethany Tynes (Vice President External and Student Affairs) and Sarah Kertcher (Vice President Finance and Administration) on their election and thank those that ran for their willingness to serve.

Internal elections are being held to determine committee membership and we expect that all will be in place shortly. Our new Council is taking its bearings and has already begun to set the direction for this term.

Student Issues

AUSU recently completed a compilation of reported student issues covering a two year period; all issues were recorded in such a way as to ensure that student information remains protected and private. This effort confirmed what we long suspected; that tutor problems were the single biggest issue faced by our students (56 of 120 complaints).

Outdated course materials and errors in texts continue to be reported as well as were exam issues, slowness of the transfer process, and the scantiness of information in School of Business FAQs. Over that two year period there was a decrease in the number of complaints about student financing, exam request problems, difficulty registering in more than six courses, and materials shortages for courses. Kudos to AU for improving in those areas. Now if we could only get the Tutors' Union to the table . . .

New 2010 AUSU Handbook/Planners – Arrived!

Finally! People have already started receiving the new planners in the mail, and we're currently shipping them out as fast as the orders come in. Full of useful information about AUSU, writing styles, course grading, great finds online for your studies that you may not have known about, as well as having places to write down your phone numbers, keep track of your assignments, and, oh yeah, a year's worth of calendar to plan out your schedule too. We'll give one free to each AUSU member just for the asking.

Remember, though, we only print a limited number of these each year, so when they're gone, they're gone.

Let 'em Know who Represents for You!

AUSU logo mugs, hoodies, USB keys, and much more are all available for sale from our office. Also, used locks can be purchased at half price! Check out our merchandise catalog on our front page. You should

check out our hoodies in particular—made in Canada and 100% bamboo, we're offering them for just barely over our cost, and they're both durable and comfortable.

And if you have new little ones in your family, or know somebody who does, check out our baby onesies. Made by American Apparel, these onesies are high quality and let folks know your kids are growing up to great things as a "Future Graduate of Athabasca U"

AUSU Scheduling Meeting with Tutors' Union – Not really an Update

Some things resist change. We're still waiting for a response from the Tutor's Union as to when we might be able to meet with them to discuss ways that AUSU and the Tutor's Union can work together to ensure that students are getting the contact they need. Unfortunately, they haven't yet replied, so we're stepping up our campaign to get in touch with them. If you want to help, the next time you're talking to your tutor, ask them if they know when the Tutor's Union will meet with AUSU so that the groups can work together on common issues.

Our statistics we've been collecting from the forums and your calls show that issues with tutors – specifically the amount of time taken for marking assignments and exams are your number one concern. Help us help you.

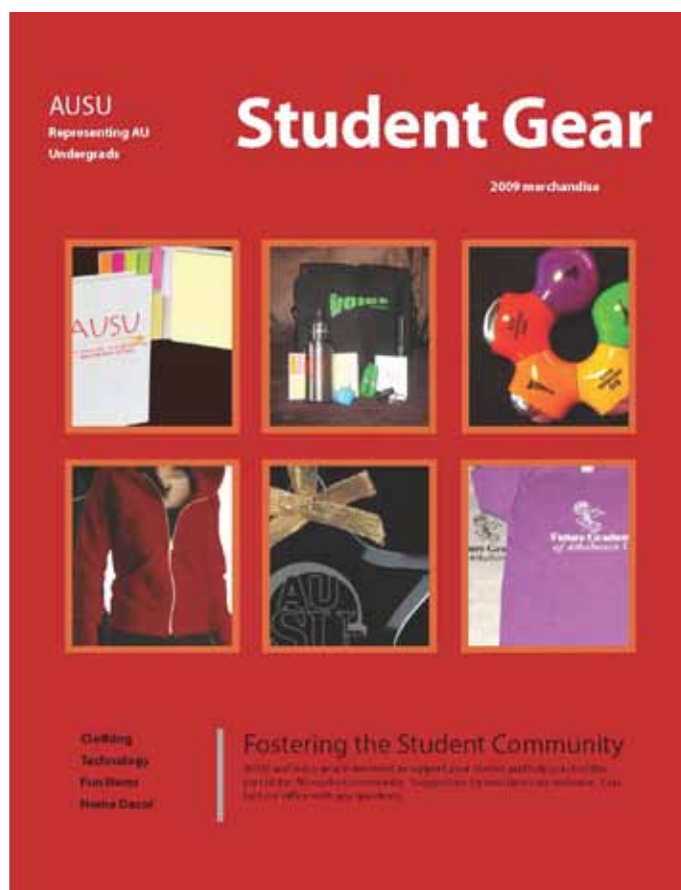
SmartDraw Program Renewal

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.



INTERNATIONAL NEWS DESK



At Home: When earthquakes hit, staying put could be safest option

When an earthquake rocked Ontario, Quebec, and surrounding regions June 23, many people followed their instincts and immediately rushed outside. But according to earthquake experts, those instincts could have put people in even greater danger.

As the [CBC](#) reports, streets in downtown Ottawa quickly filled with office workers when the quake hit. However, workers would have been safer to take shelter under their desks.

"Parts of the outside of the building are the most likely to fall and hit you," according to Professor Paul Kovacs of the University of Western Ontario. He explained to reporters that moving "inside of a building or outside of a building during an earthquake . . . is one of the most dangerous things to do." Kovacs is the executive director of the Institute for Catastrophic Loss Reduction in Toronto.

One exception to that advice is when occupants of a building hear the fire alarm go off. An alarm might be triggered by the quake but there's also the possibility of a fire. If the cause of the alarm is unknown, occupants should follow normal fire procedures and evacuate the building.

Although many in the quake zone reported it was their first such experience, they might want to brush up on emergency procedures. According to the US Geological Survey, western Quebec sustains "significant damage" from earthquakes about "once a decade" and three or four smaller quakes hit the region each year.

In Foreign News: Soft surfaces aren't good for striking tough deals

New research shows that, when it comes to negotiating a tough deal, hard surfaces might be just as helpful as hard tactics. As the [BBC](#) reports, US researchers found that "weight, texture, and hardness of inanimate objects unconsciously influence judgments about unrelated events and situations."

In one experiment, participants took part in role-playing in which they had to negotiate the price of a car. The participants who were provided with soft chairs "were more flexible in agreeing a price" while those sitting on harder surfaces took a firmer stance in negotiations.

An object's weight can make a difference as well. In another experiment, participants were given resumes on clipboards that varied in weight. The candidates whose resumes were on the heavy clipboards "were seen as better qualified than those whose CVs were on a light one."

The researchers, from Harvard and Yale University, report in *Science* that their findings show "the 'tactile environment' is vital in decision making and behaviour." Physical touch, the first sense to develop, may act as a strong subconscious basis on which people "build social judgments and decisions."

So next time you're angling for that big promotion, you might want to offer your boss the softest seat in the room.

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THE VOICE

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