

THE VOICE

MAGAZINE

Vol 18 Iss 51 2010-12-24

Personal Geographic

In a strange room

Cookie Call

Betcha CAN just eat one!

Sleep in Peace

Chances at life



*Plus: In Conversation With,
From Where I Sit, Cruiscin Lan, and much more . . .*

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**The Voice
Magazine**

www.voicemagazine.org

1213, 10011 109th
Street NW
Edmonton AB
T5J 3S8

800.788.9041 ext. 2905

Email
voice@voicemagazine.org

Publisher
AU Students' Union

Editor-In-Chief
Tamra Ross

Managing Editor
Christina M. Frey

Regular Contributors
Hazel Anaka
Katie D'Souza
S.D. Livingston
Jason Sullivan
Wanda Waterman St.
Louis

The Voice is published
every Friday in HTML
and PDF format.

For weekly email
reminders as each issue
is posted, see the
“subscribe” link on *The
Voice* front page.

The Voice does not
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Special thanks to
Athabasca University's
The Insider for its
frequent contributions.

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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.



FICTION

Adam Thackeray

God from a Machine



The doctor reads the sperm count aloud, and Ben comes to a sudden, sickening realization. Even with his own rudimentary understanding of science and mathematics, he is almost certain that the number disclosed in the file should consist of many more millions.

The doctor, a slim, grey man, stifles a yawn and taps a rhythm with his pen; his indifference resonates within the small confines of the examination room. “Of course, you do have options. It’s not the end of the world.”

Ben tenses his jaw, ready to spew a thousand expletives. His small hands ball into fists, and he envisions punching the doctor in the face, bloodying his nose, and jolting him from his grating nonchalance.

“I have some literature here you should probably take a look at,” the doctor continues, rooting about in his desk.

Ben watches the old man shuffle through reams of paper, and his vitality suddenly abandons him. His anger has dissipated as quickly as it had erupted, and he can now manage only the most basic of gross motor skills.

So he pulls on his coat and stumbles from the room.

Ben drives home as the daylight wanes. His dark eyes stare, unseeing, at the snow falling against the windshield. The Christmas lights that line the streets waver in his peripheral vision and blur into bright, watery, smudges of colour. From the rear speakers of the pickup, a radio announcer vies for his attention, but Ben silences him with an angry snap of the dial.

He circles the neighbourhood twice before finally pulling into his driveway. He idles in the fading light, studying the bungalow he shares with Sarah, staring at the red and green floodlights she has placed to brighten the front entrance. It is a good house, he thinks, with good bones—one that they had imagined filling with children. As it is, though, there have been only an old cat and a dying houseplant to share their living space. He knows why.

The snow finally stops, and Ben sits and listens to the intermittent squeak of the wiper blades across his windshield. Sarah appears, fair and angelic, in the large square of light cast from the living room window. She beckons Ben with a wave of her hand, and then disappears from sight. He has no choice now but to go inside.

She greets him at the front door with a kiss and a smile. “Might I ask what you were you doing out there, skulking about in the dark?”

He eyes the small, gold crucifix nestled in the hollow of her neck. It glimmers in the light.

“Just listening to the end of a song,” he says.

He looks at the floor, the bare walls, anywhere but in her eyes.

She wraps her arms around Ben's waist and tries to meet his wandering gaze. "What's wrong?" she says, but she knows.

"Nothing," he says.

"Ben, what did he say?"

His silence conveys all that she needs to understand.

She pulls Ben close and holds him tight. For a long while, they simply share the stillness that has fallen over their home. Ben looks past Sarah to the wreath that sits on the kitchen table. He has yet to nail it on the front door.

Finally, Sarah holds his face firmly in her hands, forcing Ben to level his eyes with hers. "It'll be okay," she says. "We'll figure something out."

The cat enters the room, eyes them both with disapproval, and begins calling to them with long, drawn-out howls. Ben withholds the urge to kick the cat into the next room. With a sudden chill, he pulls away from Sarah and goes to bed.

He lies in the darkness that night, listening for Sarah's breathing to settle into a rhythm. Once he is able to hear her slight snore, he slides out of bed and pulls on his jeans and a sweatshirt. It is not until he is on his way out the front door that he realizes he is wearing one of Sarah's oversized sweatshirts—white, with a pink Roots logo emblazoned across the chest. In one seemingly fluid motion, he takes the sweatshirt off, turns it inside out, and pulls it back on. Inside out, the pink stitching is barely noticeable, he decides. But for good measure, he zips his coat up to his chin and steps out onto the front porch, quietly locking the door. He wonders if he will ever return to hang the wreath he has left neglected.

Just outside of town, Ben pulls into the parking lot of a dilapidated little pub. He would have guessed the building to be condemned and abandoned, but the few cars parked out front suggest otherwise. So Ben cuts the ignition, drops down from the cab, and makes his way toward the entrance. As he draws near, he can see that the windows of the establishment are vibrating with the muffled pulse of rock music. The neon sign over the door used to read "The Gown and Gavel," but most of the glass tubes are dead and dark, leaving the sign with only a few consonants and vowels. Ben steps over a mess of bodily fluids and broken bottles, and then enters the building.

The pub is dark and half-empty. A band plays "Born to be Wild" as a drunken woman in a short, red, sequined dress moves about on the dance floor. Her partner, an angry-looking young man with a mullet, shifts moodily from foot to foot in time with the music.

Ben seats himself in a corner booth where the upholstered bench is stained yet comfortable. A pretty but surly waitress approaches and raises her eyebrows in anticipation of his order. She appears to have no inclination to speak with Ben, and stands there, rubbing her one free hand absently over the small swelling of her belly.

Ben has to shout above the music. "Red wine?"

She does not offer any selections, nor does she write down his order or acknowledge him in any way. She simply walks away.

Ben waits and waits. After a while, he begins to feel like a phantom that might fade into the wallpaper. He could disappear entirely, he thinks, and no one would ever be the wiser. Not in this room, anyway. With the exception of the drunken woman in red, everyone in the pub seems shadowy and strange. Their faces are husks.

Just as Ben is about to give up hope of the waitress's return, she arrives—grudgingly—with his wine. It is a white wine, a Chardonnay, and not a very good one. But after the second, third, and fourth glasses, Ben is not quite as discerning.

It does not take long for the alcohol to cloud his mind, and soon he is scanning the room with slow, tired, stupid eyes. The drunken woman is still kicking up her heels on the dance floor, shaking and shimmying to “Jumpin’ Jack Flash” now. Her man is at the bar, sitting this one out, stewing in his own surliness.

Suddenly, it occurs to Ben how desperately he needs to urinate. He rises to his feet, only to find that the floor has become unstable and he must now concentrate on each step. He stumbles across the room, attempting to appear sober. He narrowly avoids a collision with the unpleasant waitress, but bashes his shins against something hard and angular in the process.

Somehow, he makes it to the washroom, relieving himself and washing his hands purely by some unconscious, routine means. It occurs to him in one brief moment of clarity that there is a tampon dispenser in the washroom and no urinals, but the thought is fleeting and he soon dismisses the matter entirely.

On the way back to his table, Ben crosses the dance floor. There he finds the drunken blonde alone, swaying slowly to “Freebird.” She sees Ben and begins grinding her hips in his direction. He feels almost preternaturally obligated to complete the ritual, so he begins to dance with her. He hears a few catcalls from the darkness beyond the lights, and he thinks dimly of the boyfriend at the bar. The lights are hot and blinding as the woman presses her body up against Ben, moving in perfect rhythm to the music.

But the wine has dampened Ben's libido. He stumbles off the dance floor, hearing jeers and laughter from all sides. He throws down some crumpled bills at his table—a few coins scatter in the dim light—and then he leaves.

In the parking lot, Ben is searching his pockets for the keys when he hears scrambling footsteps approach from behind. A sudden solid and painful blow at the back of his head sends white spots flashing in his field of vision. His keys drop to the pavement. Ben turns and finds the drunken girl's boyfriend raging behind him, fist raised and ready.

“Think you can dance with my girl, dickwad?” he shouts.

The boyfriend is younger than Ben. Although he is small in stature, his shoulders are broad and his biceps stretch the thin material of his shirt. There is an almost feral quality about the young man, something that Ben knows he should fear. He considers for a moment that he might be able to talk his way out of this particular predicament.

The boyfriend keeps his fist raised over Ben, waiting for him to cry mercy.

“After a while, he begins to feel like [he] might fade into the wallpaper . . . everyone in the pub seems shadowy and strange. Their faces are husks.”

But Ben decides he does not want to cry mercy.

“I don’t wanna dance with your girl,” Ben says finally. “I wanna fuck her.”

The boyfriend’s eyes widen, his lips pull back from his teeth. He smashes his fist down, splitting Ben’s bottom lip wide open. The fresh stab of pain, and the blood that follows, sober Ben somewhat. He looks up and sees the boyfriend’s face all twisted with anger. He notes a small, gold crucifix stud in the young man’s ear. It glimmers in the available light.

The boyfriend picks up Ben’s keys from the pavement, throws them up on the roof of the pub, and walks away, laughing.

Ben lies on the ground, looking up at the stars. He listens to the low bass pulsing from the pub’s interior. He listens to the passing cars and figures that if he lies there long enough, someone will come along and run him over.

But eventually he pulls himself to a sitting position. He then rises to his feet on shaky legs. Although his body has suffered only minor damage from hitting the pavement, the crystal face of his watch has shattered. Time is left trapped at 1:03 am.

He grabs a handful of snow and cleans the blood from his face. He puts some of the snow in his mouth to slow the bleeding, and soon there is only a faint trace of pink in the slush that he spits to the ground.

He looks across the street and sees an old church, brightly lit, with a Nativity scene constructed on the front lawn. He crosses the street and staggers toward the manger, bathing himself in white light. Mary, Joseph, and the three wise men are only poorly drawn wooden cut-outs, but Ben feels himself drawn to the makeshift crèche nonetheless.

He moves ever closer to the bed of hay. He feels a strange anticipation; he draws a breath and holds it in his lungs. He inches himself toward some hazy sense of salvation.

But the bed is empty. There is only a small, dirty blanket left strewn in the hay.

Ben exhales, and then collapses into the manger, knocking Mary and Joseph to the ground. He vomits in the snow, and then everything is blackness.

Ben awakens to the sounds of birds and distant traffic. He opens his eyes to the bright blue sky above. His



head and face hurt, and as he rises to his feet, he vaguely recalls his defilement of the manger only a few hours earlier. Mary and Joseph stare up at him with accusatory glances. The bed of hay still lies empty.

Alongside the church, though, something catches Ben’s eye. There he can see that repairs have been partially completed on the exterior of the building. Next to the church is a heavy piece of machinery, a motorized scaffold with an elevation device resembling the workings of an accordion. However, it is not the machinery itself that interests Ben; it is the small limb

he sees protruding from the top of the scaffold.

He studies the machine in order to find a foothold, and then makes his ascent. The climb is not difficult, and when he reaches the top he finds what he had expected: a baby doll, the Christ child, lying face up on the scaffold, his limbs askew—tossed from his bed, no doubt, and left to the elements.

Ben takes the doll gently in his arms, and he climbs down from the scaffold. He swaddles the babe in his blanket and places him back in his bed. He returns Mary and Joseph to their upright position so that they might continue their adoration of the child.

Ben stands back to assure everything is in its rightful place. And then he begins his long walk home to Sarah.

CLICK OF THE WRIST: Winter Wonderland

“I’m dreaming of a white Christmas . . .” croons Bing Crosby in the Christmas classic *White Christmas*. Other songs speak of a similar longing for that “winter wonderland.” And indeed for many, a gently snow-covered landscape is the perfect backdrop for a magical holiday. But Mother Nature isn’t always so accommodating, and sometimes there’s too much of a good thing—or none at all. How to cope? Check out this week’s links for some ideas!

DIY

Got a muddy Christmas instead of a snowy one? Make your own white stuff! Traditional paper snowflakes go 3-D in this easy (although slightly messy), sparkly craft.

Just Eat It

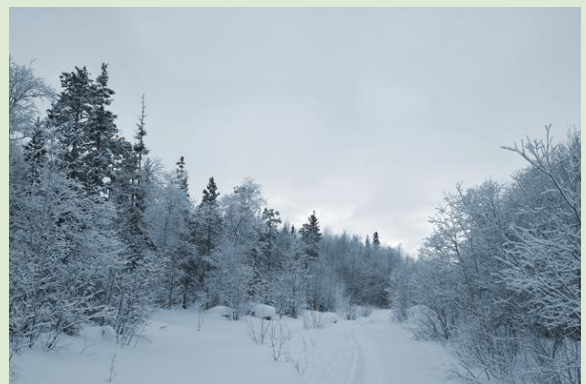
When life hands you lemons, make lemonade. If it hands you piles of snow—well, how does ice cream sound? Traditional snow ice cream gets the lavish treatment with the Food Network star Paula Deen’s recipe. Drizzle some chocolate sauce on top for a decadent—and seasonally appropriate—treat.

Dreaming

Why *do* we dream of a white Christmas—even those of us whose southern locations mean we’ll see winter snow once every couple years, if we’re lucky? This article cobbles together some of the differing opinions on the source of the nostalgic longing.

Across the World

A global “white Christmas”? Sounds unlikely, but according to this science writer, it’s not impossible. Here, he gives some fascinating facts and stats and describes a time when the whole earth may indeed have been covered with snow.



HEALTH MATTERS

Katie D'Souza



Just One More Christmas Cookie

It's nearly Christmas, so out come the butter, the sugar, and the white flour. Many of us are baking those wonderful Christmas goodies—cookies, pies, bars, cheesecakes—and ogling each one of them with guilt as we recall our waistlines and our wannabe diets. And even if we avoid baking such delicacies, the tempting morsels still arrive from friends and family. Even the chocolate-bringing Santa seems part of the conspiracy! Is there a way to keep our weight under control despite the deluge of calorie-laden treats?

Happily, yes! As a weight-conscious postpartum mom and a naturopathic doctor, I've searched for solutions that will still give you—and me—the flavour of Christmas, but without the lasting effects. We'll check out the psychology of overindulgence, and then review techniques and tips to deal with it.

The Dessert Wars

Let's take a peek at some psychology here. We know we're on a diet, or we know that we're trying to maintain a trim tummy. But when the plate of goodies is set before us . . . well, we start out by nibbling just one. *After all, it's Christmas!* Then we finish it. *One little shortbread won't hurt* . . . Next, we start craving it and dreaming about it (the just-one-more syndrome), or our host urges us to the point of embarrassment to try another concoction. Then, before we know it, we've eaten another cookie, and maybe even slice of cheesecake.

Guilt sets in—*I never, ever should have even touched one!*—and then overflows: *I've completely ruined this dieting day.* This cascade of events is followed by the devouring of another cookie (*I might as well!*) and another, since, after all, the chance to keep to a calorie-restricted diet was lost four treats ago.

Ironically, our guilt causes us to consume still more goodies to compensate for the guilty feeling. After all, we want to feel good, and our brains are hardwired into thinking that maybe some great-tasting food will offer a nice mental pick-me-up. Later on, of course, we realize that we've overindulged and feel depressed about our waistlines. And the cycle continues.

The Guilt-Busting Game

So what can we do to escape from this cycle of guilt and depression? Although one option is to not sample any holiday sweets at all, it's not my favourite technique. After all, completely denying yourself treats can make you crave them all the more.

Instead, I prefer to operate on the “mostly healthy” principle. Essentially, this means that during the holidays, 95 per cent of the time I toe the line and eat in a healthy manner, following my diet and making sure I'm eating nutritionally dense foods. But the remaining five per cent of the time, I allow myself to bend the rules and try a sweet.

We keep eating one more. Then guilt causes us to reach for yet another—and another. How to break free from the cycle?

Since I have this understanding ahead of time, I don't feel guilty after eating dessert, and I don't end up overdoing it since I know that the next day, I can do it all over again. (Just for the holidays, though!)

The Game Rules

There are several rules to this game.

- *Watch quantities:* Try to keep that five per cent equal to one moderately-sized sweet.
- *Keep the future in mind:* Remember that appetizers and snacks are also included in that five per cent. Do you really want to “waste” it on that handful of BBQ chips, or would you prefer one of your grandmother's homemade shortbread cookies later on?
- *Make that sweet count:* Don't be the first in line at the dessert table, where you'll feel hurried by others through your dessert selection. Be the last, and take your time to decide. If it's your only treat, make it an amazing one: chew it well and savour it.
- *Choose smart:* If you're equally torn between cheesecake and fruitcake, choose fruitcake. The calories in it are likely lower, as it's full of healthy nuts and fruits.
- *Consider guilt-free snacks:* After all, Christmas doesn't have to be all about calories and sugar! For example, keep dried fruits like figs, dates, and apricots on hand. Their sweetness will help take the edge off your sweet tooth, making it easier to save your five per cent for the evening's dessert table or that midnight chocolate run. Other snacks include oranges or clementines (they're in season!). For taste bud stimulation, try walnuts (but use caution as to quantity, as they are high in fat).
- *Move on:* Once you've selected your treat, don't stand around at the dessert table, testing your willpower against the plates of sticky sweets. You'll have better success if you move away, and strike up a conversation with someone rather than hanging around the source of temptation.
- *Fill up:* Drink tea or water before you select your dessert, especially if the dessert is eaten some time after your main meal. Not only will this distract you from staring at the others who are stolidly eating sweets, it will also give your stomach something to think about so you won't attack the dessert table with hunger cravings.

Is a Christmas party around the corner? What about the big family gathering? Try the above suggestions, and see if you don't come off victorious! I've already thought ahead for my five per cent on Christmas Day: it's going to be a piece of homemade shortbread. I can't wait!

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



You can have your gingerbread . . . and eat it, too!

Disclaimer: 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.

IN CONVERSATION WITH . . .

Wanda Waterman St. Louis

Meklit Hadero, Part II

Meklit Hadero is an Ethiopian-born, Yale-educated, San Francisco-based singer-songwriter whose style merges jazz with folk and world music to create deeply sympathetic portraits of life's magical (and often unnoticed) details. Her first full-length CD, On a Day Like This ..., has just been released by Porto Franco Records. Meklit recently took the time to chat with Wanda Waterman St. Louis about getting inspired to write songs. (Check out the first part of this interview [here](#).)



How to Write a Song

Breakups are good for songwriting, and so is being in love and so is poetry. When I'm writing, I almost have blinders over my eyes. The things that make you look at the world from straight-on are the things that help you adapt to functioning logistically in the world. It's a big part of how we have to function. But when you open that wider, you see that everything is magical, even the smallest things. Anything can be a song.

I really like it here in San Francisco. I like going to New York regularly and I like kind of popping in and out. In New York the creative pulse is like a river—there's nothing trickling about it. But here you have more space to reflect, which is good for incubation. New York is good for output.

On "Walk Up" (based on *Three Gems* by James Turrell, at the de Young Museum)

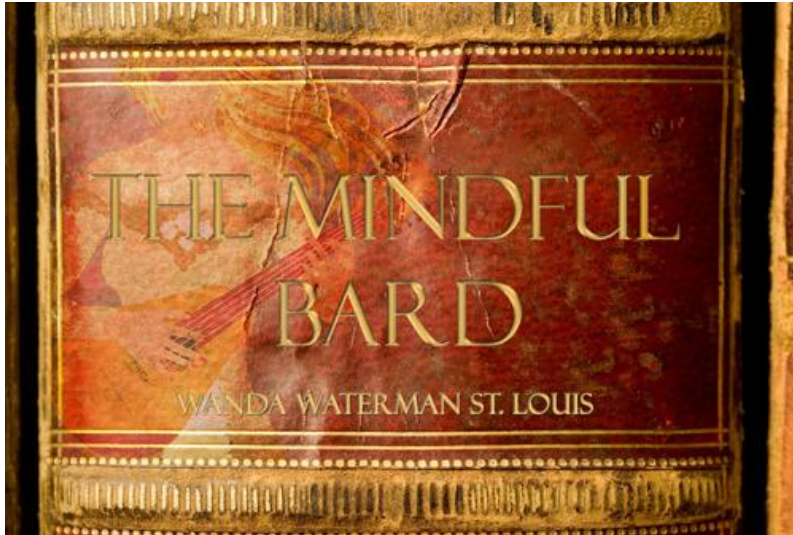
The song is less about the installation and more about what happens to people inside it. It was inspired by it, but it's not about it. It's the soundtrack to what happens to people when they're inside of it.

I spent a residency at the de Young, which meant I spent all day, every day, writing songs there. It was a wonderful period of expansion. I would arrive there at one o'clock, put down my things, and head to *Three Gems*. I'd sing in there, watch people. I spent time in there because I loved it.

It's a big room, mostly made of cement, open to the sky, with great acoustics, and the sky becomes this presence inside the space. I'm not sure how he does it—the whole is more than the sum of its parts—but the sky is with you in there and you watch it; you watch the fog and the clouds and the birds.

It was very predictable, what would happen to people after a while. When they were in *Three Gems* they would expand. It was so beautiful. You would watch them removing the buzzing distraction of what was going on, and they would just rise.





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

Book: Damon Galgut, *In a Strange Room* (Europa Editions 2010).

The Self as a Ubiquitous Geography

“ . . . movement has always been a substitute for thought and he’d like to stop thinking now.”

Damon Galgut, *In a Strange Room*

Our nameless white South African protagonist is making his way from Malawi to

Tanzania with some travellers he’s met along the way. His anxiety builds as they approach the border and, sure enough, his companions (two Swiss, one French, and one Chilean) are admitted without visas while he is barred.

Throughout this strangely beautiful tale, the hero wrestles with his South African-ness. It often appears to be his mark of Cain, the thing that has exiled him; he has been permanently displaced by world opinion and by his personal reaction to his national identity. He’s terrified of going home and just as fearful of what might happen to him in the world at large.

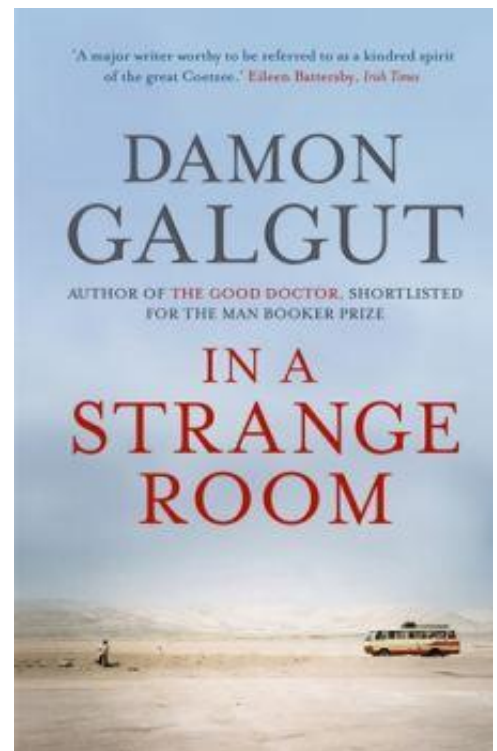
He’s being ferried across a lake in Malawi and sleeping under a magnificent canopy of stars when he notices a massive hook dangling above him, the kind used for lifting crates. He obsesses over this hook off and on during a fitful sleep: “The night is starry and huge, despite this one concentration of dread at the very centre of it, above him.”

He projects his own fear, revulsion, and loneliness onto his companions and thereby ends up hating a few of them while at the same time experiencing a profound longing for intimacy.

The rhythm of the prose is a gentle intoxicant, lulling the reader into a calm space from which to watch the events unfold (in spite of the fact that many of the scenes are full of noise and fury). The absence of quotation marks adds to the serene dignity of tone. And Galgut’s metaphors are exquisite.

Plus he has something to say about metaphors themselves. At the aforementioned border crossing, he muses, “Everything at times takes on a symbolic weight and power. But this too is why he travels. The world you’re moving through flows into another one inside, nothing stays divided any more . . . The border is a line on a map, but also drawn inside himself somewhere.”

As in Dostoevsky’s more memorable passages, you realize with a shock that you’ve been here; the names and places have changed, but



you've lived it. The familiarity is jarring.

Galgut's hero is a personification of human fragility, of our (largely unconscious) dependence on place, our sense of disconnection and alienation once we are uprooted, and the cycles of searching that this alienation engenders.

"We see that the human body is itself a geographic entity—subject to contest . . . disputes, and battles."

One device the author uses to illustrate the sense of rootlessness is a frequent (and often unexpected) switching back and forth between first and third person. One moment our hero is couched happily in his own skin, and the next (most often when overcome by pain or discomfort), he's out of his body, observing himself with an (almost) objective detachment.

Eventually he names himself—with the author's first name—at a moment when he is attempting to reconnect with his ethnic roots. We see that the human body is itself a geographic entity—subject to contest, paternalism, disputes, and battles; loved, cherished, despised, and sometimes abandoned.

In a Strange Room manifests 11 of The Mindful Bard's criteria for books well worth reading: 1) it is authentic, original, and delightful; 2) it confronts, rebukes, or mocks existing injustices; 3) it gives me tools enabling me to respond with compassion and efficacy to the suffering around me; 4) it makes me want to be a better artist; 5) it gives me tools which help me be a better artist; 6) it displays an engagement with and compassionate response to suffering; 7) it inspires an awareness of the sanctity of creation; 8) it is about attainment of the true self; 9) it provides respite from a sick and cruel world, a respite enabling me to renew myself for a return to mindful artistic endeavour; 10) it stimulates my mind; and 11) it poses and admirably responds to questions which have a direct bearing on my view of existence.



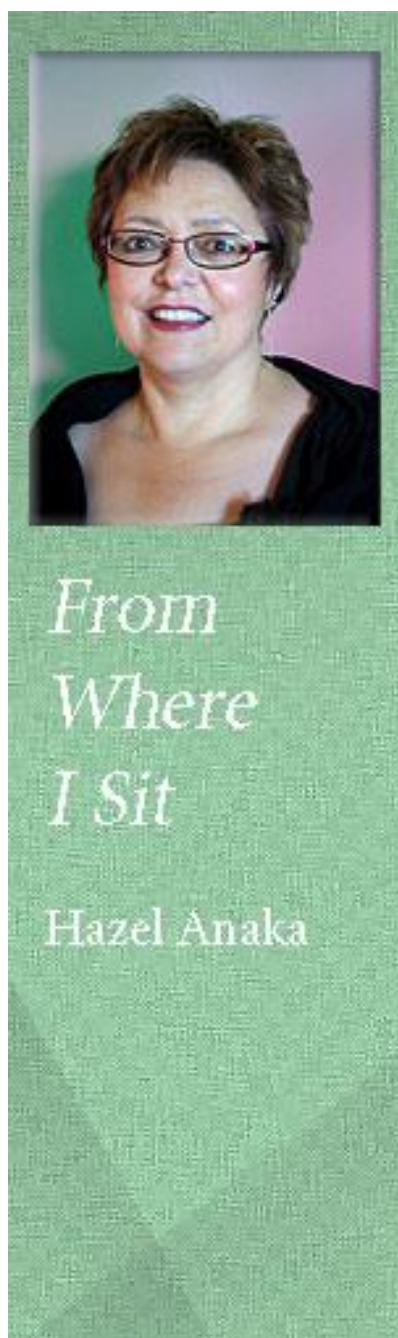
Happy Holidays from the Voice

Maybe it's due to the *White Christmas* marathon that's been playing on television lately, but I can't get the classic Irving Berlin musical (or its theme song) out of my head. And no wonder: with catchy tunes, great dance numbers, and a heartwarming plot, the film's the perfect way to de-stress amidst all the holiday hubbub. It's also a wonderful reminder that it's family, friends, generosity, and joy in the little things that truly create that seasonal spirit!

We have something extra to celebrate here: the end of another successful year at *The Voice Magazine*. This is our final issue of 2010, and we'll be spending the week after Christmas enjoying fireside, family, and fun.

We'll be back after New Year's with our annual "Best of the Voice" issue, where we'll showcase some of our finest writing from 2010. "Best of the Voice" will appear on January 7, 2011, and our first regularly scheduled issue of the new year will be published on January 14.

"May your days be merry and bright!" Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays from the Voice!



Looking Back, Looking Ahead

As incredible as it seems, another year is drawing to a close. After the eggnog, family gatherings, gift exchanges, and usual hubbub of Christmas, many of us will pause to reflect on the year past.

If we're at all lucky, our balance sheet will include more blessings than heartaches. We will hold precious those moments spent with our spouse, children, and grandchildren and let go of the time spent in the company of fools. Or spent waiting—in line, for service, for medical care, for life to come up and tickle us. We may check our bucket lists and see, with satisfaction, that some items have been stroked out. Or maybe 2011 will be the year to finally make that list.

Maybe now is a good time to inventory our health and see what incremental changes we can make to increase not only the number of our days but the quality of the experience. Cutting out salt is achievable. So is throwing out the stilettos. Booking regular massages to un-kink the knots can be heavenly. Forgiving the aforementioned fools can also add years.

If we're really brave, we can look back over the year and see if we did more harm than good, if we hurt rather than helped, if we inched toward our potential or simply coasted. Did we keep our word? Did we learn anything new? Did we make anyone's life better because of our existence?

If we feel at all alone or small or alienated, we can recall the heat of our Canadian pride during the Vancouver Olympics. We can relive the drama of the Chilean mine workers rescue and know that as we watched transfixed, so did much of the world. We were united in a hope bigger than any one of us or our petty international differences. We were thrilled because lives were saved, and the world needed a good news story.

In these days of political correctness, of seasonal gatherings instead of Christmas parties, of "Happy Holidays" instead of "Merry Christmas," it's easy to get caught up in the backlash of anger that some Canadians are promoting. Concern about what "these foreigners" are doing to good old Canadian traditions and values. Sometimes our world gets so small and our thinking so narrow that we forget that we are simply a collection of individuals: some good, some bad, some white, some not. There is an Egyptian shopkeeper here who's enriched our community. I have a young friend who is Korean. She talks about how her parents raised her to respect others at all costs. The Vietnamese woman who does my nails talks about her life and her beliefs. We are more similar than not. If we let it, this mix of cultures, races, and beliefs will make us and our country cosmopolitan. Not a bad thing for 2011, from where I sit.

May you enjoy the blessings of the season! See you back here next year!

CHRONICLES OF CRUISCIN LAN

Wanda Waterman St. Louis



DID YOU KNOW?



AU's New Web-Based Transfer Credit Search Page

Curious as to how your past coursework might transfer for AU credit? Want to find out whether courses at other universities are equivalent to AU courses, or transferable as AU program requirements?

You'll want to check out AU's new web-based Transfer Credit Search application, which allows "students to search transfer credit decisions at Athabasca University by both course and program."

The user-friendly, online application can be used in three ways: to check how courses you've taken at another institution would transfer to AU, to check the transferability of programs you've taken at another institution, and to "search for AU course equivalents at other institutions."

For further information, see the Transfer Credit Search [help page](#). Or, to access the application and start searching, click [here](#).

INTERNATIONAL NEWS DESK



At Home: Arctic Forest

High in the Arctic there's not a tree to be seen—but it hasn't always been this way. In fact, mummified forests have been found north of the tree line, suggesting a different pattern of plant growth than the one we're accustomed to today. But there's more than just historical merit here: these ancient forests can help predict the future.

As the [CBC reports](#), one such forest, recently discovered on Ellesmere Island in Nunavut, may be “key . . . to teas[ing] out the impacts of global warming in the Arctic.”

The mummified forest, which is composed of birch, larch, spruce, and pine trees, is believed to have been “buried by an avalanche two million to eight million years ago.” It's the northernmost such forest discovered so far.

Researchers believe that the trees and plants “struggled to survive” the rapid climate changes of the time (from a warmer, more vegetation-friendly climate to “its current frigid state”). And although now we're looking at a different direction of climate change, scientists hope that the preserved forest will offer clues to the future of the Arctic. By exploring “how past climate conditions stressed plant life,” we might better understand “how the Arctic tundra ecosystem will respond to global warming.”

Around the World: If It's Broken, Don't Fix It

Damaged antiques, crudely mended old pottery, and items whose replacement parts are a mishmash of materials—all are frequently rejected by antique hunters as having little value. But a new trend in collecting suggests that these patched-up items may yet get their chance to shine.

As *The New York Times* [reports](#), collectors now are seeking out the so-called “make-do” antiques, items “that bear evidence of having been broken and repaired in unusual and often artful ways.” And rather than being scorned for their appearance, these objects are becoming increasingly “cherished for their imperfections.”

Praised by interior designers for their chic, “deconstructed aesthetic,” make-dos bring an additional dimension to the mix: what's the story behind the damage and the subsequent repair? Why was it repaired at all, and why in that particular manner?

Plus it's a reflection of our own human condition. As David McFadden, chief curator at Manhattan's Museum of Arts and Design, told reporters, “There is something profoundly human about these repairs . . . They've been around from Day 1.”

There's also a tie-in with our growing awareness of the link between lifestyle and environmental impact. As McFadden told reporters, “It's just so relevant now that we're dealing with sustainability.”

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.



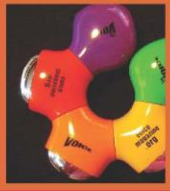



For any course that requires charts that cannot be easily created in Word or Excel, this should be a real time saver and make it easier to submit all portions of an assignment by email.

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.

AUSU
Representing AU
Undergrads

Student Gear

2009 merchandise

Clothing
Technology
Fun Items
Home Decor

Fostering the Student Community

AUSU and Voice gear is intended to support your studies and help you feel like part of the AU student community. Suggestions for new items are welcome. Contact our office with any questions.

CLASSIFIEDS

Classifieds are free for AU students! Contact voice@voicemagazine.org for more information.

THE VOICE

1213, 10011 109th Street NW, Edmonton, AB T5J 3S8 - Ph: 800.788.9041 ext. 2905 - Fax: 780.497.7003 attn: Voice Editor

Publisher Athabasca University Students' Union
Editor-In-Chief Tamra Ross
Managing Editor Christina M. Frey

Regular Columnists Hazel Anaka, John Buhler, S.D. Livingston, Jason Sullivan,
Wanda Waterman St. Louis

www.voicemagazine.org

The Voice is published every Friday in HTML and PDF format.

Contact *The Voice* at voice@voicemagazine.org.

To receive a weekly email announcing each issue, see the 'subscribe' link on *The Voice* front page. *The Voice* does not share its subscriber list.
Special thanks to Athabasca University's *The Insider* for its contributions.