

THE VOICE

MAGAZINE

Vol 19 Iss 21 2011-06-10

Lend Me an Ear

Surround sound

Churning It Out

No news is good news

Source of Inspiration

A Muslim poet speaks

Plus:

*The Mindful Bard
From Where I Sit
and much more!*



CONTENTS

The Voice's interactive Table of Contents allows you to click a story title to jump to an article. Clicking the bottom right corner of any page returns you here. Some ads and graphics are also links.

Features

Editorial: Surround Sound3

Articles

In Conversation With . . . Ammar AlShukry5

Columns

Chronicles of Cruiscin Lan4

Write Stuff: Churnalism7

The Mindful Bard: *Marwencol*9

From Where I Sit: It's A Start 11

AUSU Update 13

News and Events

Click of the Wrist8

Did You Know?..... 10

International News Desk 12

From Our Readers

Letters to the Editor2

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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.



Re: “Write Stuff: Indie World of Publishing, Part III: The Buzz” by S.D. Livingston, v19 i20 (2011-05-27)

Great series, with really useful info. Thanks, and keep up the good work!

Wanda Waterman

EDITORIAL

Christina M. Frey



Surround Sound

If a tree falls in the forest with no one to hear it, does it make a sound? Part scientific, part philosophical, and always thought provoking, it's a question that's bandied around so frequently that it's almost reached the status of classic joke.

What rarely gets discussed is whether we *could* in fact hear the sound of that tree falling to the earth—or whether we *would*. Because usually, the myriad sounds that surround us

go unnoticed in the background as we push on through our day, our brains multi-tasking with a frenzy that leaves little room for listening.

Listening is fast becoming a lost art. Not just listening to what others are saying—as in, *really* listening to what others are saying—although that's certainly an increasing problem. But we're also losing the ability to listen to and truly hear the small sounds that make up much of living.

The notion took me by surprise during last week's hiking trip to Algonquin Park, Ontario. It was off-season in the park, so we had the trails to ourselves, and after several hours of slogging up and down paths and picking our way through the mud, we had run out of everyday chatter. Or perhaps the stillness and peacefulness of the wild outdoors had touched us and settled our minds.

Regardless, we paused for a moment and tried listening to the sounds around us, to the slow creak of trees and the movement of branches and leaves. And amazingly, we discovered something: there is a lot of incredible and delightful noise out there that we never hear, because we fail to take the time to listen.

The sounds of nature rarely startle us into noticing them. Unless they're in-your-face loud—think crashing waves and booming thunder—we tend to relegate them to the unimportant background. But listening, separating, and really focusing on those quiet background noises can be very rewarding.

It's true that constant all-day hikes aren't practicable in today's busy world. But taking time out of our day to listen doesn't mean forsaking our modern comforts and heading for the woods. It's easy to stand still in my office and spend a few moments just *listening*. No talking. No checking email. No deliberate distractions, like radio. No mental calendar-checking. No future worries. Phone muted. Eyes closed. Brain still.

Listening.

It's breathtaking how refreshing it can be to spend just a few minutes, no matter where we are, listening to the sounds around us. And the joy isn't limited to the sounds of nature, either. Even sitting at my desk I can hear noises that I normally take for granted, but which are soothing or unique. The soft *whooshing* of the laptop fan. That funny little noise the processor makes when I've got too many programs running. Even the *rumble-click-stop* of my fingers tapping away on the keyboard is unique, interesting, rhythmic.

"Don't underestimate the value of Doing Nothing, of just going along, listening to all the things you can't hear..."

A.A. Milne

There is a whole world of noises out there if we just learn to listen. The sound of a car passing by changes as the vehicle approaches and passes. The “white noise” of the air conditioner is actually a combination of several sounds and pitches, and it wobbles slightly like it’s being performed by a young and inexperienced player.

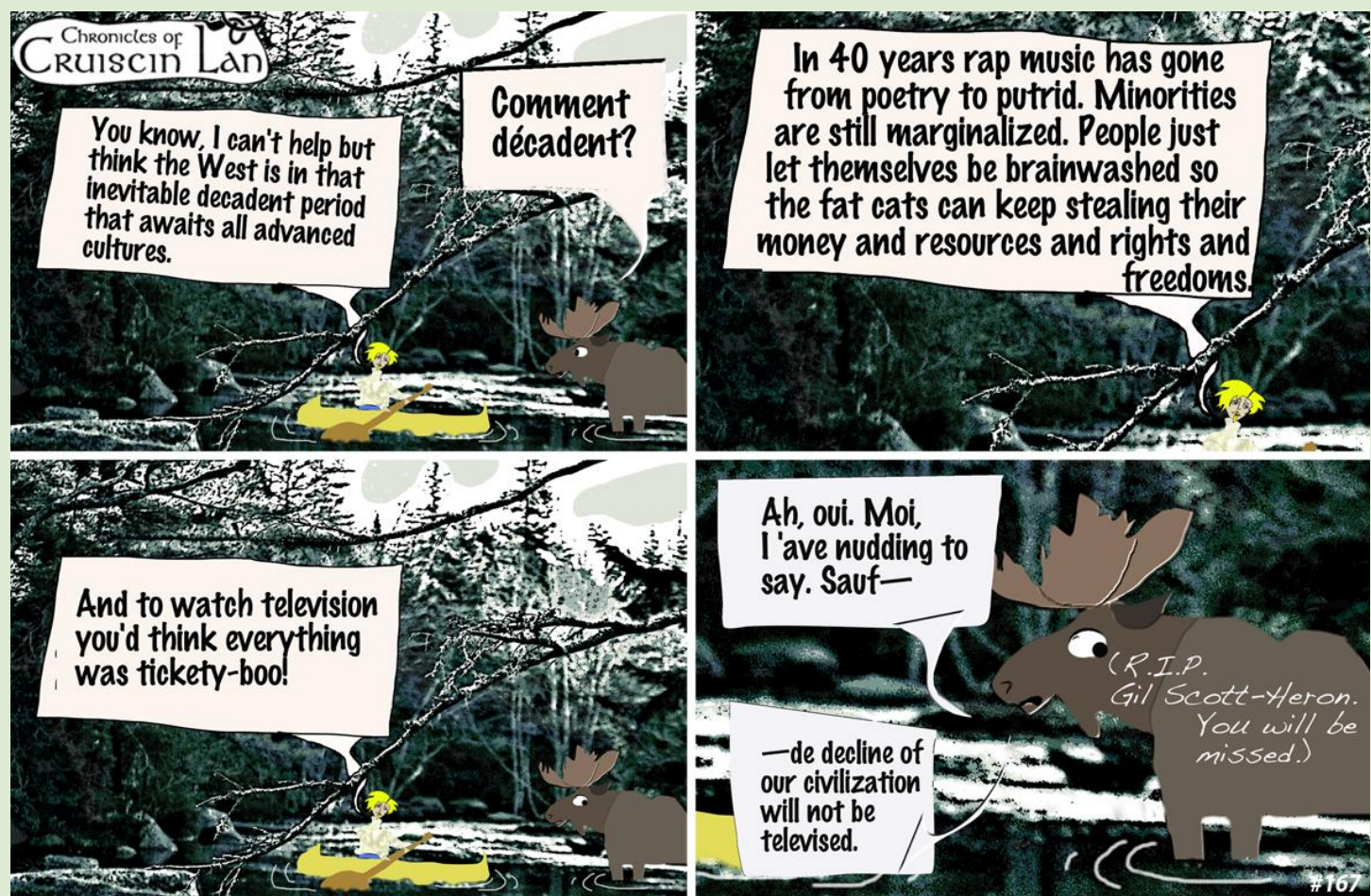
It’s relaxing, yes, but at the same time it’s exhilarating. Simple, everyday sounds become enticing with the joy of discovery. Who would have imagined the world of individual noises working together to create an intricate pattern of complex sounds—a whole lost world that is so easily passed by as we scurry ahead with the business of living?

The newness that we feel is refreshing, inspiring what the sages often call a childlike fascination with the world. Hearing is indeed a miracle. Sometimes listening to the background and letting it become the foreground for a short while can be a key factor in giving ourselves a true break. Periodically turning off the frenzy of deliberate distractions and mental gymnastics that keeps us deaf to what’s around us can renew our spirits and buoy us up for the future.

So just for a minute, let’s stop. Hush. And listen.

CHRONICLES OF CRUISCIN LAN

Wanda Waterman St. Louis



IN CONVERSATION WITH . . .

Wanda Waterman St. Louis



Ammar AlShukry

Ammar AlShukry is a Muslim poet living in Jamaica, New York. He recently chatted with Wanda Waterman St. Louis about inspiration, the role of poetry in the Muslim community, and the importance of listening.

“ . . . And I will sit in the shade of your smile,

and ask you your story directly from your mouth,

as we sip from Salsabil, ice cold,

and would be deeply embarrassed if you asked me for mine,

Cuz I never did anything right, other than loving you

and then . . . if you let me, I would love . . .

for a hug.”

Ammar AlShukry, from the poem “Until I See You”

What Do You Need in Order to Write a Poem?

A deadline. I don't get to write as much as I would like, and usually what forces me to sit down and focus on writing is having some upcoming event or request . . . It doesn't affect the nature of what I will write but it does put pressure on me to find the time to do it. A lot of times I'll have concepts swimming in my head for days or weeks before I'll put anything down.

Why Rhyme?

I've never been as fond of poetry that didn't rhyme. I never got the point of it. This year I've kind of become more acquainted with free verse and the imagery that some great poets create, and I do appreciate it a little bit more. It's about the message that you are trying to convey, without needing to be confined by a rhyming scheme.

Should Muslims Do Poetry?

I think the arts in general have been neglected by the Muslim community in the pursuit of more stable and respectable careers (i.e., being a doctor and engineer); poetry has, however, definitely been an important tool used in our societies to capture history, express emotion, understand language, and convey knowledge.

Are you an aspiring poet? Ammar's advice: “[W]rite what comes to your heart, even if it doesn't rhyme and even if you don't think it's great . . . there may be a line from that exercise that you might be able to use . . .”

It's nothing more than a medium, and like other media it becomes praiseworthy or blameworthy depending on what it is advocating for. So if that which you are advocating for is good, and the means that you are using to advocate it are good (by good I mean within the confines of what is Islamically acceptable), then you've got a green light.

On Inspiration

The conclusion I've come to is that I can't write if I'm not inspired. All of my favourite poems that I've written have been quick in their process—they've just flown out of me within an hour. I may go later and brush it up or polish it, but it's completed from beginning to end. I've had other poems that I would write two lines, and then save it, then go back the next day and erase one of those lines. That process isn't fun; in fact, it's very stressful. So I would say, don't force it, just write what comes to your heart, even if it doesn't rhyme and even if you don't think it's great. And at the very least there may be a line from that exercise that you might be able to use at a later time or for another piece.

Also make sure to record lines when they come to you. A lot of times for me, I will think of verses as I'm walking down the street, usually very random situations where I'll never have a pen or notebook with me. Depending on my memory to remember them later fails more often than not, so I will type it into my phone, or use a voice recorder on my phone to record it.

Listening

I always hear people say that they don't listen to anyone else in their genre because then they might affect their style. I can see why they would say that, but I can't help it. I listen to poetry in English and Arabic, and you'll get ideas on performance, or how someone uses their body language and posture to further adorn their words, or how they use their voice. When I read books, sometimes a paragraph or point made by the author will inspire a verse or few lines, so I just make sure to jot it down when I think of it.

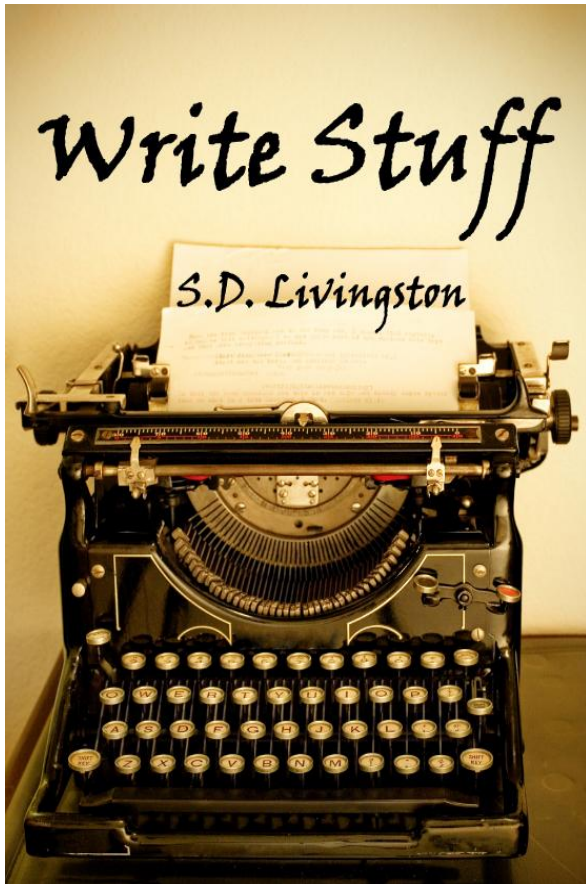
Getting the Poetry Out

Well initially I didn't want to ever have to do public performances; I just wanted to write what I could and show the world online. I began to understand later that public performances for an artist help build social capital—they help you get your message out to people who would otherwise never hear it. Also for someone like me, who is hardly a professional poet, it's good to be able to sharpen your presentation skills, as a big part of it is how it is performed.

There is a verse in the Quran that speaks about poets and says that they say what they don't do. So I reflect on that verse a lot, and I try to remember that if I'm saying it, I have to do it. So in that sense it will make you more purposeful; if you're constantly reminding others, you don't want to be the first one to forget.



The poetry of Ammar AlShukry was recommended to Wanda Waterman St. Louis by Abobakr Abdellah of Egypt.



Churnalism

“People everywhere,” wrote A.J. Liebling, “confuse what they read in newspapers with news.” That might seem strange coming from an acclaimed journalist of Liebling’s stature, but he’s right—and time hasn’t changed things for the better. As newspapers and magazines face shrinking budgets and pressure to give content away for free, the practice of cut-and-paste has spread. It’s called churnalism, and it threatens to turn your daily “news” into nothing more than one giant press release.

The word churnalism comes from “journalism” and “churn.” Conjured a great visual, doesn’t it? It’s also incredibly accurate. Suppose Corporation A has a new product to push. They (or their PR firm) write a press release, dump it into the news stream via email or feeds, and presto—it begins to churn through the system, being published in newspapers and magazines and appearing for all the world to be real journalism. You know, the kind that’s well researched, reasonably impartial, and the cornerstone of an informed democracy.

Churnalism isn’t always about selling a product. Religious and political groups, fringe research interests—anyone can feed a press release to the world these days. The problem comes when reputable news outlets pick up those press releases and run them, often verbatim, without checking a single fact or confirming a single source. That’s where the cheeky little story of the penazzle comes in, involving a fake press release invented by the website called—what else—Churnalism.

The premise was both simple and hilarious, as this *Guardian* [video](#) shows. The clever crew over at Churnalism asked a media company to build a website that featured men’s health and style products. In just two short hours the site was up and running, complete with a press release for the penazzle, the male version of the vajazzle. (Google with care if your maiden aunt’s in the room.)

The Churnalism site emailed the press release to the news desks of every national newspaper in the UK. And before you could say adhesive gemstones, the “news” was being published, in some cases the very next day. Not only did the story run, but *The Sun*, the largest-selling paper in Britain, lifted 45 per cent of the press release word-for-word in their “article.”

Although the Churnalism site is UK-based, the problem definitely isn’t limited to that country. When several newspapers there ignored a press release about another fake product, the chastity garter belt, the



journalist who concocted it fed the story to a news wire. It promptly got reported as legitimate news by papers and TV stations around the world, including in the US, Germany, India, and Israel.

The practice of churnalism is hardly new, but in today's wired world a press release masquerading as news can go viral in hours. That fast pace also puts more pressure on legitimate journalists as they struggle to sift through a never-ending flood of information, follow up, and check sources before the story's considered old news.

So tread carefully when you believe what you read in the "news," even from reputable sources. After all, that journalist might just be sporting a penazzle.

CLICK OF THE WRIST

Heroes

Superheroes are taking over Hollywood this summer. From box office hit *Thor* to *X-Men: First Class*, which opened last weekend, to the upcoming *Green Lantern* and *Captain America*, there's high interest in comic book action heroes these days. And no wonder—the concept of superpowers is truly fascinating. The following links explore "superhumanity" a little further.

Superman

So you're no Superman. You can't fly, you don't wear a cape, and you definitely don't have super strength. But you can gain a little more strength in your back by doing the "half-Superman" exercise, which builds strength in your back "from your upper back all the way to your glutes." Who knows—maybe flying is next!

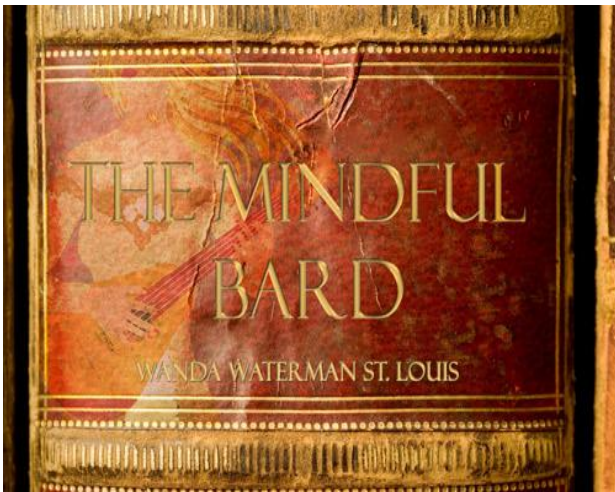
Wonder Woman

Some people take self-made superheroism all the way. One woman's childhood dream of gaining superpowers turned into reality when she made a list of all the skills she'd need to develop—and then began acquiring the skills, putting them to use in her work as a bounty hunter. US radio show *This American Life* has her fascinating story.

Truth is Stranger

Superhuman powers may seem unlikely to most, but some people really do have extraordinary "powers" that are reminiscent of those shared by comic book superheroes. This Cracked.com introduces seven real individuals with astonishing physical abilities.





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

DVD: Marwencol (Open Face 2010)

Genre: Documentary

Director: Jeff Malmberg

"All that we see or seem

Is but a dream within a dream."

Edgar Allan Poe

Traumatized Brain Generates Magical Kingdom Complete with Avenging Barbie Dolls

After having received a vicious thrashing in a Kingston, New York bar, Mark Hogancamp spends nine days in a coma and wakes up with no memories, in a state of helplessness that requires him to become a toddler all over again, learning to walk, talk, read, write, eat, and rebuild a life whose reality for him is now permanently altered.

He copes by manifesting what would appear by most measures to be a very odd personality: he walks along the road each day in World War II regalia, pulling a miniature jeep full of Barbie and soldier dolls whom he introduces to the very few brave enough to stop and chat him up. These eccentricities may have existed before the bar attack, but now seem to be clamouring for release. It is as if giving voice to this self is an essential part of his healing as well as a means of conceiving some of the most original and engaging outsider art imaginable.

Hogancamp's oeuvre is a miniature outdoor village called Marwencol, a deliciously nostalgic world inhabited by Barbie dolls and action figures posed in a series of fictions expressing both Hogancamp's personal climate and the tensions and hypocrisies of the world around him. The village is set in Belgium during the Second World War. Hogancamp's alter ego, a dashing soldier, owns a clandestine bar called The Ruined Stocking, in which the Barbie women stage cat fights and consort happily with the American and British soldiers and the resident Germans. The soldiers all get along famously, but the SS are constantly patrolling the area in search of Mark's bar, which is considered subversive. The scenes of these stories are religiously documented by Hogancamp by means of an old camera with a broken light metre.

The story is an allegory of the attack Mark suffered and the circumstances surrounding it; it's also the sweet aura emanating from the trauma at the center of American memories of World War II. As these stories unfold it's clear that Mark is playing out his fantasies, processing the trauma, working toward facing down his

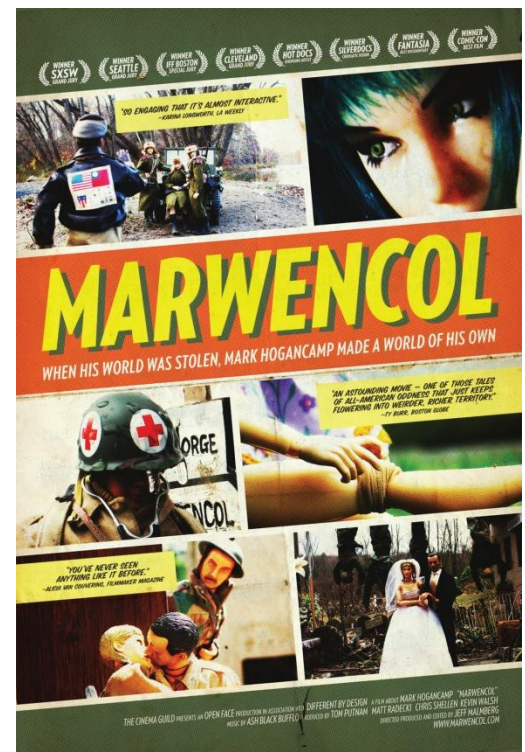


Photo courtesy of The Cinema Guild.

fears, and discovering his true self. He's also commenting on the world at large, judging and condemning his former self (amazingly his alcoholism hasn't survived the attack), forging a greater freedom of identity, and ultimately giving voice to parts of his personality that before the event had been dormant.

In this film, which is Jeff Malmberg's directorial debut, every scene is visually mesmerizing. There's a delightful campy weirdness about the contrast between the soldier action figures and the glamorous Barbie dolls. Jeff Malmberg has wisely avoided making this a documentary about the scientific causes and effects of brain injury, choosing instead to reveal how Mark's personal artistic journey is both therapeutic for himself and illuminating of the bigger pictures of recovery, human psychology, violence, social decadence, and art.



Mark Hogancamp talks with director Jeff Malmberg.
Photo by Chris Shellen. Courtesy of The Cinema Guild.

Marwencol manifests eight of The Mindful Bard's criteria for films well worth seeing: 1) it poses and admirably responds to questions having a direct bearing on my view of existence; 2) it stimulates my mind; 3) it provides respite from a sick and cruel world, a respite enabling me to renew myself for a return to mindful artistic endeavour; 4) it is about attainment of the true self; 5) it inspires an awareness of the sanctity of creation; 6) it displays an engagement with and compassionate response to suffering; 7) it is authentic, original, and delightful; and 8) it makes me appreciate that life is a complex and rare phenomenon, making living a unique opportunity.

DID YOU KNOW?



Watch Convocation Online

Don't forget: Athabasca University's Convocation is happening right now! If you were unable to travel to Athabasca to participate in the festivities, if your special friends and relatives couldn't make the trip to support you in person, or if you'd just like a preview of your own future graduation, there's good news: AU's website is webcasting live footage of the Convocation ceremonies.

Coverage starts at 11:45 am MST on June 9, 10, and 11. For more information, or to watch live, visit AU's Convocation [web page](#). You can also view footage from last year's ceremonies, as well as browse photo albums of previous AU grads.



From Where I Sit

Hazel Anaka

It's a Start

So tell me, am I the last person on the planet who doesn't have a website, blog, Facebook profile, or Twitter account? The worst part is that I'm not even sure I want or need to. But maybe this is like years ago, when I concluded I needed to become computer literate or be roadkill on the information highway. My first computer course, through the Edmonton Public Schools Extensions Program, was called something like "Scared Stiff"—or perhaps it was "All You Wanted to Know about Computers but Were Afraid to Ask. Beginner, beginner. I survived and continued to learn through trial and error, repetition, and the help of others. Now I can't imagine life without access to this marvellous and empowering tool.

Maybe that's the mindset I need to employ in overcoming my resistance to these other online ventures. It's not like I haven't dabbled. In 2006, I was one of the suckers who bought the Storesonline pitch about how easy it was to make a fortune online with a retail site and drop shipping. The fact that I paid them so dearly for the sites, domain names, tech support, and hosting fees still makes me cringe with embarrassment. I hope the relentless "closer" who wore me down to the point of capitulation has felt the sting of karma.

It didn't help that during that time I had been reduced to printing with my left hand because of surgery on my right shoulder, and, on top of it all, was also suffering from anemia so severe that a transfusion was just hours away. A combination of meds and fuzzy thinking didn't help my cause. I did run a website selling high-end handbags, but certainly didn't make a fortune. I got fed up with all the costs of doing business with Storesonline.

As far as blogging goes, I've done the reading, attended a course, and dabbled with setting up a WordPress account. Again, it's not as easy as it sounds. I guess I also fear just how much time it will take to keep a blog relevant. I know I'm not impressed when I Google a subject and get led to a site, only to find that someone posted a couple of blogs three years ago. Do it right or

don't do it at all is my philosophy.

As for Facebook, it just plain scares me. Though I suppose if I did go that route, I'd have the sense not to show or say everything. Life has toughened me up. I know there are people with nefarious motives out there, waiting to prey on the trusting or the naive.

Supposedly Twitter has value in marketing a person or product. Hemingway could have made 140 characters count. Those people whose vocabulary doesn't stretch beyond "awesome" or "absolutely" have characters to spare!

With the imminent e-publication of my first novel, I guess I had better get with the program and start building my profile and my platform. Stay tuned for the exploits of a reluctant anything-but-early-adopter. It may not be pretty but at least it's a start, from where I sit.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS DESK



At Home: Flying Bear

At high speeds, birds hitting cars can be bad news for both the bird and the car's windshield. Fortunately for motorists, the chance of being hit by a larger flying creature is extremely slim.

However, in a stranger-than-fiction occurrence, it has happened. As *The Toronto Star* reports, a recent bizarre and tragic accident involved a flying bear whose collision with an SUV killed two people.

The bear had begun crossing a rural Quebec highway when it was "hit by an eastbound car," which "flipped the bear into the air." The bear flew across the highway, "rocketing through [an] SUV" approaching from the opposite direction.

Local police say that the bear went through the windshield, hitting and killing the driver and the passenger behind her before exiting through the back windshield. A third passenger sustained minor injuries.

Around the World: Listen to Me

Students and stress: it's a match made in hell, maybe, but for many it's a painful reality. Fortunately for most, there's an end in sight; once that exam is over or assignment handed in, the stressed student can breathe a sigh of relief. For others, however, the stress of life can sometimes become a bit too challenging to handle well. Things begin to crumble.

In order to help those who have become overwhelmed, programs are being developed to train their fellow students to recognize problems before they get too big. For example, as *The New York Times* reports, the Student Support Network helps students "learn . . . to listen for whispers of despair and to reach out to such students before things get worse."

Student participants are trained to recognize "depression, anxiety, eating disorders, suicide and substance abuse," and during sessions they spend a lot of time practicing role play. Although they're not counsellors, they learn to recognize when counselling is needed—and "how to gently persuade another student in distress to go for professional help."

Although for years initiatives have focussed on training "professors, coaches and other staff members" to "intervene" when potential problems arise, today's students are more likely to confide in one another than in an authority figure. As Alison K. Malmon, who founded non-profit mental health advocacy group Active Minds, told reporters, "Students aren't necessarily calling hot lines or going to drop in centers . . . They are talking to their peers."

The Student Support Network is just one of the programs that recognize the importance of student-to-student intervention.

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

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