

THE VOICE

MAGAZINE

Vol 19 Iss 26 2011-07-15

Book Drive

Old friends, new hands

All Arise

Time to stand tall

Words of Note

Poetic harmony

*Plus:
From Where I Sit
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.



STUDY SPACE

Christina M. Frey



Take a Stand

The sky is sunny and the temperature's warm—so why aren't you feeling more motivated? After all, the distracting gloom and cold of winter have long since passed.

It's surprising, but true: the summer's not always a particularly productive time. Whether you're working, studying, or both, it's hard to stay focused at that desk when the outdoors—be it beach, fishing pier, mountains, or forest—is beckoning.

But there are deadlines to meet, papers to write, assignments to finish. What to do?

Consider attempting a tactic to pull yourself up out of your summer slump—literally. It's called a standing desk.

Standing desks, which are designed to be at an appropriate height for working while standing, have become a bit of a fad in the business world. But they have a long history—not to mention more than a few famous devotees. Charles Dickens, Ernest Hemingway, Virginia Woolf, and Sir Winston Churchill all used standing desks, and their example is followed by politicians, leaders, and visionaries.

A commonly cited reason is the health benefits. The dangers of a sedentary life are well established, and standing allows you to maintain a higher metabolism, burn calories, improve your posture, and engage your core. But there's an even bigger reason to try taking a stand: it may give your productivity a huge boost.

Studies have shown that regularly changing your work environment is a boon to productivity (and helps keep boredom at bay). But won't standing actually create a more distraction-prone environment?

Actually, that's not borne out in practice. Sitting hunched forward in the chair, eyes ahead, it's easy to space out a bit, lose focus, or over-fixate on issues that aren't going anywhere. And if you're already easily distracted, sitting contributes to boredom because it doesn't engage you physically or mentally.

Standing, on the other hand, gives you something small to focus on physically, leaving your brain free to zero in exclusively on your book or screen. You no longer feel the unspoken need to seek out something else to do.

Interestingly, educators who work with children who have ADHD or similar learning challenges have found that when these kids work standing, they're able to stay on track better than when seated. As this *U.S. News & World Report* article notes, “standing enhance[s] focus and attention”—something especially challenging for kids with ADHD or ADD. Some schools are even implementing desks with attached treadmills or stationary bicycles to give an additional outlet for their energy.

It's not only kids with learning challenges whose concentration is improved by using a standing desk. One innovative school in Minnesota has implemented "activity-permissive" learning, which means that kids can choose whether to sit, stand, or do a little of each. The students are being studied by a team from the University of Minnesota, but in the meantime teachers believe the setting will allow the kids to "focus better on their work rather than focusing on how to keep still."

The same follows for adults. As one formerly seated blogger notes, while seated "my posture was terrible, my attention span was narrowing rapidly, and I was constantly battling fatigue." But after moving to a standing desk, it was easier to focus longer and better, and problems seemed less frustrating.

In fact, using a standing desk may even enhance creativity, since light physical activity increases our problem-solving skills.

Can't afford an executive-style standing desk? The web is full of innovative ideas for a temporary set-up, from modular furniture to shelving to books stacked on a counter. To beat the slump this year, try experimenting with a standing desk. It might end up being your best summer yet.

CLICK OF THE WRIST

Abracadabra

Even Muggles are getting excited about this weekend's opening of the final film in the *Harry Potter* franchise. To join in the spirit, this week's links shed some light on the intersection between modern technology and the wizarding world. It's truly magical!

Hide

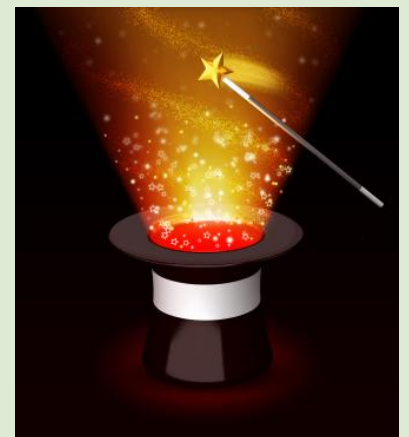
Need to make yourself scarce, hide that stain on the living room floor, or both? Harry's invisibility cloak was one of a kind, but in our world similar designs are being developed and tested by scientists right now. This *Good Morning America* piece explains the science behind the cloaking devices.

Extinguish

It may not work as well as Peruvian Instant Darkness Powder, but these electric wands do a pretty good job of extinguishing fire. This *National Geographic* Daily News story describes the wands, which could someday be used by firefighters.

Forget

Memory-wiping appears many times in the Potter world (and in dystopian fiction as well!), and scary as it sounds, scientists are making progress toward it. This *Telegraph* article, written by science columnist and *The Science of Harry Potter* author Roger Highfield, explains.





Intriguing New Trends in Music

Album: *Drums Between the Bells* (a spoken word collaboration between musician Brian Eno and poet Rick Holland)

*"... You really seem to see the real
The exact and actual reality
Of the real in things you seem to see
The real thing..."*

Rick Holland, in *Drums Between the Bells*

Of all definitions of art, my favourite is Red Green's: "If I can make it, it's not art."

It is easy to listen to experimental music and snort, "Hey, even I could do that!" And there's some truth in this; advances in technology have rendered experimental music much easier to do. At the same time, it's much harder to do it well, so the challenge of today's avant-garde musician is to produce work of artistic merit. Despite appearances, this requires all the genius, training, fearless exploration, and rigorous discipline demanded of Bach, Brahms, or Beethoven.

I've often tried to elucidate the difference between a song lyric and a true poem thus: in a song the words and music must learn to dance together, and in a poem the words dance alone, creating their own music. For this reason song lyrics tend to be much simpler and at much greater risk of sounding trite and cliché in their written form (witness the comedic potential of reading the lyrics of pop songs at poetry events) because of dependence on the music and the need to fuse seamlessly with it. Poetry, conversely, can afford to be much more rhythmically and metaphorically complex—after all, it brings its own music.

But this doesn't quite explain poetry readings accompanied by music, wherein the rhythms of spoken language form one musical thread, with a special emphasis on the relationship between the rhythms, pitches, and cadences of natural speech and the structure of the musical accompaniment. You might say that the music and the words are still dancing together, but it's more of a ballet than a rumba.

Rick Holland's poetry might fall flat on a first reading (these poems are really meant to be heard, not read), but in this album it's so beautifully complemented that the music ends up illuminating the meaning of the words. This only happens in the very best spoken art.

In the way that Wynton Marsalis plays "all of" jazz—meaning Dixieland and fusion and everything in between—Eno makes frequent musical references to the history of avant-garde music. "Bless This Space" starts out with a beatnik drum kit, harking back to spoken art's modern roots in the LA coffee



house scene. Eno has long embraced “all of” avant-garde (serious contemporary and experimental music) as far back as the 50s and earlier, with nods to Allen Ginsberg, John Cage, Gil Scott-Heron, Kraftwerk, Laurie Anderson, and the house music of the 90s, all the while remaining jarringly original and authentic.

Eno began collaborating with Rick in 2003. They’ve had an on-again off-again creative relationship for years, culminating in the album *Small Craft on a Milk Sea*, which came out just before *Drums*.

The track titles on *Drums Between the Bells* are almost as enchanting as the tracks themselves: for example, “Fierce Aisles of Light,” “Breath of Crows,” and a title that’s simply and innovatively called “A Title.”

Holland only speaks his own poems on one track; the other voices are carefully chosen for expressiveness and even at times slight idiosyncrasies of diction and accent.

The music, mostly played by Eno on electronic instruments, is hauntingly beautiful, jettisoning the conventional blandness of the comfort zone and putting in its place a blissful sense of the sweet absurdity of reality. Whatever irritations you may be experiencing now, this album is your aesthetic oasis.

DID YOU KNOW?



Just Ask TED

Bored? Stuck in a rut? Maybe you just need an influx of something fresh and new. Look no further than TED.com, a “global community” created by non-profit organization TED, whose singular mission is to propagate “Ideas Worth Spreading.”

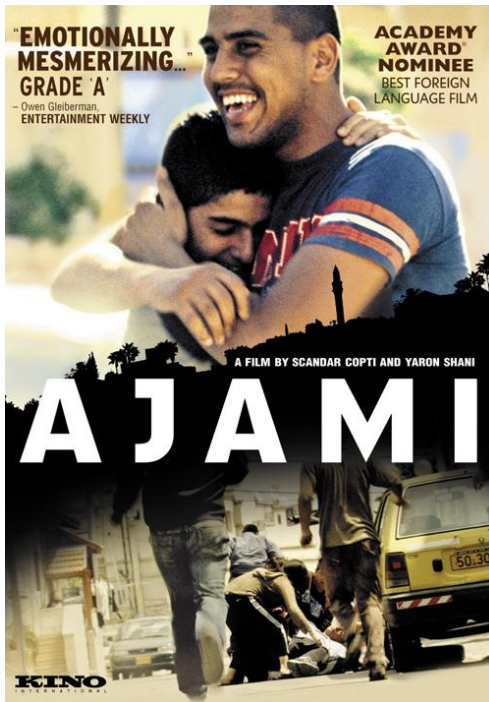
The organization sponsors conferences and prizes, but its website is accessible to all. It hosts nearly 1,000 (and counting!) interesting, entertaining, inspiring, and/or informative talks by experts and thinkers in all fields and from all corners of the globe. Some talks were given at TED conferences, while others were created for expressly for the organization. All the talks are published under a Creative Commons license, which means that they may be downloaded and shared freely (with certain limitations as to use).

The site can be searched by category, but viewers can also browse the most popular talks, as well as those rated by other viewers as high-ranking in certain descriptive categories (most inspiring, most ingenious, etc.).

A sampling of what’s awaiting you: a talk profiling someone who treats cancer through dance, an education and creativity expert’s thoughts on why traditional education stifles creativity, and a Harvard political philosophy professor’s discussion of the “lost art of democratic debate.” From AIDS research to artificial intelligence to Google to sustainability, you’re sure to find something to intrigue or inspire you.

THE MINDFUL BARD

Wanda Waterman



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

Film: *Ajami* (2010)

Directors: Scandar Copti , Yaron Shani

Cast: Shahir Kabaha, Ibrahim Frege, Fouad Habash, Youssef Sahwani, Ranin Karim, Eran Naim, Scandar Copti

"Evil, when we are in its power, is not felt as evil, but as a necessity, even a duty."

"Human beings are so made that the ones who do the crushing feel nothing; it is the person crushed who feels what is happening. Unless one has placed oneself on the side of the oppressed, to feel with them, one cannot understand."

Simone Weil

The Three Faces of the Sons of Abraham in Occupied Palestine

A Bedouin crime family sends its man into a Jaffa restaurant to scare up some protection money. He shoots his rifle into the air, and for his trouble gets seriously wounded by the restaurant owner.

Now the clan is in a very bad mood. They retaliate by setting out to kill Omar, the restaurateur's nephew. But they've identified Omar by his car, which Omar just happened to have sold to his cousin—and they shoot Omar's cousin by mistake.

Abu Elias, a kindly Christian businessman, agrees to help negotiate a settlement for the family. He takes Omar to the Bedouins and their judge, and after some quick calculations on the seriousness of the injuries on both sides (and after shaving off specific amounts for the sake of God and family and a host of other considerations), the judge comes up with the sum required to prevent Omar's death. Any dissent is quickly squelched with the firm pronouncement, "Enough. Trust God. Drink coffee." The deal is sealed with the lifting of ornate demitasses and a round of forgiving embraces.

Very touching, but the sum demanded is way beyond what Omar's family can afford, and in 45 days the amount will double. Omar's mother wants to leave town, but Omar refuses because he is in love, God help him, with Hadir, the daughter of Abu Elias.

"Shahir Kabaha is so delightful and natural as Omar, and his responses to events are so authentic, that they lend a hyper-realism to the story."

But he is Muslim and she is Christian, so their glances and touches and sweet words are furtively intense. There is a very touching scene in which Omar and Hadir are left alone for a moment in her family's parlour

and he jokingly tries to make her sit beside him. All of the actors (many of whom are not professionals) are superb, but Shahir Kabaha is so delightful and natural as Omar, and his responses to events are so authentic, that they lend a hyper-realism to the story.

In a desperate struggle to raise funds to buy his own life, Omar enlists the help of Malek, an illegal immigrant who's working for Abu Elias in order to raise money to save his dying mother. Enter Jewish cop Dando, who, along with his deeply grieving family, has lost all of the joy of life due to the disappearance of his soldier brother.

Again and again throughout the movie Omar escapes his demise while one scapegoat after another dies for his sins—just as he bears the sin of his uncle. By the end of the film he is carrying a burden of guilt that is almost palpable but which he himself does not appear to grasp.

"The three monotheistic traditions . . . crisscross and interweave until all you can see is common ground . . . [yet] there are deep rifts among these three groups of jealous siblings who are so adamant about worshipping the same God."

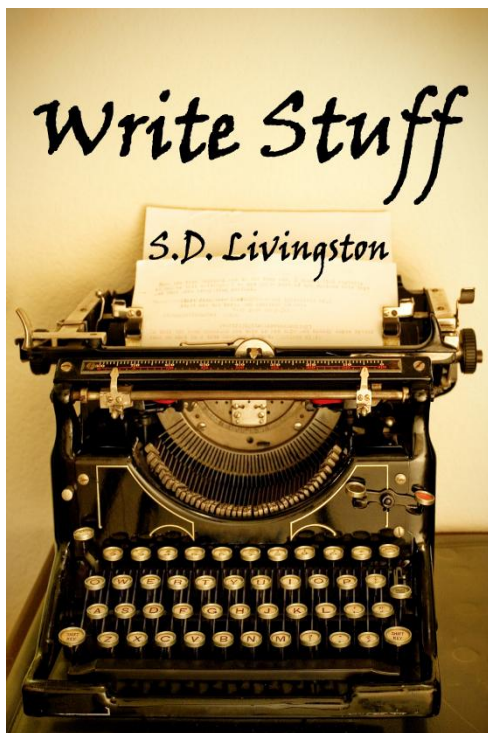
There is little in this film to make the heart rejoice. The air appears thick and heavy and the urban scenes have little aesthetic appeal, but this is entirely intentional and very effective. The only beauty you will find is in the loving scenes among family members. There is a familiar tenderness in the homes of the Muslims and Jews (but notably not among the Christians) that makes the violence and cruelty seem that much more tragic.

The three monotheistic traditions— Judaism, Christianity, and Islam— crisscross and interweave until all you can see is common ground. Members of all three groups make constant appeals to the God of Abraham. At one point when Dando is at the synagogue talking with some men about his lost brother, one of the men starts quoting from Psalms, in Hebrew: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence

cometh my help. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore." (Psalm 121: 1-8, King James Version).

Tragically, there are deep rifts among these three groups of jealous siblings who are so adamant about worshipping the same God.

Ajami manifests four of The Mindful Bard's criteria for films well worth seeing: 1) it poses and admirably responds to questions that have a direct bearing on my view of existence; 2) it displays an engagement with and compassionate response to suffering; 3) it is authentic, original, and delightful; and 4) it makes me appreciate that life is a complex and rare phenomenon, making living a unique opportunity.



Book Drive

It's summertime and the reading is easy. Whether you've loaded your beach bag with paperbacks or filled your e-reader with hundreds of titles, you've probably got more books than you have time to read them. Which is why it might startle you that, for millions of people, simply getting access to books is still a struggle. In the interest of helping fellow readers—and decluttering your own space—here are a few ways to help.

According to [UNESCO](#), 20 per cent of adults around the world are illiterate. That means one in every five adults can't read to their kids, or follow street signs, or return to school to upgrade their skills in hope of getting a better job. Even more alarming? Two thirds of those illiterate adults are women. And although it's true that access to education is a problem, having access to books plays a huge role in the success (or failure) of many schools. (Sometimes, just getting the books to their destination can be an [adventure](#).)

On the global front, [Worldwide Book Drive](#) has donated nearly two million books to schools and charities from the US to Africa. They also sell about six per cent of the books they get to cover their operating costs. They accept books of all kinds, including textbooks, hardcovers, and library discards. Books may be in any condition, since the organization recycles damaged books to keep them out of landfills and turn them back into usable paper. And if you're part of a college or university, Worldwide Book Drive will supply everything you need to run a book drive, including "book-drop boxes, fliers, and the cost of return shipping."

Closer to home, access to education may not be the problem, but the forest fires in Slave Lake, Alberta, were. The new public library in Slave Lake opened in 2010 and was completely destroyed by forest fires on May 15 this year—along with 40 per cent of the town. The Government of Alberta has [put out a call](#) to help rebuild the library through donations of "new or nearly new" books (less than two years old), which will be catalogued and stored while a temporary library is built.

Natural disaster isn't the only problem libraries face these days. With funding cuts hitting libraries even in affluent places, their buying power is diminished—and that means less choice for you. So why not donate your used books and strengthen the community resources in your area? Whether it's the [New York Public Library](#), the [Toronto Public Library Foundation](#), or your local library, most accept DVDs, CDs, and VHS tapes as well. Even if the library can't use your donation on its shelves, books are often passed on to other charities or sold to raise funds for new library purchases.



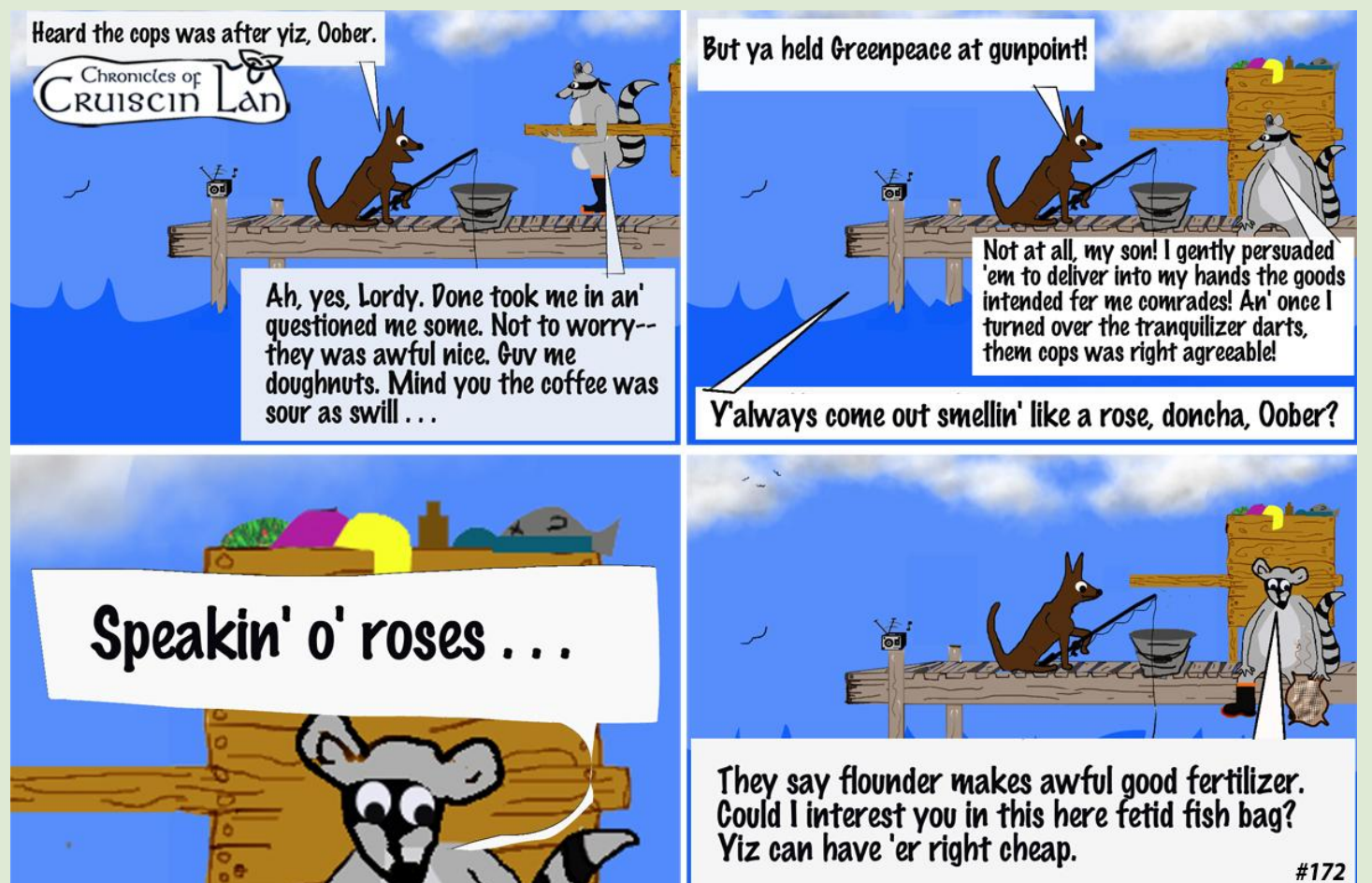
If you're still not sure that a few used books can make a big difference, check out the story of Irwin Herman, also known as The Bookman. When he retired from his appliance repair business, Herman donated some used books to a local prison. He was so overwhelmed by the response that he began collecting and donating used books on a larger scale. Today, he drops off thousands of free books each week at places as diverse as San Diego City College and the San Diego Botanic Garden. Publishers like Reed-Elsevier and Harcourt have gotten involved, and Herman's efforts support the Rolling Readers, a group of over 300 volunteers who read to school kids.

Those ideas should get you started in putting your used books in front of eager eyes, but there are a couple of other resources you might like. One is UNESCO's list of book donation agencies for the English-speaking world. The other is The Children's Book Bank, a registered charity that "provides free books and literacy support to children in low-income Toronto neighbourhoods."

Taking the time to bundle your used books means so much more than simply clearing shelves; it can make an enormous difference in another reader's life. And whether it's summertime or not, the reading should always be easy.

CHRONICLES OF CRUISCIN LAN

Wanda Waterman





From Where I Sit

Hazel Anaka

Jerry

Jerry Seinfeld, recently in Edmonton for three sold-out shows, dazzled thousands with his probing look at everyday life. Listening to him take on one mundane issue after another made the 13 years since his sitcom ended fall away. The exasperated squeaky voice rose as he drove to his point. The familiar hoarse indignation cued us he was there.

Surprising to me was the physicality of his act. He paced; he gestured and waved. At one point he lay down on the stage, demonstrating how some people's energy drops in sync with the battery strength on their Blackberries. He did the "Edmontonian in the pouring rain" walk—no rushing or hunched shoulders from those tough characters.

He said things we've all thought. We've all done the dance to activate the faucet in the public washroom. He talked about how some people settle into a coffee shop, and we could almost see the laptop and books and bags (and a change of clothing perhaps!). His choice: to sell coffee in "Get Out" and "Scram" sizes.

At age 57, Jerry shows his age in some of the topics he tackles: issues like rudeness and over-consumption, for example. Childhood memories of discovering and eating Pop-Tarts sounded almost orgasmic. His observations and mockery of *other* people's behaviour is spot-on, and there was a strong underlying message often hitting closer to home. He explained the evolution and journey of garbage: our latest purchase is opened and displayed on the kitchen table, but before long it's in a drawer, cupboard, or closet. Eventually it makes the one-way trip to the garage (a word eerily similar to the word garbage) before its final trip to the dump. Of course, now eBay allows us to "mail our garbage back and forth across the country."

Both Jerry and opening comedian Mario Joyner spoke about cell phones, apps, rudeness, and insanity: "I'm surprised you people are even paying attention to this." The glow of cell phones around me confirmed this rude addiction. *Why, in the 21st century, do we still need to be told to wait for the beep, then leave our name and phone number—who doesn't know this? And what's up with caller ID and now caller ID block?*

He ranted about the gaps in public bathroom stalls and the lack of instinct in fathers. He talked about the weather channel and the folly of five day forecasts. *If that were possible, why not just do the weather every five days?*

During a brief encore he took questions from the crowd. "Where's George?" someone yelled. "George is a fictional character," came the reply. "A Seinfeld movie?" "No, I'm old and rich and lazy."

Jerry is a master at noticing and exploiting the foibles of human beings. He poked fun at us, and we paid him dearly for the privilege. Jerry is every one of us, from where I sit.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS DESK



At Home: Survivor Support

Most survivors will tell you that having cancer is a life-altering experience. While cancer patients are still pursuing or undergoing treatment, there's an abundance of resources on which they can rely for support. Yet frequently, after the rounds of medication and care are finished and they've been given the "all-clear," the stability of that support falters—even if the survivors aren't quite emotionally ready to integrate back into their old lives.

But, as *The Globe and Mail* [reports](#), there's good news: the After Cancer Treatment Transition Clinic, an "innovative program" run out of Princess Margaret Hospital and Women's College Hospital in Toronto, is just one of a number of similar organizations that are "changing cancer care across North America."

Why the need? Once treatment is completed, "cancer survivors continue to face challenges" like a "vulnerable psychological state" and "overwhelming fatigue, anxiety, difficulty returning to work, fertility concerns and changes in brain function." To

provide continuing support, the so-called "transition care" programs help patients deal with their unique issues, and often offer counselling where necessary. Other services provided include medication and treatment explanations, nutritional advice, and other information needed to allow patients a full understanding of the "short- and longer-term effects of cancer."

Around the World: Play It Again

It's summertime, and the kids are getting out of hand: picking fights, acting out, getting increasingly aggressive as boredom escalates. Although sports have long been linked with negative behaviours, a new study suggests the opposite: team sports may actually have a positive effect on aggressive boys.

As *The Globe and Mail* [reports](#), a recent study from Tel Aviv University suggests that, in fact, "physical education can be more effective than verbal therapy" when working with aggressive boys. Although girls were included in the study, the results were not as obvious as with boys.

The study, which focused on children "from low socioeconomic backgrounds," discovered that "compared to the control group . . . the physically active group showed greater self control, problem solving and a decline in aggressive behaviour."

The study's leader believes that because physical activity actually "reduces negative emotions," it's more effective than simply lecturing or talking through problems.

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.

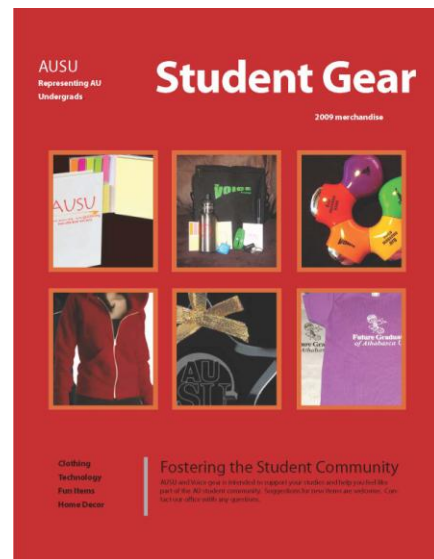
SmartDraw Program Renewal

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.



CLASSIFIEDS

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

THE VOICE

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