

THE VOICE

MAGAZINE

Vol 19 Iss 29 2011-08-05

Winners Quit

Give up, move ahead

Family Ties

Embrace the messiness

Unpublishable

Story and spirit

Plus:

*The Mindful Bard
Cruiscin Lan
and much more!*



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Magazine***

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

For weekly email
reminders as each issue is
posted, fill out the
subscription form [here](#).

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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.



EDITORIAL

Christina M. Frey



Quit to Win

Out with the old, in with the new: it's a popular sentiment at New Year's Eve parties. Not so throughout the course of the year, when a change of plans can raise eyebrows, cause embarrassment, and create a lot of self-loathing and personal torment.

Look around, and you'll notice that popular and corporate culture are filled with phrases suggesting that stick-to-it-ness is the keystone of success.

"Winners never quit, and quitters never win," the motivational poster says, and it's echoed in many aspects of life. Rarely is there a hero who pauses, changes course, and then restarts a quest in a different direction—and succeeds. In film and fiction alike, we're presented with protagonists who keep their eyes focused on the end goal ahead, pursuing it regardless of personal consequences.

And do a Google search for "quotes on quitting," and you'll find advice from thousands of success stories whose motivational offerings make a fool of anyone who'd consider changing course.

That's a shame. Because while it's true that staying on target and mindfully pursuing goals is admirable and important, it's far from being the only characteristic necessary for succeeding. Equally crucial is the ability to not merely pursue a goal for the sake of pursuing, but to know when it's time to switch to a new tack.

Constantly changing our minds and giving up whenever things get rough aren't going to get us far. But knowing when it's time to stop and readjust, pause and change our direction, or shift our focus can be vital not just to success but to also sanity.

It's hard to believe, given the prevailing view, that abandoning positive plans could ever be a good thing. Even the phrases we apply to ourselves smack of the same attitude: *I'm quitting. Dropping it. Leaving.* Our whole social vocabulary is premised on the notion that a change of course is failure.

We see it in ourselves and among family and friends. For one, a living situation is simply not working out; circumstances have changed, and she's having a hard time dealing. Yet she feels she's made her decision and needs to stick with it. For another, the career path he thought was the answer is turning out unfulfilling, but he has good prospects and believes he'd be a loser, a quitter, to pursue a different direction.

Staying on course is important, but it's equally crucial to know when it's time to stop and change direction.

Not so. There's no shame in recognizing that it's time for a change; in fact, it's extremely important to stop a non-productive course of action if we realize our goals have shifted or that we made a mistake in

the first place. We need to develop the ability to say no, to decide that this isn't working out for us, that we need to move in a different direction.

But it needs to be done properly.

We know about thinking through decisions, of making lists of stay/go pros and cons. But even more important, when we're changing course, it's vital to ensure we're running *toward* something rather than running away.

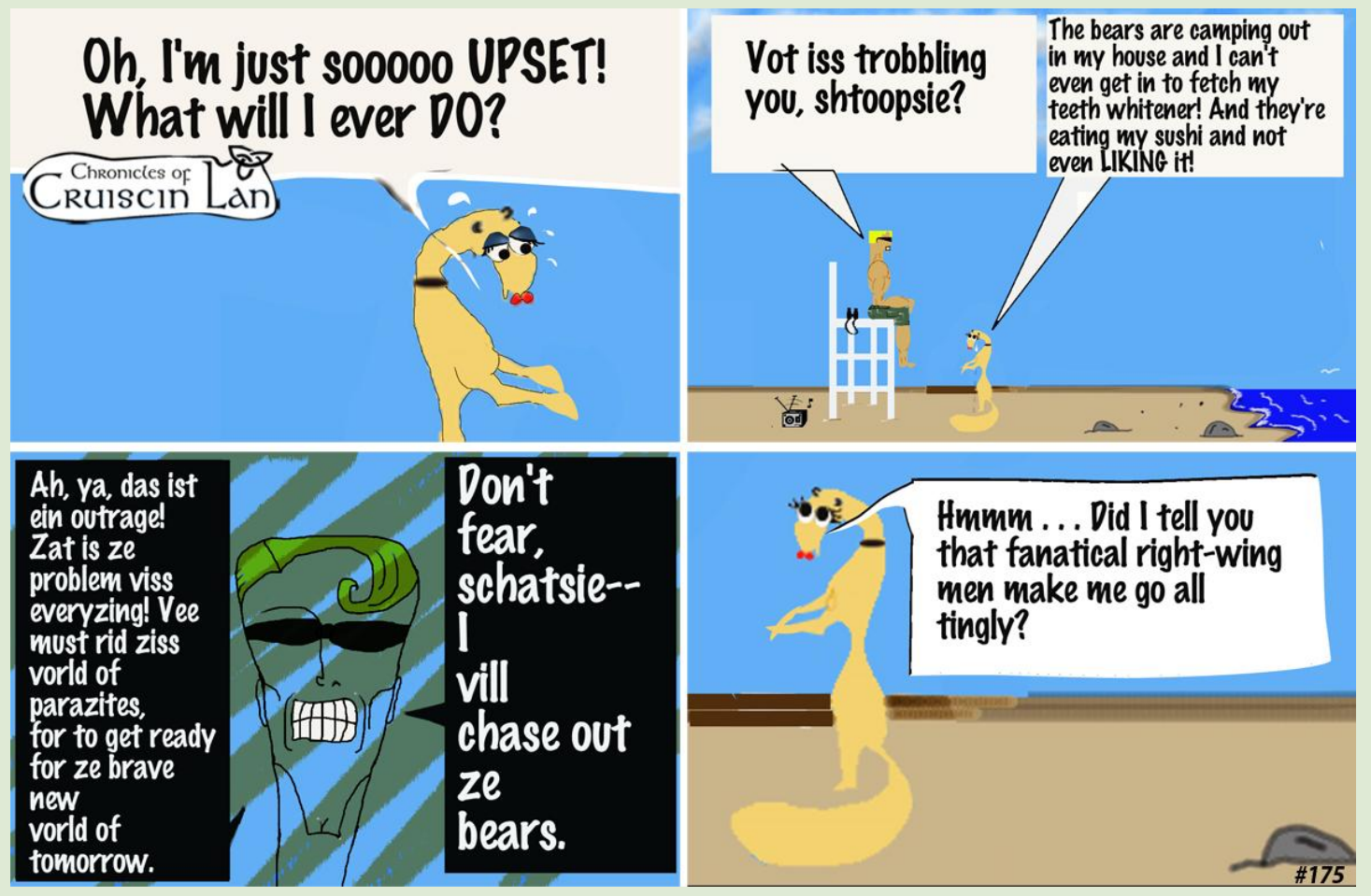
This ensures we're not shrinking from the low point that's inevitable in every journey. It also forces us to make value judgments. Why do we want to take a new direction? Are we merely discouraged, or do we truly feel that this route will better fulfil us personally, professionally, or spiritually?

Having a goal to run toward also gives us a boost of self-esteem. In a world that so values sticking to the status quo, seeking a change can draw negative feedback. How many goals and dreams are ignored out of existence due to the fear that a new start means an old failure? Having a clear plan in mind means we can step away with confidence, looking ahead rather than at what we're leaving behind.

And it's that confidence, that spring in our step, that plants us firmly on our new path to success.

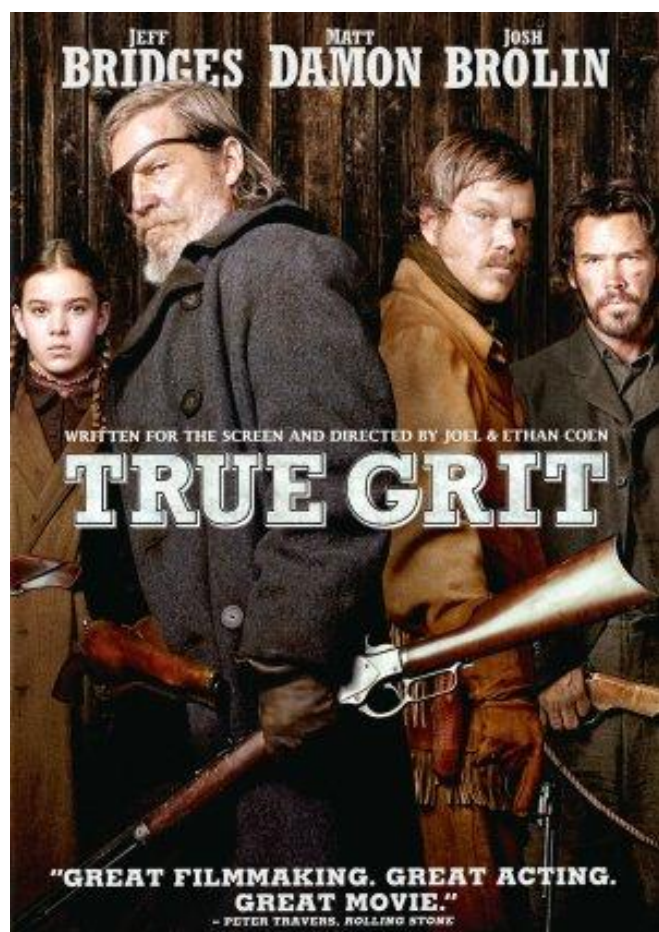
CHRONICLES OF CRUISCIN LAN

Wanda Waterman



THE MINDFUL BARD

Wanda Waterman



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

Film: True Grit (2010)

Writers/Directors: Joel and Ethan Coen

Cast: Jeff Bridges, Matt Damon, Josh Brolin, Barry Pepper, and Hailee Steinfeld

"MATTIE ROSS: I just spent last night at the undertaker's, in the company of three corpses. I felt like Ezekiel. In the valley of the dry bones?"

GRANDMA TURNER: Yes, well, God bless you."

From *True Grit*

When a social upheaval reaches an unnerving crescendo, those who must endure it often long for heroes who embody iron will and superlative physical and mental skills. Some of us dream of a Captain America, but I (and judging from the box office, many others) prefer to dream of a Mattie Ross.

Mattie, not Rooster Cogburn, is really the hero in this film. It's her determination, rigorous ethics, and faith that serve as catalysts for the remarkable deeds carried out by Rooster and the other men she's called into her service.

Mattie Ross is a 14-year-old with a steel backbone. She's been brought up to be religious, disciplined, and fearless, as was common among pioneer families of the era.

Tom Chaney, a hired hand, has murdered her father. As is typical of this genre, Mattie is bent on revenge. But she's so cool, collected, and uncompromising that she seems superhuman. This is because she's representative of an ideal for which America and much of the world pines, an ideal that becomes ever more desirable (and unattainable) within the context of the kind of violent lawlessness that we associate with the old Wild West.

The first adaptation of Charles Portis's novel of the same name came out in 1969, with John Wayne and Kim Darby in the lead roles. At that time the older generation was in shock from news of the libertine excesses of the younger, and the younger generation was increasingly disillusioned by the hypocrisies it was discovering among its elders. America was numbed and discouraged and reeling from a series of attacks by homegrown terrorists determined to bring in diverse forms of revolutionary change.

It's worth exploring why another adaptation of this novel might appear in 2010. To what moral crisis does *True Grit* speak? With what terms is it attempting to negotiate, in Francesco Casetti's words, the future?

We have here three historical points: the setting of the story of *True Grit* (somewhere around the turn of the century, I'm guessing), 1969 (the year the first adaptation appeared), and 2010 (the year of this adaptation).

There are parallels among these three periods; political extremists tended to wear beards and chant mindless slogans, and leaders appeared to lack backbone and acumen. And although America's problems are now seen to be more global—more closely linked with a history of foreign policy that has created international resentment—the reactionary sentiments that eventually emerge in an anything-goes atmosphere are remarkably similar.

Mattie Ross, for example, can't trust the local law to bring her father's killer to justice, so she takes justice into her own hands. It's an unfortunate but often inevitable response to the sense of helplessness and rage generated by unbridled crime operating in an ineffective system of social controls, and a response we are now seeing being played out on the world stage on several fronts.

But Mattie is no extremist. She's often heard threatening men with the name of her lawyer, Dagget, who is only briefly seen. In this way she appeals to an ideal of law and order that, though distant and haphazardly applied, is very real.

"Mattie's role is a tough one . . . [but] Hailee Steinfeld does an amazing job of making this very symbolic character live, breathe, and radiate an almost divine resolve."

Mattie's role is a tough one and the spot-on performance of Kim Darby in the first version made me assume it couldn't be topped. However, Hailee Steinfeld does an amazing job of making this very symbolic character live, breathe, and radiate an almost divine resolve. The true test is the delivery of the line "They tell me you're a man with true grit," and Hailee says it in an entirely new way—with just the right balance of admiration and ambivalence.

Mattie must earn Cogburn's respect, which she does by upholding her own strict code and by maintaining the toughness of a boiled owl.

Despite efforts to ditch her she insists on joining the posse because it is she (the embodiment of justice), and not some moneygrubber, who must commit the final act of revenge. Rooster grudgingly admires her and relents.

Even through all this, Mattie remains a child. Around the campfire she insists on telling ghost stories as she had with her dad and little brother on their last coon hunt. She is a fine example of the archetype of the wise child who due to early trauma has developed an uncanny wisdom and yet remains playful and lighthearted in the midst of chaos.

"It's worth exploring why another adaptation of this novel might appear in 2010. To what moral crisis does True Grit speak? With what terms is it attempting to negotiate, in Francesco Casetti's words, the future?"

From a technical standpoint, the film is a well-integrated work of art. The sepia-toned cinematography and the mock-formal dialogue of the more proper characters is a delight, beautifully evoking the several dimensions of the mythic splendour of the Wild West. The Coen brothers' films are noted for their soundtracks and this one is no slouch either, an engaging vista of artful arrangements of traditional hymns underlining Mattie's moral fortitude.

True Grit manifests five of the Mindful Bard's criteria for films well worth seeing: 1) it provides respite from a sick and cruel world, a respite enabling me to renew myself for a return to mindful artistic endeavour; 2) it is about attainment of the true self; 3) it gives me tools which help me be a better artist; 4) it is authentic, original, and delightful; and 5) it makes me appreciate that life is a complex and rare phenomenon, making living a unique opportunity.

CLICK OF THE WRIST

Simplify, Simplify

We all wish life would be a little less complicated. And while we can't control everything, simplifying as many aspects of our lives as possible does help lighten our journey. This week is National Simplify Your Life Week, which means it's the perfect time to make that first step toward more peaceful living. Click through these links for some ideas on where, what, and how to simplify!

Find Your Score

We all want to simplify, in theory. But for some it's not a luxury, it's a necessity. This quiz, adapted from Marian Van Eyk McCain's *The Lilypad List*, provides an eye-opening peek into to how badly your body and spirit need you to slow down.

Simple Living Manifesto

Inspirational blogger and writer Leo Babauta's advice is to the point: "Identify what's most important to you . . . Eliminate everything else." In this article, he elaborates with 72 ideas or steps to help you simplify things in both small and large areas of your life. If nothing else, it's a great attitude check!

Simpler Finances

Money complicates everything. Here, Man vs. Debt blogger Adam Baker offers suggestions for simplifying finances—and for simplifying the way you look at finances. His motivation: simplifying your life, including the money aspects, leaves more time, energy, and resources for things you're passionate about. The rest of his blog has interesting insights, too.



AUSU UPDATE: JULY 29, 2011**Bethany Tynes, President****AUSU Joins ASEC!**

On Friday, July 15, AUSU was officially accepted into membership by the Alberta Students' Executive Council. ASEC is a provincial lobby group that now represents students from fourteen post-secondary institutes across Alberta, including schools from five of the six categories described in Alberta's Post-Secondary Learning Act. ASEC is focused on advocating on behalf of all post-secondary students at Alberta institutions, recognizing that each school has a unique student population and there is no such thing as a "normal" student. ASEC has recently been incredibly successful

in their efforts with government and media, having been the driving force behind the newly-launched Serving Communities Internship Program, which provides students with the opportunity to pay for their education through volunteer work. AUSU is incredibly excited to work with ASEC! For more information on ASEC, visit albertastudents.ca.

Meetings with CUPE 3911

CUPE 3911 is the union that represents our AU tutors, and for a very long time AUSU sought to meet with representatives from this union to discuss how we can work together to improve students' experiences at AU. A few months ago, we were delighted to have the opportunity to meet with members from the CUPE Executive, who expressed great support for students. Our AUSU Executive will now be meeting with CUPE on a quarterly basis to keep communication channels open and discuss our mutual concerns.

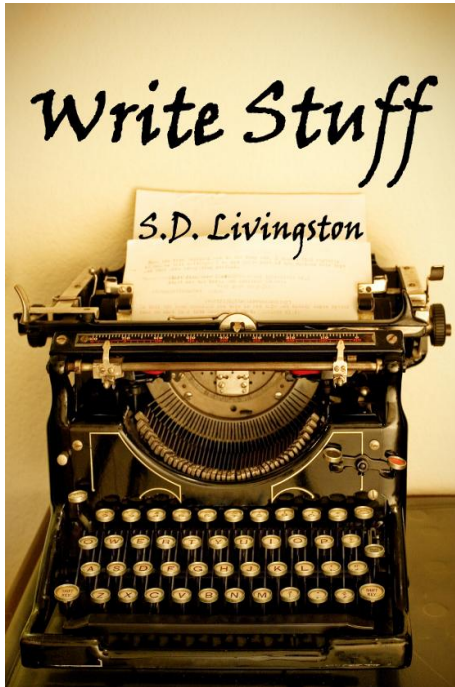
Relationship with AUGSA

AUSU is excited to see the growth and development that has happened in the AU Graduate Students' Association recently, and has also met with AUGSA to talk about how we can join forces to advocate on behalf of all AU students. AUSU will be meeting with AUGSA on a bimonthly basis from now on, with the two unions' presidents meeting on a monthly basis.

SmartDraw License Renewed

Did you know that as an AU student and AUSU member, you can get free software? SmartDraw is a design program that can allow you to create detailed charts and graphics. These can then be inserted into Word or PDF files or exported as JPG images so you can submit them to your tutor with your assignments! Contact our office to find out how YOU can download this program for free, and then let us know if it's useful to you! This is a program that AUSU has offered for a few years, but we have been informed that the price will be increasing drastically in the years to come. So check it out and let us know if it's a service you'd like to see continued, or if you'd rather we investigate other options.

This column is provided by AUSU to facilitate communication with its members. The Voice does not write or edit this section; all content has been exclusively and directly provided by AUSU, and any questions or comments about the material should be directed to ausu@ausu.org.



In Praise of Unpublished

Blogs. Self-publishing. Twitter. Customer reviews. These days, every thought and opinion we have can be published, in most cases instantly and globally. And it seems that because we *can* publish, there's a growing assumption that we should. But in this rush toward public exposure, we may be losing sight of the joys of writing for private consumption—or simply for ourselves.

More and more, publication is seen as the end goal of writing, whether it's a blog or a Big 6 bestseller. The urge is understandable. Sharing our words allows us to contribute to public discourse, to share our knowledge, to be noticed. Yet the benefits of recording our thoughts on paper (or on screen) exist even if the world never sees those scribbles. Indeed, private acts of writing can bring rewards that publication can't match.

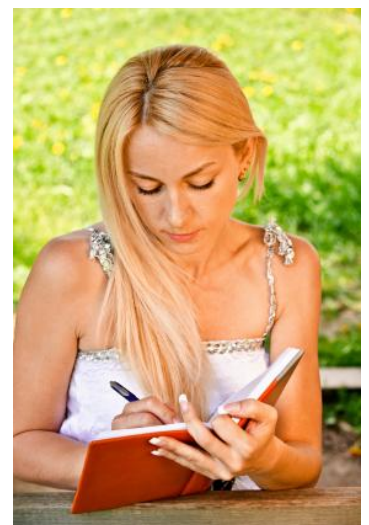
Long before the average person had access to easy publishing, diaries and letters were an intimate form of expression. Unless the letter writer was a politician or other public figure, words were intended for private eyes only; either the writer's or those of a few family and friends. Today, our diaries have shifted to blogs and Facebook postings, and our letters have taken the form of email.

It might seem like we're willing to share our most intimate thoughts in public, but most people still employ a healthy dose of self-censorship when posting online or sending email. There's always the chance that a boss or spouse might read a blog, or that an email might go viral, as one future mother-in-law recently discovered.

And it's that wall of self-awareness, no matter how thin, that can undermine the benefits of writing in a private diary, something known as the "Bridget Jones effect." As this *Guardian* article reported, psychologists have found that "putting feelings down on paper reduces activity in a part of the brain called the amygdala, which is responsible for controlling the intensity of our emotions."

Volunteers were asked to write for four consecutive days, 20 minutes each day. One group wrote about a "recent emotional experience," while another group wrote about neutral events. In the group that recorded private thoughts and emotions, whether in prose, poetry, or song lyrics, their writing had a clear effect on an area of the brain called the right ventrolateral prefrontal cortex: it "dampened down neural activity linked to strong emotional feelings." In other words, the ability to freely express their feelings in writing helped them deal with emotional distress.

Sharing your latest movie pick or vacation plans on Facebook or a blog is fine,



but how many of us are truly willing to reveal our innermost thoughts on family or politics or religion, our words flowing free and uncensored? And even if we were, how wise would that really be? Social networking can strengthen bonds, but the pages of a diary still offer the ultimate refuge to help unburden private thoughts. The pages can always be destroyed or deleted, while the emotional benefits remain.

“The ability to freely express [your] feelings in writing help[s] [you] deal with emotional distress.”

Even professional writers, those whose business it is to share their words with the world, can profit from private expression. Whether it’s a horror novel or an essay on US debt (to some, the same thing), writers often struggle with the invisible critic on their shoulders. Trying to get things perfect can lead to a creative block so sludge-like even a plumber can’t help, and it can be maddening to try to get the words rolling.

A useful strategy is to simply dump the words onto the page, and the only way to write with this absolute, uninhibited freedom is to write something no one will ever see—to focus on the act of flexing your writing muscles instead of fretting about the result. Some writers start their day with a set amount of throwaway words, and sites like [750words](#) give you an alternative to your own daily blog pages that you might forget to mark as private. I’m not sure about putting my uncensored ramblings into someone else’s care, but the site looks like a good alternative for those who want to tap out their daily writing exercise on the morning commute without accidentally leaving a paper notebook behind.

The freedom to publicly express ourselves in writing should be treasured. I’d rather wade through a million blogs about people’s holidays and Yorkshire terriers than face the spectre of a life without that liberty. Sometimes, though, there’s a whole lot of freedom in letting those words go unpublished.

DID YOU KNOW?



AU’s Advising Services

For first-time students, program selection and planning is a significant undertaking. But even if you’re well on your way to earning that degree or certificate, it’s important to revisit and revise your program plan continuously as circumstances and interests change.

It’s easy to get bogged down in the confusing swirl of prerequisites, program requirements, and transfer credit. Fortunately, AU’s [Advising Services](#) is there to help.

The advisors, who are available by phone, email, and in person at one of AU’s Centres, “can assist you in areas ranging from clarifying your undergraduate program requirements, to helping choose the next course for your program of studies.” They also can answer your questions about “university regulations and procedures” as well as “transfer credit evaluation.” Special academic advising is also available for specific programs.

For more information, visit the [Advising Services page](#), or fill out the [online contact form](#).



From Where I Sit

Hazel Anaka

Forgive and Forget

Families are a funny thing. They provide our genetic material, our roots, and our history. Books and movies portray the best and worst manifestations of families. The really dysfunctional ones (and which families aren't?) provide fodder for stand-up comedians and tell-all memoirs—not to mention the couches of both psychiatrists and late night talk show hosts.

When we're young, we compare our families to those of our friends. Inevitably their curfews are later, the allowances larger, the chores fewer, and the rules more elastic. But as adults we still compare. Their family appears closer, more supportive, more generous. Their Christmas get-togethers are befitting a Norman Rockwell painting. Even their alcoholic uncle is a funny drunk rather than a mean bully.

We wish our family was smaller or larger, nearer or further away, or more fun or more grounded. We get into spats, hold grudges, pass judgment. We wonder why that brother married what's-her-name or why that cousin can't hold a job. We question others' parenting skills or how they spend their money. Lord knows we wouldn't have bought that fill-in-the-blank or allowed our kid to pierce those particular parts. We would have put our foot down when the kid was first showing signs of . . .

Then, in moments of clarity, we finally learn that being a parent is hard work. There are triumphs and proud moments, but mostly it's a day in, day out slog of being loving but firm, of walking the talk, and of righting wrongs and misunderstandings. Or of asking questions—and accepting answers.

We learn that as important as friends may be, when the crunch comes we want and need our families. They are the ones at our bedsides; they are the ones praying for us. They are most likely to lend money in an emergency and forgive us when we act badly.

All of this came flooding back to me as a cousin lay critically ill in the hospital and then passed away. At age 54 his death is a merciful end to a lifetime of ill health and pain. All of us will think about the deceased, his family, and this time of decision making and closure. Death and funerals are not easy to cope with, and some are more able to rise to the occasion. We will cringe at the petty disagreements and inappropriate behaviour of some. We will be heartened by the hugs, warm words, and presence of others. We all act exactly as one would expect us to because people are flawed and behaviour is ingrained, and because children live what they learn and sometimes the lessons are skipped or poorly taught. Sometimes the lesson becomes more of a warning than an example.

Yet when all is said and done, these are our people, our tribe. For better or worse they are the ones connected to us by blood for all time. Because we are imperfect ourselves forgiving and forgetting is our only hope, from where I sit.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS DESK



At Home: Music Hath Charms

Serious illness doesn't seem like something one would want to sing about. But for many children, expressing their feelings and concerns about sickness, health, and treatments can be therapeutic. And few things help do that job better than Band Wagon 1, a mobile recording studio now in use at BC Children's Hospital in Vancouver, BC.

As *The Globe and Mail* [reports](#), the sophisticated studio allows children to create and preserve "songs, drumming and guitar riffs they come up with in music-therapy sessions." It is fully mobile, yet can produce "studio-quality recordings on the spot" and boasts software that can help kids "create layered pop tunes in the style of their music idols."

Best of all, children from any ward are now able to create music to cope with "pain, nausea or fatigue from treatments such as bone transplants" and sort out "intense feelings of anger, sadness or celebration." As hospital music therapist Erin Johnston told reporters, "Music is a really emotive therapy that we can use to allow them some means to express some of these high emotions."

Fundraising to create similar mobile studios nationwide will begin this fall.

Around the World: Memory Matters

Scientists have traditionally believed that as we age, the neurons in our brains decay and eventually die, causing us to gradually forget and lose focus. However, new research offers hope for the aging population: neural decay isn't necessarily permanent, and may even be reversible.

As *National Geographic's* Daily News Site [reports](#), scientists discovered that certain chemicals given to monkeys "blocked a brain molecule that slows the firing of the brain's nerve cells, or neurons, as we age—prompting those nerve cells to act young again."

Scientists believe that it's the interaction among neurons, facilitated by an appropriate neurochemical environment, that marks the difference between young brains and those of the elderly. This particularly makes a difference in the area of memory, because the neurons need to be able to "excite each other to keep working memories on the brain's slate."

The chemical used in the study would help keep the neurochemical environment healthy in order to promote neuron interaction.

The researchers are cautious but hopeful that the study may lead to drugs that improve working memory in humans.

CLASSIFIEDS

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

THE VOICE

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www.voicemagazine.org

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

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