

THE VOICE

MAGAZINE

Vol 19 Iss 32 2011-08-26

London Calling

Adventures abroad

Mediocre Muddle

Lebowitz on culture

Lunch Box

Beware the barn!

*Plus:
In Conversation With
Cruiscin Lan
and much more!*



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***The Voice
Magazine***

www.voicemagazine.org

1213, 10011 109th St. 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
Wanda Waterman

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](#).

The Voice does not share
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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indicate if we may publish your letter.



THIS WORLD: HOME AND AWAY, PART I

S.D. Livingston

This is the first of a two-part series on the author's recent jaunt to two of the most enduring cities on travellers' lists: London, England and Paris, France.



Big Ben, a London landmark.

London and Paris. The names conjure images of romance and history, of royalty and revolution. Until this summer they were places I'd only imagined seeing, but months of planning had paid off. On a cold July evening (5C damp, blustery degrees on the edge of the Atlantic), I found myself boarding a plane for Heathrow and adventure—and more than a few surprises.

Transatlantic flights are hardly what they used to be, but not even congealed airline eggs were enough to dim the anticipation. Our first surprise was Heathrow itself. Back in 2008, when the airport opened its shiny new Terminal 5, the result was chaos. Flights were cancelled and luggage belts were clogged. We weren't expecting that much confusion, but with almost a million passengers expected to fly through Heathrow that same weekend alone, we were braced for delays.

Not so. After a 15-minute trudge through customs lineups, we found our luggage already circling the carousel and our shuttle driver waiting. And that's when the true meaning of "population density" hit.

In Canada, most of us are used to wide open spaces. Our nation covers almost 10 million square kilometres, an area home to just over 34 million people. By contrast, the UK totals just under 244,000 square kilometres, yet holds nearly 63 million people. That's almost double the population in an area 40 times smaller. If you think you've seen traffic in Toronto, you haven't seen anything like the streets of London!

The famous red double-decker buses are everywhere, but so are something called Boris bikes. Nicknamed after London's mayor, Boris Johnson, they're part of the city's first large-scale public bike-hire plan. Some 400 bike docking stations have been set up across the city, and commuters simply pick up their rides at one station and drop them off at any other.

I've seen complaints that the sturdy grey bikes are clunky and less than appealing, but that sure didn't seem to affect their popularity. As cars and double-decker buses wheeled through roundabouts and switched lanes with a hair's breadth to spare, Boris bikes zipped between them, seeming to defy the laws of physics as they swirled in and out of sight in the sea of traffic. Businessmen in three-piece



Bikes, buses, cars, and pedestrians share London streets.

suits, college students, seniors—for thousands of people, Boris bikes were just a practical way to get around.

Yet in spite of the constant traffic and streams of buses, something was missing, and it took a couple of days to figure it out: the air didn't seem polluted. That's especially surprising since in April of this year

London hit its highest air pollution levels since 2003. The only answer I can think of turned out to be the thing that surprised me most.

London is the greenest city I've ever seen.

That may not be news if you've heard about the many famous parks in the city. Hyde Park alone comprises 350 acres and contains some four thousand trees. But what you may not expect is to be surrounded by tall, stately foliage along almost every street you find.

Not only that, but Londoners seem especially good at tucking green havens into the smallest, most unlikely places. Basement patios, narrow balconies, rooftops: every block we walked held several

green gems tucked between buildings or on stoops. On one busy street near our hotel (in the Fulham district), a tiny wrought-iron fence led to an unexpected oasis that seemed to stretch between apartment blocks for miles.

Historic sites, of course, are even more plentiful than trees, and if you're a first-time visitor with less than six months' free time, be prepared to narrow your must-do list. There simply aren't enough hours in a week—or even a month—to take it all in.

Besides gaping at major attractions like the Tower of London and Windsor Castle, we found unexpected bits of history everywhere we turned.

Like strolling past a school and noticing a small sign on the wall: "Beatrix Potter lived in a house on this site from 1866 to 1913." Or hopping off a bus to land in front of an ancient stone building that Henry VIII built for Anne Boleyn—one that she never saw completed, since he had her beheaded.

We also ventured out of the city and headed for the seaside in Lyme Regis, Dorset, braving the infamous British Rail system along the way. Now, I've followed BBC Radio and several UK papers for years, and I've heard the general rumbles of discontent from locals. I was prepared for

"London is the greenest city I've ever seen . . . Londoners seem especially good at tucking green havens into the smallest, most unlikely places. Basement patios, narrow balconies, rooftops: every block we walked held several green gems tucked between buildings or on stoops."



Sightseeing: Windsor Castle, as magnificent today as it was centuries ago.

nightmarish train schedules, cancellations, and all manner of transport havoc. But what a treat! The trains were clean and quiet, the routes and incoming trains clearly displayed, and, in a feat the TTC hasn't yet mastered, the announcements could actually be understood.

For some retail therapy we popped into Harrods, the London retail icon that's been at its current site, in one form or another, since 1849. Offering valet parking and designers from Alexander McQueen to Yves Saint Laurent, it seemed a sure spot for an hour of hushed elegance and upscale window shopping. Instead, we found a bewildering *Alice in Wonderland* atmosphere we were glad to escape.

"Harrods . . . was a cacophony of sight, sound, and heat that quickly drove us back to the relative sanctuary of the busy streets. Odd, to say the least, for a luxury store!"

The low ceilings were understandable given the older architecture, but temperatures varied wildly from one department to the next, with air-conditioned chill giving way to stuffy heat upon simply passing through an archway. The landings, all served by a central escalator, were gorgeous to look at but filled with piped music that mingled with competing songs from one level to the next. The effect was a cacophony of sight, sound, and heat that quickly drove us back to the relative sanctuary of the busy streets. Odd, to say the least, for a luxury store—and an experience that suddenly made Wal-Mart look like shopping nirvana!

But if there's one thing that stood out, that enchanted us beyond the sight of the Thames and the London Eye, it was the city of Bath. Two thousand years ago, Romans came here to relax in the only hot springs in Britain, and the remains of that spa allow visitors to walk on the same stones those ancient footsteps trod.

The city itself, though, was the unexpected marvel. Imagine stepping back in time to land in an 18th-century street, surrounded by stunning architecture and winding, cobbled streets everywhere you turn.



The City of Bath, a history and literature buff's dream.

From the Assembly Rooms to Jane Austen's residence to the massive stones at Avebury Circle, Bath is a history and literature buff's dream—and plans are already in the works for a return trip.

London's surprises—both good and bad—had barely been discovered before it was time to grab our passports and head for France, luckily missing the recent UK riots by days. Next week we'll board the ferry to Calais, stroll the streets of Paris, and find out what it's really like to dine at those famous sidewalk cafés!

IN CONVERSATION WITH . . .

Wanda Waterman



hue, Part II

hue is a Toronto-based indie band noted for its enthusiastic pop rock tunes, superlative sound production, and creative collaborations with a host of stellar acts (including Timbaland, We Are Wolves, The Wooden Sky, Two Hours Traffic, Said The Whale, Hollerado, Lights, and Mother Mother). Starting Fires is hue's second full-length album. Recently the band's leader, singer, and songwriter, Danny Paton, Jr., took the time to answer some of Wanda Waterman's questions about hue's past, present, and future.

Backgrounds

Andrew Schmidt, myself, my sister Jessica Paton, and Darcy Finck all grew up in London, Ontario. The boys met in high school. Andrew Jones grew up in Scarborough.

Andy and I started playing guitar together in grade nine, quickly learning beside each other and continuing to grow to this day. Andrew Jones and Darcy Finck played in many bands throughout high school, learning their way around the guitar.

Jessica and I grew up with the most loving parents possible. Our father played the Beatles, Bob Marley, Neil Young, and James Taylor on Sunday mornings and our mother made the greatest Italian meals, daily.

A Band Named hue

"Hue" initially stood for "Human Use of the Earth." It has transformed, and now we like to think that we're our own "hue" in the music industry—our own style and genre somewhere in the hues of music.

Rehearsals

Darcy and I live together in a loft-type second-floor apartment. The other members will show up and we'll have coffee on for the group. We'll sit and chat and catch up on the week, and



then naturally end up in Darcy's bedroom (our jam space). We'll jam for a few hours, floating ideas around until we feel good and finished. Usually we'll all go for food or at least a drink to wind down afterward.

You're so brand new

Through and through . . .

You called, you said it's alive

You said it's almost like the sun to ashes

You called, you said it's alive

You said it's almost like shy lashes"

From Starting Fires, "Shy Lashes"

Recently Spun

City and Colour: *Little Hell*

Tyler, The Creator: *Goblin*

Coldplay: "Charlie Brown"

Cut Copy: *Zonoscope*

Foo Fighters: *Wasting Light*

On the Horizon

We plan on touring across the country, getting a few videos on MuchMusic, and just trying to be heard in the Canadian music industry. We're going to work as hard as it takes to get to that point. Hopefully *Starting Fires* can do all this for us; we feel the album's strong enough for that.

DID YOU KNOW?

Student ID Cards



Studying by distance? You can still get student discounts at the movies, bookstore, or train station! According to the [AU Student Calendar](#), every "active Athabasca University student" is eligible to request a photo student identification card.

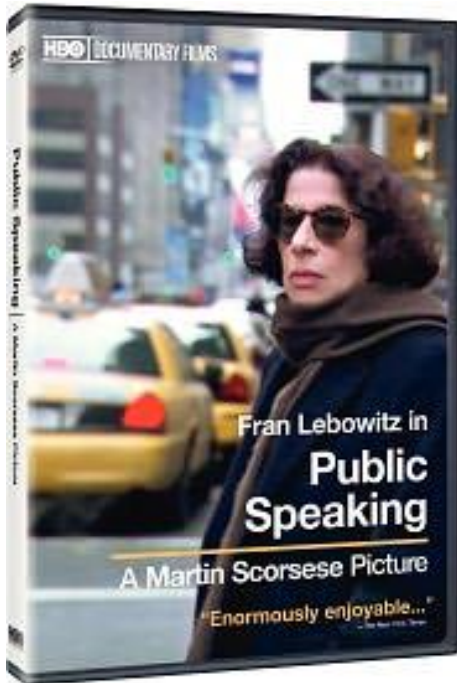
To apply, you need to complete the required form and submit a photo. Acceptable photos are "taken by an Athabasca University staff member whenever possible."

However, if circumstances require it the Registrar's Office will accept a digital photo together with a copy of your driver's license, or a passport photo. If not taken by AU staff, photos must be signed by a guarantor, someone "who can attest to your identity." Further instructions can be found [here](#).

Still have last year's ID card? Don't throw it away, as AU students are only eligible for one card during the course of their studies. To keep the card current from year to year, active students may "request a date sticker from the Office of the Registrar, AU Edmonton, or AU Calgary."

THE MINDFUL BARD

Wanda Waterman



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

Film: *Public Speaking* (HBO 2011)

Director: Martin Scorsese

Genre: Documentary

"The primary distinction of the artist is that he must actively cultivate that state which most men, necessarily, must avoid: the state of being alone."

James Baldwin

"The first thing I do in the morning is brush my teeth and sharpen my tongue."

Dorothy Parker

Gay Connoisseurship, Democracy in Art, and the Progressive Dumbing Down of Culture

In school, Fran Lebowitz was punished for reading books of sardonic essays behind her textbooks and laughing out loud. When her own essays finally got the attention they deserved, she was offered six-figure sums for books she hadn't even written yet. Evidently the educational system not only fails to nurture genius, it also punishes and attempts to sabotage it.

There are other influences besides the educational system that, according to Lebowitz, have led to the dumbing down of our culture. One is the fact that art and culture aficionados don't know enough about culture to know that it's now being endlessly recycled to the point where it is, in Lebowitz's words, "death-dealing." Everything looks new because no one knows about the past.

Another contributing factor is the democratization of the arts. Democracy has no place in culture, says Fran; culture must be an aristocracy of talent, and those who don't make the grade must be excluded and forbidden to contribute. (She tells one roomful of young people that they've been given far too much self-esteem and should not be producing books.)

Still a third element that contributed to the increasing stupidity of American culture was the AIDS crisis. Many have remarked on how this epidemic took out hordes of New York's best artists in a very short time, but few have taken note of the impact of the loss of one of the most subtle and advanced audiences imaginable, people who were sensitive and well-informed, manifesting a highly sophisticated aesthetic. According to Fran, when this audience died the subtleties and details that made up New York's most phenomenal films, music, performances, writing, and art no longer mattered. It was okay to be mediocre or less because the upper echelon had disappeared.

One great virtue of Fran Lebowitz's brain is the simplicity and brevity of her speech. Another is that she refuses to admit the old, worn-out clichés, poses, attitudes, and ways of thinking and is perpetually open to seeing and talking about the new in ways that are so simple but which haven't occurred to anyone else.

One would think a documentary about a writer wouldn't pack much visual oomph, but Scorsese has done a wonderful job of creating atmosphere in this film. The more visually iconic aspects of New York City providing an inviting backdrop, couching the fascinating Lebowitz with her sartorial style, her rapid speech, and the mesmerizing flip of her hands.

Public Speaking manifests six of the Mindful Bard's criteria for films well worth seeing: 1) it is authentic, original, and delightful; 2) it poses and admirably responds to questions that have a direct bearing on my view of existence; 3) it stimulates my mind; 4) it gives me artistic tools; 5) it makes me want to be a better artist; and 6) it makes me appreciate that life is a complex and rare phenomenon, making living a unique opportunity.

CLICK OF THE WRIST

Oh Hungry?

Harvest season is approaching, but right now many adventurous food-lovers aren't thinking about the earth's bounty. That's because it's also fair time, which means the chance to sample some of the most bizarre concoctions dreamed up by cooks with a vat of oil and contempt for the arteries. One of this summer's big hits has been deep-fried Kool-Aid (yes, the drink). Intrigued? Disturbed? Check out this week's links for more extraordinary food experiences.

Food Exhibition

Ever wanted to sample all of the artery-clogging offerings at your local fair—or at the CNE? This blogger recounts—with pictures—his forays into fried cherry aid, fried mac and cheese, and a Krispy Kreme burger.

A Peck of Dirt

The research is mixed on whether or not accidentally consuming dirt is healthy—but there's nothing but looks holding you back from one trend in haute cuisine, edible dirt.

Time magazine explains.

Sushi Bar

In the sushi world, presentation matters. But one chef takes it to new limits: she serves it on the (mostly) naked body of a woman. From *Vanity Fair*, one writer's experiences of an evening spent as a naked sushi model.





From Where I Sit

Hazel Anaka

Beware the Barn

It's probably easier for me to get excited about back to school season because I don't have to buy shoes, clothes, and school supplies for anyone. When I wander the special displays of stationery I can cherry-pick a few items for my own use and reminisce about the rest. I can avoid the \$12 three-ring binders because I know that the price is insane. There is no one whining, begging, or guiltting me into buckling under the pressure.

I can grab a few packages of lined refill sheets for 25 cents each because I use them in my project binders. If I needed a new ruler, now would be the time to buy it; there are plastic, wooden, and metal to choose from. I'm not sure if the scented ones are still available, but do we really need another product with off-gases?

This is also a good time to buy subject notebooks. I scored five—one of each colour—of Hilroy's 80-page ones for 15 cents each. We use one by the main telephone to keep a log of incoming and outgoing calls. I use others for specific projects. Of course there are three-subject notebooks and ones with fancy covers or brand names; expect to pay more, much more, for those.

There are also huge selections of backpacks and lunch kits. I bought myself the coolest purple and black quilted insulated lunch bag for those days when

I'm away from home. It looks more like a purse than a lunch bag. There's room for a couple of ice packs, a zip-lock bag of veggies, a piece of fruit, a snack bar, and a frozen entree.

A far cry from the old metal barn-shaped one I had in grade three. The roof part held the Thermos bottle. The humiliation of it all! I can't remember what the cool girls had that year, but I guarantee it wasn't a barn. What is the price of fitting in? Thank goodness Grady takes a *Cars* one to daycare. Mind you, a two-year-old isn't likely to lobby and plead for what "all the other kids have."

When does the green-eyed monster rear its ugly head? At this age Grady has no idea whether he's wearing Nike or Puma shoes and Quiksilver t-shirts. Enjoy it while it lasts, parents, because before long he'll be driving the buying decisions.

And maybe for parents that's the crux of the whole matter. Pick your battles. Buy only what you can afford. Teach your children about value, doing without, and the need to compromise. Don't allow yourself to be bullied into buying things without value or things that are outrageously priced because of the hot-this-minute movie star or cartoon character emblazoned on them. But splurge on something so the kid feels good and fits in.

When you're shopping this fall, remember my barn lunch kit. Save on the basics like refills and notebooks, and then get one really cool item. Your kids will thank you, from where I sit.

CHRONICLES OF CRUISCIN LAN

Wanda Waterman



Green Light



In her [travel piece](#) this issue, S.D. Livingston notes how Londoners seem to have mastered the art of growing greenery in the smallest of spaces. If you've got an apartment, or a place with limited room, consider joining the growing trend of container gardenening.

Plants are grown in containers—anything from clay pots to wood trenches to old tires—either indoors or outdoors.

Concerned about the coming cold weather? This informative [article](#) from the University of Virginia's Cooperative Extension program has tips on how to grow winter crops, from lettuce to tomatoes to sprouts. And this [page](#) offers suggestions on helping your plants survive during the cold Canadian winters.

Happy gardening!

Garden Home

AUSU UPDATE: JULY 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.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS DESK



At Home: Word Play

Playing a few rounds of Scrabble during family game night—or carrying on a slower-paced game with strangers via Facebook or a smart phone app—is usually a casual activity. But for serious Scrabble players, it’s all about the game. In fact, they’re so well-practiced in the art of Scrabble play that it’s actually changed the way they read.

As the CBC [reports](#), a recent study at the University of Calgary indicates that “[competitive] Scrabble players process words differently than the rest of us.”

We look at “sound, spelling, and meaning” when we’re processing and reading words, one of the professors involved told reporters. On the other hand, she pointed out, the Scrabble players use “significant flexibility in the tools they use to read words . . . [including] orientation [vertical or horizontal] of the word as well.” Researchers believe it’s the “intense training techniques” that cause this shift.

It’s not clear why the difference exists, but Siri Tillekeratne, who leads the Calgary Scrabble Club, has an idea. He told reporters that he “believes the competitive way the game combines word meanings and mathematics makes it special.”

Around the World: Mama Plessey

Reptiles lay eggs and mammals give birth to their young, and scientists believed that the same rules applied to the prehistoric ancestors of today’s animals. Previous paleontological research has uncovered nests of dinosaur eggs, suggesting that the giant reptiles were in line with the “norm.” But what of plesiosaurs, the giant reptilian sea creatures who shared the earth with the dinos?

A recent discovery is rocking the paleontological world. As the CBC [reports](#), a fossil of a pregnant plesiosaur—a plesiosaur “with the remains of a fetus inside her”—was uncovered, “providing the first proof that these prehistoric reptiles gave birth to their young rather than laying eggs.” The fossil had been unearthed for nearly 25 years, but only recently were funds available to fully excavate it. It’s been dated at between 72 million and 78 million years old.

Previously, scientists were unsure whether plesiosaurs would have ventured “onto land [to] lay eggs like other reptiles or [given] birth in the water like whales.”

Scientists speculate that plesiosaurs may also have had other practices similar to those of modern whales, like “[forming] social groups and [tending] their young.”

CLASSIFIEDS

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

THE VOICE

1213, 10011 109th St. 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, Katie D'Souza, S.D. Livingston, Wanda Waterman

www.voicemagazine.org

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

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