

THE VOICE

MAGAZINE

Vol 19 Iss 39 2011-10-14

Changing English SOS

LOL or WTH?

Inner Core

Don't take offense

Magician

Artistic illusions

*Plus:
From Where I Sit
In Conversation With
and much more!*



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***The Voice
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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



Hold Fast

They say that no news is good news, and when it comes to what we read online or see on TV, that's often the case. In fact, sometimes our news consumption can be such a downer that we almost want to avoid it. Doesn't *anything* nice happen anymore?

Actually, it does. They're hidden, but they're there: inspiring accounts of change, growth, or success, whether big or small; feel-good news stories highlighting the honesty, generosity, and compassion of the human person; and those stories of personal triumph that spur us on to pursue our own goals with a little more vigour.

Sometimes the quietest stories are the ones that can make the most noise in our hearts. This past week everyone's been talking about Steve Jobs—and the way his creative genius altered the techno-scape forever. But have you heard the story of Daniel Schechtman?

Schechtman, a 70-year-old Israeli scientist, was awarded the Nobel Prize for chemistry last week for his work in quasicrystals, crystalline structures that form in unnatural patterns. As you'd expect, the award followed decades of research, experimentation, and observation.

As you might not expect, many of those years he spent being ridiculed by his peers and others in the scientific world. In fact, he told reporters that he was “laughed at” and that at one point his research group kicked him out, telling him that he “brought shame” on them. He was even labelled a “quasi-scientist.” Yet, convinced he was on the right path, Schechtman persevered—and his discoveries have “fundamentally altered how chemists conceive of solid matter,” the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences announced.

One of the things that amazed me about Schechtman's story was his inner strength. He wasn't just convinced that he was right, he also was at peace with the knowledge that the scientific community wasn't standing behind him (or that it was even actively attacking him). In fact, he told reporters that he “never took [the criticism and insults] personally.”

What a role model for today!

Criticism is never pleasant, but it's bound to surface in anyone's life. Whether it's the in-laws telling us we're too old to go back to school, or a friend suggesting we're stupid to quit the good job to go work at the non-profit, or a family member insisting we're crazy to have a big family and become a stay-at-home mom, we're going to get flack for our life choices. If we go online, everyone has an opinion, and no one seems to like whoever's on the disagreeing side.

“Typically, we react by expending ourselves being offended, directing our energies outward. But in the end this only hurts us; emotionally and spiritually we become drained, leaving little remaining for the journey ahead.”

It's so easy to take it personally. So we vent—privately or semi-publicly—against those people who have issues with us. But is that the healthiest response?

Truly dealing with unwanted criticism requires so much more than just “not letting it get us down.” It begs for a core of inner strength, one that relies on what's inside rather than on the reaction of those around us. One that allows us to hold firmly to our beliefs and decisions, yet at the same time acknowledge that some aren't going to like what we're doing.

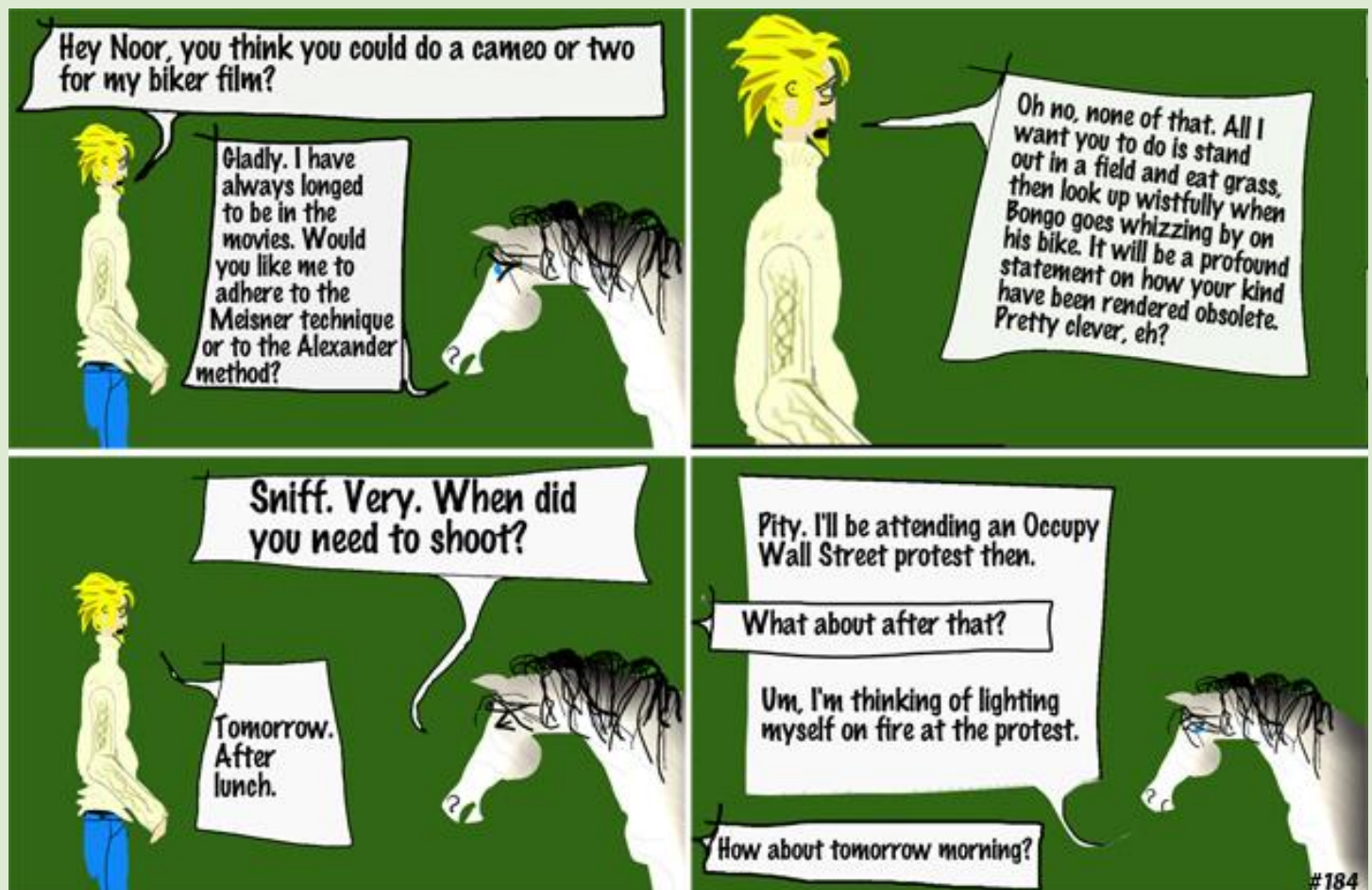
One that doesn't insist that everyone be on our side—and one that is at total peace amidst the frowns.

Typically, we react by expending ourselves being offended, directing our energies outward. But in the end this only hurts us; emotionally and spiritually we become drained, leaving little remaining for the journey ahead.

Instead, we might look inward for interior strength, searching for peace inside rather than outside. With firm convictions and that inner security, there's no telling what we might discover.

CHRONICLES OF CRUISCIN LAN

Wanda Waterman



IN CONVERSATION WITH . . .

Wanda Waterman

**J.D. Miner**

J.D. Miner is a distinctive alternative folk ensemble from B.C. It now consists of singer and songwriter Darryl Klassen, who also can play just about anything, Joe Worst on bass, and Chad Joiner on fiddle, mandolin, clarinet, and guitar. Honorary lifetime member Joel Klingler, who writes songs and plays mandolin and guitar, also joins them on their most recent album, *Coal Train*. Their sound is as firmly rooted in traditional genres as it is informed by wisdom and enriched with musical prowess.

Worst and Joiner are both classically trained and Darryl is a consummate musical autodidact. All three Miners enthusiastically embrace outdoor life and the innocence (and plain good sense) of a certain bygone era.

Recently, band member Darryl Klassen took the time to talk with me about the new album, the Age of Steam, and socialism vs. capitalism. (Read the 2008 *Voice* [interview](#) with the group.)

The Age of Steam

Coal Train is J.D. Miner's second album (read the *Voice* [review](#) of their first, *Ain't No Ordinary Hillbilly*). It's a lovely, poignant, and informed tribute to coal and steam-powered trains, an era to which many in our stressed and oil-weary economy often cast a longing eye.

When I mentioned the latest "steampunk" craze to Klassen he admitted he'd never heard of it, which makes the timeliness of this album all the more remarkable. Those who unknowingly have their finger on the pulse of change are more likely to be harbingers, not followers.

"I've had a fascination with steam engines since I was a kid," Klassen says. "I remember them, those big clouds of smoke and steam that would surround you if you were on an overpass as they passed under you. That hissing steam and cracking sound from cooling metal at the stations, those haunting whistles at night in the rain . . ."

Even this comparatively primitive technology generates wonder today. "Those old engines were massive," Klassen muses. "And they would go! Many were clocked at over 160 kilometres an hour. What a rush that would have been—virtually no headlights, barrelling into the night . . . Enough already."

The memories are sweet, and even recollections of childhood follies are tinged with tenderness: “We used to play chicken on our bikes in front of them at an uncontrolled crossing. One engineer got so mad he threw a hunk of coal at me as he sped by.” Klassen thoughtfully adds, “Poor guy.”

The Right Combination

One thing that has always impressed me about Miner music is the fullness of sound and the melodic richness achieved with such spare instrumentation—a singular mission for the arranger, to be sure. When I asked why J.D. Miner remains in trio form after the partial retreat of Joel Klingler and the addition of Chad Joiner, Klassen articulated a very sound repudiation of the “three’s company” maxim: “For me a trio is the best of all combinations. There is enough happening to provide a nice full sound, but the instruments all stay distinct and clear. There is enough backup for each player to take solos.”

The largest group Klassen ever played in had six musicians, and he claims that this led to a lot of musical shoving, jostling, and plowing under. He notes that a trio greatly reduces the logistical complexity of touring, performing, and recording. However, J.D. Miner did invite a few guests, including the consummate drummer Ron Briggs, to perform with the group and record on some of the tracks on *Coal Train*.

Wall Street, Bay Street, the Communist Bloc

Among the things that make J.D. Miner music so attractive in the first place are the rustic homespun simplicity of their aesthetic, the socially conscious mindset behind it, and the ability to see both sides of the coin. This shines directly through the obvious messages of some songs, but also indirectly, in the aura of compassion and gratitude for simple things.

“I’m actually quite serious about the ‘lock up the bankers’ reference in ‘Cowboy Rap,’” Miner says. “It amazes me that it’s taken this long for people to start pointing the finger where it needs to be pointed—Wall Street and Bay Street.

“I’m not a rabid socialist; I travelled through East Germany when it was still part of the Communist Bloc, and the difference even in the condition of the fields between there and West Germany was mind-boggling.

But flip the coin, and voila: “You don’t need to be very smart to see where this capitalism thing has led, and continues to lead us. Fewer and fewer people own more and more. So they underwrite politicians to keep the system working for them and hire spin doctors to convince everybody else (maybe even themselves) that this is how it has to work. It’s all such a crock.”

(To be continued next week.)

Why a trio? According to J.D. Miner band member Darryl Klassen, “[A] trio is the best of all combinations. There is enough happening to provide a nice full sound, but the instruments all stay distinct and clear.”



From Where I Sit

Hazel Anaka

Does It Count?

A governance board that I sit on held a recent retreat at the Fantasyland Hotel at the West Edmonton Mall. Because I'm quite new to this group and our regular meetings are months apart, I didn't know my colleagues very well.

Luckily, breaking bread with people is a time-honoured tradition for increasing comfort levels and getting to know one other. That was as true at L2 Grill and in our meeting room as it was when cave dwellers shared roots, berries, and the odd woolly game.

The tasty, hot meals and coffee time snacks provided by the hotel catering staff were a big hit with all present. We all drooled over a particularly large and decadent dessert: a wedge of raspberry pie with a latticework pastry top, served with the requisite dollop of whipped cream, puddle of sauce, and stick of white chocolate, all artfully arranged.

This delicious conclusion to the meal got a couple of the men sitting near me reminiscing about their mothers' baking and some of their favourite treats. The memories were vivid and warm, the details as clear as though it had all happened yesterday.

Finally I could stand it no longer. I said, "If I knew how excited middle-aged men got remembering their mother's cooking, I'd have tried harder as a mother!"

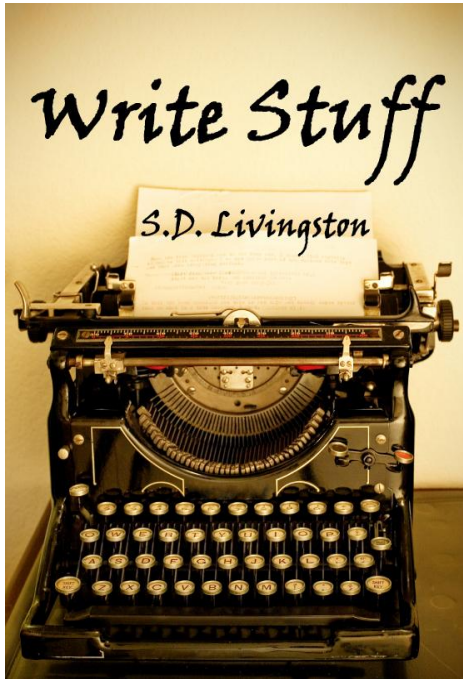
They looked at me and burst into laughter. When the laughter subsided they asked, "How old are your kids? What do they remember, macaroni and cheese?"

As much as I enjoy providing a laugh in any situation, I was also deadly serious. These men are a decade or two older than my 33-year-old son. But I dare say he couldn't conjure up any sentimental (or other) memories about any particular dish or dessert I might have prepared during his childhood. Though he does get emotional when talking about his Baba's perogies and pereshke.

As expected, this mother felt guilty. I wondered whether my kids had been cheated of vital memories and were forever scarred. My baking adventures were pretty well limited to banana bread when I couldn't stand the waste of overripe bananas, and some muffins when zucchini the size of a small baby were foisted upon me.

I have to console myself with the notion, the prayer, really, that I was able to do other things that dazzled and impressed my kids. Surely to God, food isn't the only way to a child's heart! But maybe I underestimate my kids—and myself.

Does it count that I had many roles in the public eye? That I operate a combine every fall? That I wrote a book? That I role model a happy marriage? That I am a well-intentioned woman who did what she could? It'll have to, from where I sit.



Glistening Prose

LOL. ROFL. YMMV. If these initialisms have you scurrying for the comfort of your Strunk and White, you're not alone. It's popular these days to bemoan the falling standards of written language. Literacy, punctuation, and grammar have slipped into the morass of text speak and misspelled blogs. Or have they? When it comes to the written word, holding onto the good old days is a losing battle—and one that shouldn't even be fought.

Language is a constantly evolving thing, with new words being coined all the time. In the 14th century it was words like *glisten*, in use well before Shakespeare penned “All that glisters is not gold” in *The Merchant of Venice*. The modern version of the word retains its original meaning, but should we really protest when jewellery ads promise that their diamonds will *glitter*?

If that's the case, then we ought to give students a failing grade for writing *island* instead of *eyland*—the original spelling, as this fascinating [Sunday Times article](#) points out.

Make no mistake, spelling matters. But only for the larger matter of consistency. The main goal of writing is to make ourselves understood, whether we're trying to entertain someone or write a manual on how to fly a plane. Consistency enhances that understanding, and we'd be lost without it. After all, if I randomly label the control panel *altitude*, *altitewd*, and *alt2d*, how the heck will you know whether you're about to crash into a mountain? Likewise, if everyone knows that YMMV is a fast, easy way of saying your results might vary from mine, then what's the problem with using it?

Perhaps it's not the change itself we're worried about, but the dizzying pace of it. For the English language, though, that's nothing new. A special [report](#) from the National Science Foundation notes that “while Japanese has changed relatively little over 1,000 years, English evolved rapidly in just a few centuries.”

We've borrowed words from Latin, Norse, French, and more, and altered them to suit our needs. And if YMMV seems foreign to you, just imagine how poor Chaucer would feel if he spotted the word *sweet* on a Hallmark card, when his classic works had forever enshrined it as *soote* (or so he may have thought).

Should we rely on the experts, then? Pull out our Strunkenwhite, as it's affectionately known, and point indignantly to the rules? No, because the “rules” are only based on accepted usage—and what's considered acceptable depends on the way people use language at different periods in time.

Never end a sentence with a preposition? Maybe not if you're writing in Latin, but it's fine in English. Never split infinitives? That one's been debunked too. Even the illustrious team of Strunk and White have fallen in esteem these days. For writers that rail against the use of passive construction, they use it in the very sentence that advises against it, as the Language Log [illustrates](#).

And one half of that team, E.B. White, is guilty of a 21 per cent passive-construction rate in his introduction to *Letters of E.B. White*. By comparison, studies of contemporary journals found that the highest rate of passive-construction use was 13 per cent.

Perhaps the last word should go to the *Chicago Manual of Style*, in October's online Q & A. When a reader asks about singular vs. plural subjects, the *Chicago* editors end their reply with this: "We prefer that you make up whatever rule you like. We are going to take an aspirin and lie down."

Editors and writers everywhere are surely thinking, "LOL."

CLICK OF THE WRIST

Eternal Life

Last week marked the 60th anniversary of the death of Henrietta Lacks, an indigent African-American woman whose cells changed modern medicine. The fascinating story of Henrietta, and her cells, abounds with ethical and moral controversy. Exploring these links will intrigue you—and get you debating!

The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks

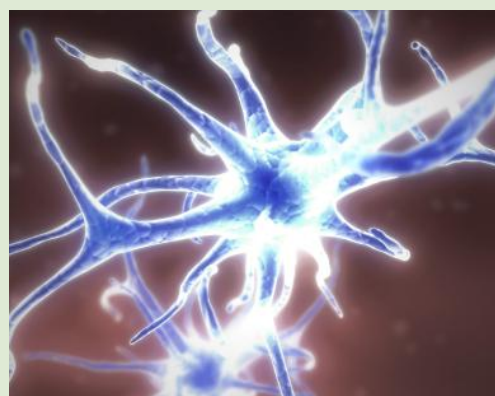
Henrietta's cells are the cornerstone of decades of medical breakthroughs. But who was the woman behind the cells, and how does her story factor into the ethical drama? Science writer Rebecca Skloot was determined to find out. Her quest for the truth resulted in a fascinating tale of ethics, legal rights, socio-economic thought, race relations, and medical miracles. The *Voice* review of Skloot's book sheds some light on this excellent and thought-provoking non-fiction gem.

A Chat with George Stroumboulopoulos

In April 2010, *Immortal Life* author Rebecca Skloot appeared on *George Stroumboulopoulos Tonight* to talk about Henrietta's amazing legacy—and the ethics of science and journalism. Click to watch a video of the interview.

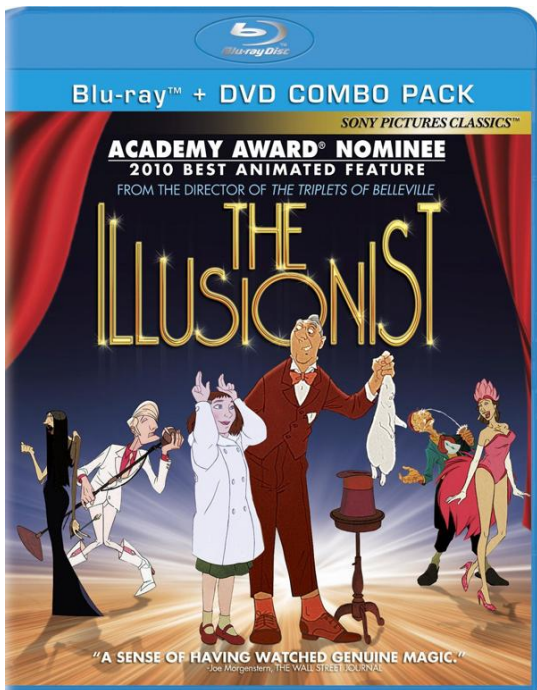
Follow That Cell

Most of us have difficulty picturing what's happening inside us on a cellular level. If you want a visual on some of the cell processes referenced in the Skloot book and appearing in the ethical debate surrounding Henrietta Lacks' cells, check out this unique website. The animated "movies" were created by a biologist and artist who wanted to provide a close-up view of what goes on inside us every day.



THE MINDFUL BARD

Wanda Waterman



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

Film: *The Illusionist* (Sony Pictures Classics 2010)

Director: Sylvain Chomet

Original Script: Jacques Tati (adapted by Sylvain Chomet)

Genre: Animated

The Magic of Magic Dispelled: Portrait of the Artist as a Travelling Magician

Tatischeff, a has-been magician, is performing his tired magic act at a hall in Paris. Big in the small time and small in the big time, he shares the stage with a number of disparate acts. He's ordered to fill in for the aptly named Billy Boy and the Britoons, who are a tad late, so he continues to try to come up with new

tricks for an increasingly hostile crowd until at last the rockers arrive and he's hustled out.

The fans scream as the Roxy Music clones belt out their ballads and go into contortions designed to make young girls wiggle and squirm (despite the fact that, as we discover backstage, girls really aren't their cup of tea). Tatischeff must close the show, but then the curtain rises to reveal naught but a grandma and her bespectacled grandson in the audience. The boy makes it clear that he knows exactly how the tricks are accomplished and tries to tell Grandma, who quickly hushes him up.

Real magic entails a manipulation of natural forces by means of forbidden (at least forbidden by organized religion) power. Tatischeff's magic only tries to recreate the sense of wonder experienced by our simpler selves when we first witness the unexpected.

At one other venue he meets an amiable drunken Scotsman whose pure pleasure in life is something admirable in itself, even if he is a tippler. This bare-bottomed, kilted, loving, atavistic, bon vivant makes no snobbish distinctions in his joyful consumption of the entertainment arts; rock n' roll is to be revelled in as much as his traditional Highland dancing, or even Tatischeff's tricks.

I love this Scotsman more than anyone else in the film. He doesn't ask the magic to be real, but wants only to be delighted by it. He represents half of an artist's followers—the ones who simply love you and all that you do, who revel in your performances, who adore you unconditionally, and who hold none of your faults against you. This type of consumer can be very uplifting and encouraging in a line of work that needs big shoulders. On the other hand it can tempt you to vice and a lack of self-discipline.

The rest of your followers truly believe that what you are doing is magic and not sleight of hand. This group spurs you on to greater and greater feats and demands more and more, but eventually becomes distracted by reality and wanders off after someone else who promises more magic. Thus you have worked yourself to death for nothing.

This sector is represented by the Gaelic-crooning Alice, the poor little drudge of a girl who cleans the rooms at the pub on the Hebrides island where Tatischeff is staying. The Scotsman has brought him there to help celebrate the arrival of electricity on the island.

When Tatischeff makes Alice's soap bigger she is amazed, and immediately puts all her faith in him. She then appears on the boat that takes him back to the mainland and expects him to magically produce a ticket for her.

What can he do? Alice becomes his unofficial ward. To humour her, or perhaps because her admiration is a salve to his oft-wounded ego, he continues to knock himself out to keep her illusion alive, even at the cost of his own health.

After all, isn't this why he became a magician? To create illusions?

Alice is not unlike those who believe that artistic creation is just play, yet have no idea that many of us go without and often work at menial jobs in order to be able to go on providing them with the illusions that buoy them up.

The sadness of Tatischeff and his essential solitude are so beautifully couched in exquisite portrayals of the essential sweetness of life. This film is a visual and aural feast for the distinguishing film viewer's palate.

The Illusionist fulfills eleven 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 harmoniously unites art with social action, saving me from both seclusion in an ivory tower and slavery to someone else's political agenda; 5) it provides respite from a sick and cruel world, a respite enabling me to renew myself for a return to mindful artistic endeavour; 6) it is about attainment of the true self; 7) it inspires an awareness of the sanctity of creation; 8) it displays an engagement with and compassionate response to suffering; 9) it makes me want to be a better artist; 10) it gives me tools of compassion, enabling me to respond with compassion and efficacy to the suffering around me; and 11) it makes me appreciate that life is a complex and rare phenomenon, making living a unique opportunity.

"Writers and people who had command of words were respected and feared as people who manipulated magic. In latter times I think that artists and writers have allowed themselves to be sold down the river. They have accepted the prevailing belief that art and writing are merely forms of entertainment. They're not seen as transformative forces that can change a human being; that can change a society . . . It's not the job of the artist to give the audience what the audience wants. If the audience knew what they needed, then they wouldn't be the audience. They would be the artists. It is the job of artists to give the audience what they need."

Alan Moore

AUSU UPDATE: AUTUMN 2011

Bethany Tynes, President



Update on AUSU awards program

AUSU has long had a student awards program to recognize outstanding students and assist those in need. Over the course of the last couple years, though, we've sought to revamp and revise our awards portfolio to improve existing awards and add new ones! We now have a wide array of bursaries to support students in need (including our popular computer and travel bursaries), scholarships to recognize students' outstanding academic achievements, and merit-based awards to recognize students' exceptional abilities and extra-curricular activities. Some awards are open to application at any time of year, while many have semi-annual deadlines. Our next major awards deadline is November 1st, so make sure you [check our site](#) for more information and get your application in by then!

AUSU newsletter hitting mailboxes near you . . .

Every four to six months, AUSU publishes a printed newsletter full of helpful information for students and updates on what the Union is working on. The newsletter is drafted by AUSU's Executive Director with assistance from the AUSU Media Committee. Our most recent newsletter has been mailed out, and if it hasn't reached you yet, keep an eye on your mailbox, because it should arrive soon. If you just can't wait to see it, though, you can also [e-mail our office](#) for a PDF copy.

Watch for a new AUSU website coming soon!

Our website has served us long and well, but it is starting to show its age in some areas, so we're preparing to give our site a full facelift! We are currently just in the planning stages, but we're hopeful that within the next couple of months, we'll be able to announce a grand unveiling of our new site. We'll be making sure that our new and improved site is easier to navigate, with slick new menus and a contemporary look and feel. We want our site to provide dynamic content and updates so that it's a place that you, as an AU student, WANT to visit regularly! If you have suggestions on content you'd like to see on our website, please get in touch with us to share your ideas.

Have you heard . . .

Have you heard that we still have some of our awesome 2011 AUSU Handbook/Planners available? Some of the information in these little books is priceless when it comes to helping AU students navigate the University and our services—but they're free for you, just for being an AUSU member! We even mail them right to your door. All you have to do is ask!

And have you heard about our SmartDraw program? We've been arranging for a license for our students to use this software for the last few years. It lets you create detailed charts and insert them into your assignments (even ones you submit as Word or PDF documents). The company has warned us, though, that there will be a massive price increase next year, so we want to know if our students feel that the software is a help to them, or if they'd rather have us look into other options. Get your copy today, and let us know what you think.

Get in touch with us

Have comments or questions about AUSU or anything in this column? Feel free to get in touch with AUSU President Bethany Tynes at president@ausu.org. You can also e-mail our office at ausu@ausu.org or call 1-800-788-9041 ext. 3413. We'd love to hear from you!

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DID YOU KNOW?

Open Access Week



As more and more students reject traditional learning models, a more open-minded approach to educational delivery is becoming popular. In recognition of the need for universal access to educational materials, Open Access Week was born. The event, which provides presentations, activities, and resources, is dedicated to “promoting Open Access as a new norm in scholarship and research.”

The 4th annual Open Access Week is coming up October 24-30, 2011. Events include seminars, workshops, conferences, addresses, and discussions, and are hosted by universities and organizations across the globe. Many of the events are available via online delivery.

Athabasca University will be hosting five of the week's events; topics range from challenges arising from social learning platforms to creating cohesive learning from fractured media to the sustainability of OER. For more information on these presentations, which will be webcast, visit AU's Open Access page. The page is also a goldmine of open access-related activities and resources.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS DESK



At Home: Hands Off

Let's face it: air travel isn't what it used to be. No longer the luxury experience of decades ago, it's now often an ordeal to be endured. Passengers frequently complain about the smaller seats, reduced services, and lack of amenities. In fact, they're so keen on keeping what few perks are left that they can get quite possessive of them.

For example, what happened on one Canadian flight recently. As the *Edmonton Sun* [reports](#), a plane set to fly from Montreal to Winnipeg was delayed two hours when a fight broke out between two passengers "who were brawling over a pair of headphones."

One of the passengers "sat on the armrest of a seat and broke his neighbour's headphones," a police spokesperson told reporters. The fight escalated, and a flight attendant attempting to intervene was injured.

Eventually two pilots from the flight had to step in and break up the scuffle. After the delay the flight resumed without incident, although one of the brawling passengers "was kicked off the flight" and has been charged with several offenses, including resisting arrest.

Around the World: The Curse of the Jewels

It sounds like the plot of a *Nancy Drew* novel: a fraudulent psychic using false readings to scam her clients out of money. But truth is stranger than fiction, and this real-life drama followed a similar pattern—with a twist.

As LA's *KTLA News* [reports](#), a California woman was arrested on charges of extortion for convincing a 12-year-old girl to "[steal] \$10,000 worth of jewelry in an attempt to reverse a supposed curse."

The "psychic," who was the mother of one of the girl's friends, provided readings to her. However, the girl's future was bleak; she was apparently under a curse that meant "horrible things would happen to her—and her family."

The curse could be removed "for a monetary price."

The woman encouraged the girl to steal her parents' jewellery and bring it "in order to perform a ritual," but each ritual revealed that the jewellery was "not enough to remove the curse."

Eventually the girl's parents discovered the loss—and the story behind the theft.

It is believed that the psychic pawned the stolen jewellery for cash. Police are concerned that more unsuspecting clients may have fallen victim to her fraudulent scheme.

CLASSIFIEDS

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

THE VOICE

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