

# THE VOICE

## MAGAZINE

Vol 19 Iss 44 2011-11-18

### **Get Off My Cloud!**

When ads crash the party

### **Write No More**

Put down the pen

### **Creative Language**

AU's newest Spanish course

*Plus:  
The Mindful Bard  
From Where I Sit  
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](mailto:voice@voicemagazine.org), and please  
indicate if we may publish your letter.



## EDITORIAL

Christina M. Frey



## Why I Quit NaNoWriMo

Quitting has always gotten a bad rap, but often it's undeserved. In fact, sometimes it takes undertaking a project or life change to figure out where you want to go—and then quitting the project to get there.

Every November, I've felt the urge to join in the craziness that is NaNoWriMo. The phenomenon—National Novel Writing Month—requires participants to finish a 50,000-word novel between November 1 and 30. It's a good way to force the reluctant writer inside to find that hidden inspiration and run with it. It's also helpful for perfectionist, who's forced against her will to churn out material and worry about making it *just so* another time.

I'd struggled with perfectionism-based time management issues and thought it would be fun to expand my creativity a bit in the fiction genre. So this year I took the plunge: on Halloween night, at two minutes before midnight, I registered and made the commitment. I was going to write a novel, or die trying.

Day 1 went well. I was working in the evening, so I didn't even get started on my novel until 9 pm. I wrote and wrote and wrote, and when I walked away from the computer in the wee hours, I was feeling pumped and excited and all full of *Wow, I can so do this*.

Sure, I knew it would take a big time commitment—and a psychological toll, too. But I wanted to prove to myself that I was capable and strong, even through the highs and lows and slumps that I knew inevitably form the rite of passage of a WriMo initiate.

The following morning, though, a blurb in *Working Mother* struck me. The issue was all about priorities, and one sidebar item recommended that we cut out things that take a commitment of more than a certain number of days a month. For example, the editors wrote, don't decide to train for a marathon when you've already got enough on your schedule.

Just what I needed: another excuse to not work out!

But it got me thinking. NaNoWriMo was a big commitment, even if it was one I'd wanted to do for fun. However, if I was going to be making such a large physical and emotional investment, then in terms of priorities, shouldn't I make sure it was the best fit for me right now?

What was I was doing—and why? How would it benefit me in both the shorter term and the longer term?

Like many writers, I'd always cherished the idea of writing an instant bestseller. But when I did a bit of honest goal inventorying, I realized that right now, writing fiction just wasn't high on my list of personal or career goals. It would have been a new area for me, and one I'd definitely like to explore in the future, but



it didn't measure up to other aspirations I'd been holding onto. I began developing a strong feeling that my priorities should be elsewhere.

My nonfiction work wasn't yet where I'd hoped to bring it, and there were other important goals that I hadn't yet reached. If I was being honest to myself, I had to admit that NaNoWriMo was a diversion, even if a both attractive and vexing diversion, from something that I really, really wanted deep at heart. Thus quitting was the most responsible option if I wanted to free myself to pursue long-held dreams and plans.

Could I have arrived here on my own? Perhaps not. Because thanks to NaNoWriMo I'd proved to myself that I could get my act together and accomplish far more than normal. I could funnel my drive into one project for a few hours instead of allowing the multiple distractions and pulls for my attention to drag me in several directions at once. I could focus—and accomplish. Even if I didn't have a 50,000-word draft by the end of the month, I could make real progress toward something that had been specifically been a long-held goal rather than an “I wanna try it” whim.

I have no regrets. It took starting the NaNoWriMo journey to make me remember what direction I'd wanted to be going in the first place. Sometimes, it takes quitting to realize where we want to be. And even if, as the saying goes, winners never quit, quitting the wrong road may be one of the most important steps I'll ever take in recognizing, and moving back toward, my long-term ambitions.

## CLICK OF THE WRIST

William Tell

Some sources set November 18 as the anniversary of the day legendary archer William Tell shot an apple off his son's head—way back in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Yet historians are divided over dates, circumstances, and even whether the story is true. Click through these links for a closer look at the man and the myth.

### Swiss Hero

Folk hero or historical personage? This *Smithsonian Magazine* article uncovers some of the debate surrounding the question—and describes why, even if it's all legend, his story was crucial to the Swiss identity for centuries.

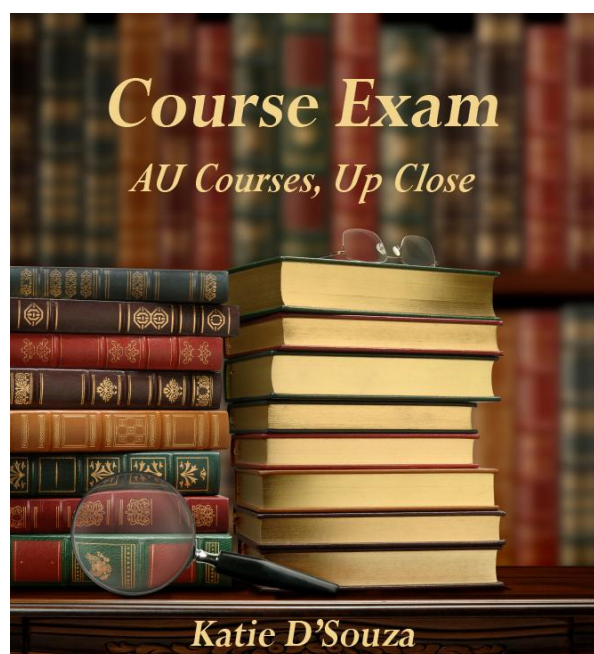
### The Drama

You're probably familiar with Rossini's “William Tell Overture,” but did you know that the opera it was written for was based on a play by German poet and playwright J.C. Friedrich von Schiller? Read through the drama's fine language here.

### Behind the Music

NPR insists that Rossini's opera *William Tell* is “more than just a pretty overture”—and they're right. Click to discover the story behind the music and to listen to a few samplings (including, of course, one of the most famous “opera escapees”).





## SPAN 330: Textual Analysis and Composition

### *AU's Newest Spanish Course Takes a Unique Approach*

Athabasca University's Centre for Language and Literature has launched a new Spanish course: Textual Analysis and Composition (SPAN 330). This three-credit humanities course requires SPAN 301 as its prerequisite, and is offered through individualized study, with an online component.

How does SPAN 330 differ from AU's other Spanish courses? Course author and coordinator Michael Dabrowski explains: SPAN 330 is unique in that it doesn't simply teach the language at a higher level. Instead, it focuses on developing fluency through writing in a variety of styles and genres.

Although the course zeroes in on common grammatical pitfalls, it's not a traditional class with grammar exercises and "huge vocabulary lists for students to memorize," Dabrowski says. Rather, he notes, the "written and oral texts provide a context from which the student builds up their vocabulary through application." He feels confident that students who have taken the course prerequisites will be able to handle the vocabulary component.

SPAN 330 has several course objectives. Students focus on writing "with a purpose" instead of rote memorization and demonstration of grammatical concepts, Dabrowski explains. Although the course mainly concentrates on informal writing, some aspects of formal written Spanish are also taught.

Student evaluation in SPAN 330 consists of eight assignments, six of which are written essays. The two non-essay assignments accompany students throughout the course: the *Diario de Reflexiones* (worth 10 per cent) is a basic reflection upon "discoveries made during the writing process," and the *Trabajos Escritos* (worth 30 per cent) consists of textbook-based homework.

The goal of the essays is to allow students to practice writing in different contexts; students are encouraged to draw upon the wide range of styles of written Spanish to which the course materials have exposed them.

The first essay (worth five per cent) starts out gently, providing a "series of questions" to encourage students to describe a personal experience. The second (also worth five per cent) similarly promotes freestyle writing: students respond to a newspaper article, gaining "practice arguing for or against an issue" in Spanish. Students explore a bit of history and current events in the third essay (also worth five per cent), submitting an "editorial about a political, social, economic, or scientific event."

The fourth and fifth essays, worth 10 per cent each, allow students to explore their creativity within the confines of the Spanish language. In Essay #4, students "[rewrite] a traditional fairy-tale from a different perspective." Dabrowski encourages imaginative responses, indicating that "pretty much anything goes as long as the basic story structure remains the same." For instance, some students have changed the classic



Little Red Riding Hood into an “an undercover spy transmitting secret messages during WWII . . . a drug runner between Colombia and the United States . . . [and] the ‘hottie’ that the wolf and woodcutter were fighting over.” He’s also seen “the three little pigs in outer space and as devious charlatans out to destroy the wolf’s reputation.”

Essay #5 is “one of the most challenging and satisfying assignments,” says Dabrowski: students write their own short story in Spanish.

The final essay (worth 25 per cent) is a research paper that focuses on formal written Spanish.

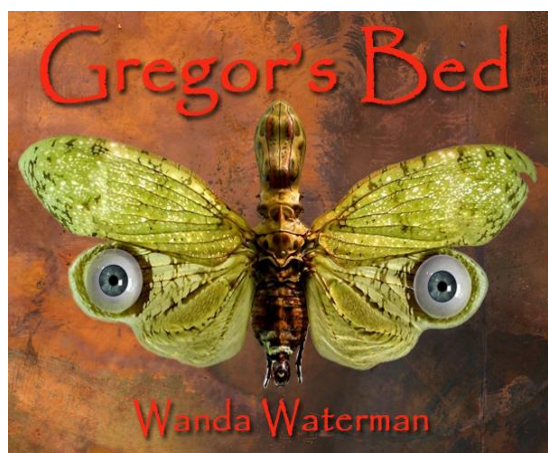
Course author Michael Dabrowski coordinates all five of AU’s current Spanish courses. He holds a post-secondary degree in the Spanish language, and prior to his time at AU spent two years in Guatemala, immersing himself in the Spanish language and local culture and history.

For more information on SPAN 330, visit the [course website](#).

## CHRONICLES OF CRUISCIN LAN

Wanda Waterman





## Recent Discoveries From the Realm of the Experimental and Avant-Garde

**Film:** *Zenith* (2010)

**Written and supervised by** Vladan Nikolic

**Directed by** Anonymous

**Cast:** Peter Scanavino, Jason Robards III, Ana Asensio, David Thornton, Al Nazemian

*"Once something has reached its Zenith there always follows an inevitable decline, the sun proves this every day. This is what our society faces . . . This recession is the first indicator of the coming decline. But remember, the future we face is still uncertain. We can work together to stop this. It won't happen easily, but we will do it."*

The *Zenith* [blog](#)

### Don't Look Behind You: the Truth is Straight Ahead

*Zenith* opens with a seedy-looking Ed Crowley driving while simultaneously addressing a video camera. He's speaking about the infamous Stanley Milgram experiment at Yale, one in which subjects— who believed they were administering ever more painful and finally lethal shocks to unseen people—were totally obedient to the experimenter, meekly following orders despite the cries and shrieks of the people whom they believed they were hurting.

The Milgram experiment was designed in part as a means of understanding why millions of decent, God-fearing Germans meekly obeyed the most cruel and preposterous of Nazi orders against other human beings. The experiment's conclusion was disheartening. It's tempting to hope that the problem might be simply have been cultural, but sadly the experiment has been replicated many times in many cultures, with similar results across the board.

We are the ones we've been waiting for, but up close, we ain't pretty. The willingness of human beings to suspend moral judgment in the face of authority is one of the most potentially destructive truths we need to face about ourselves if we are to survive as a species.

Ed Crowley has become a priest because he doubts God (no, I didn't get it either). One day in the confessional a bald guy introduces Ed to the existence of Zenith, an organization of puppet masters hell-bent on exploiting everyone and everything for their own gain. The Zenith folks are wolves in sheep's clothing, presenting a candy-coated vision of a world without pain and suffering, when all they really want is total control of everything—including human sensibility.

This confession is a rallying cry that forms part of a bigger call that comes at Ed from all directions. He becomes obsessed with Zenith and preaches about it from the pulpit until he loses his position with the



church. He then starts calling himself a “priest of truth,” vlogging his conspiracy quest and ultimately losing his wife and son.

Similarly, the film *Zenith* is just one part of an organized rallying cry involving multiple media: blogs, forums, and YouTube videos, for example. The websites refer to the recent financial crises and the Occupy Wall Street movement. Like most good speculative fiction, this one is about now, and the film’s story is engaging enough to bring that alive.

It’s the year 1944. People have apparently been genetically modified to be always happy, which is a strange statement because no one in this film appears happy—at least not for long. In fact, the happiness directive is experienced as a form of oppression from which many, including Crowley’s estranged son Jack, long for escape. Frankly, this “happiness” is simply a form of numbness, like depression, an inability to experience the fullness of human emotion. The lack is manifested clearly in a partial loss of language.

Like aboriginal groups, these people have had their language stolen from them; there are words that have been forgotten by all but a few. The loss of vocabulary is one of the most serious forms of dehumanization evident in this dystopian world. Our hero Jack remembers words and recites them over and over to himself each day because he’s afraid of forgetting them.

Jack is both an anomaly and a paradigm of right action. He is heroic in that he allows his personal convictions to take the wheel, resisting the temptation to cave to the seemingly benign but ultimately demonic goals foisted upon him but whoever has power over him.

Jack’s particular subversion takes the form of acting as though he knows nothing. “There’s no medicine for poor people,” he says, signalling the personal moral autonomy that may just help him survive Zenith; and although he’s a top student in med school, he drops out in his final year to sell pain-inducing contraband drugs. He lives with a wise old philosopher who says things like this, paraphrasing a quote from Dag Hammarskjöld: “God doesn’t die the day we cease to believe in a personal deity, but we die the day our lives cease to be illumined by the radiance of wonder renewed daily.”

The sad fact is that, like the Milgram experiment subjects, we’re the ones making the destruction possible. In our acquiescence we continue to administer pain and suffering despite the cries of the people and the environment we’re slowly destroying, mindlessly obeying the dictates of government and big business until the nightmare of our own depravity screams back at us.



Wanda also penned the poems for the artist book *They Tell My Tale to Children Now to Help Them to be Good*, a collection of meditations on fairy tales, illustrated by artist Susan Malmstrom.



## *From Where I Sit*

*Hazel Anaka*

### **Making Time for Friends**

In the last few days I've made a conscious effort to reach out to people. My MO included using email and Telus as conduits when in-person wasn't possible. While I am quite content with my own company or with staying home with Roy, that lifestyle is perhaps not the healthiest—or the most fun.

With a finite amount of time for doing anything, our choices become even more important. Since the birth of Grady two and a half years ago, we spend more time with our son and his wife and their precious boy. That is as it should be; it's simply too important a relationship to leave to chance. But while I'm in Sherwood Park quite often to see Grady, I don't have time to see Elaine or Bonny for coffee and to catch up. Why is that?

I'm old enough to remember a time when families got together to visit, when couples met regularly to play cards, and when Sundays were a day for visiting. Why is there no time for that now?

I was feeling guilty that I haven't seen Chuck, an Edmonton friend, even though I'm near his place of work every three weeks or so. Yet why is that a surprise when it's been ages since we've seen friends who live only 20 minutes away? A trip to Edmonton always includes a laundry list of errands, appointments, and shopping for business or pleasure. The day is action-packed, filled with urgency,

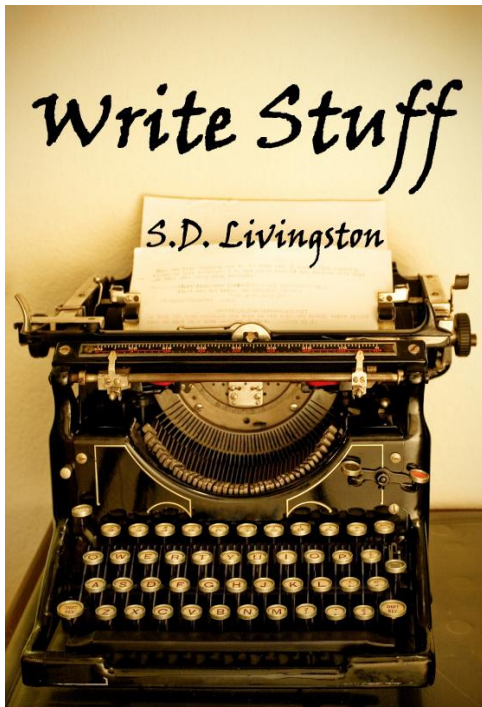
and often dissatisfying in terms of what is actually accomplished.

The road to hell is indeed paved with good intentions. When I called Susan to offer our condolences for the loss of their brother-in-law, we promised *again* to get together "soon." When I popped in to see Vonnie at work, we crammed months of updates into a few minutes. We made concrete plans to visit at a perogy supper in late November to hear the rest of each other's stories. We admit we're not telephone people. Besides, no one wants to make personal calls in the evening; most of us are just plain pooped, drained by the efforts of the day.

Three of us talked about not going to community dances anymore. It seems that most of our generation doesn't dance. Trying to converse over the din of the music seems fruitless, especially with everyone's hearing fading. So we stay home.

There is no adequate—or acceptable—explanation for the drifting apart. We still have history and common memories. No one is becoming a millionaire from all the work being done. (Maybe that's it; everyone is scrambling to avoid losing ground.) No one is jetting off to exotic locales or lounging about eating bonbons. Why is there insufficient time or motivation to reconnect? My sister Sherry tries really hard. She hosted a potluck dinner in the spring with the intention of starting a monthly rotation among our group. Never happened. I wrote about a regular games night; it never happened either.

I don't see an easy answer. November is already a *write-off* (sorry!) for me with NaNoWriMo. And December doesn't look so good either, from where I sit.



## It Ain't Your Cloud

Mick Jagger's been shouting at me a lot lately. Not in person, and not even on my iPod. No, he's been shouting in my head: "Hey! You! Get off of my cloud!" It's an echo of how some people feel about a growing trend in social networks these days—corporate ads and profiles in places like Facebook. But guess what? It ain't your cloud.

The sentiment, of course, is understandable. Social networks pitch themselves as warm, human places; the digital version of the village green. They invite you to gather, catch up on news, and gossip with each other. To bump into old acquaintances and make new ones. We feel a sense of emotional investment, of ownership, because social sites promote that feeling with words like *share* and *connect*.

So naturally, when corporate behemoths show up, we resent the intrusion. I mean, suppose you're hanging out at the local restaurant with your friends. The sales rep from Microsoft arrives and squeezes onto the seat beside you, all smiles and friendly nods. She won't say a word. Really. She's just there hanging out like everybody else. But if you happen to notice the cool new product she's brought with her, well, she'd be more than happy to "share" more about it.

A recent *Telegraph* [article](#) summed up our annoyance nicely. TNS, a global research company, surveyed 72,000 people in dozens of countries, asking about online ads. In the UK alone, over 60 per cent said they "do not want to engage with brands via social media." But the truly telling words were these: "many resent big brands invading their social networks."

Which brings us back to Mick. He owned his musical cloud and had every right to shout at people to get off it. But you don't own your social networks, and they aren't "yours" beyond the fact that you've opened accounts with them.

Sure, you use them. And you definitely contribute to their popularity and share value. But the bottom line is that you're using a free service that someone else pays to maintain.

Facebook's [Statistics page](#) offers an idea of how much that maintenance might cost. Currently, there are over 800 million active users. On an average day, more than 250 million photos are uploaded. There are over seven million apps and websites integrated with the site.

Those numbers translate to huge (and ongoing) costs in bandwidth, programming, electricity, and servers. Then there's the rent or purchase of buildings. Plus maintenance and insurance. Plus staff salaries. Plus legal fees, travel expenses, and . . . well, you get the idea. Those same costs apply to other social networks, like Google+ and Twitter.



So if sites like Facebook and Twitter offer their services for free, who's going to pay for all that server space and bandwidth your holiday photos and comments eat up? Some of the cash comes from initial investors. Some comes from a share of the apps that users buy. Another chunk comes from limited shares sold to private investors. (In Facebook's case, shares are expected to go public early in 2012.)

Can you see where we're going here? Not even Mark Zuckerberg's fortune could sustain such massive expenses forever—not without a healthy revenue column to balance the expenses. That's where ads and corporate brand pages come in.

Just like at that restaurant you and your friends hang out at, the owners of social networks need to keep the lights on and the grill fired up. You might not like the Microsoft or Sony rep nuzzling up beside you, but the restaurant owner has every right to invite her in to offset expenses—especially if the burgers and beer are free.

The beauty of it is that, if you don't like corporations popping up beside your personal conversations, you're free to hit the "Delete" button and leave at any time. And if you want a social networking site that's truly ad-free, you can always buy your own domain and start building, inviting people to join and paying all the costs yourself.

But for the best of both worlds, you could always create an imaginary one—just like Mick's cloud.



*S.D. Livingston is the author of several books, including the new suspense novel Kings of Providence. Visit her [website](#) for information on her writing (and for more musings on the literary world!).*

## DID YOU KNOW?

## Visual Thesaurus



If vocabulary and word issues have you in a creative rut, consider checking out the online Visual Thesaurus. The innovative site doesn't simply list synonyms, but instead creates colour-coded word maps with synonyms, antonyms, and slight variations in meaning laid out spatially in an "intuitive interface."

In conjunction with the visual thesaurus-dictionary, Visual Thesaurus also offers many resources for students and writers—including cross-linked, interactive vocabulary lists for popular books, typical English class reading list requirements, and even standard tests like the GRE.

The Visual Thesaurus is a subscribers-only service (cost: \$19.99/year or 2.99/month USD), but you can try it free for 14 days. Subscribers have unlimited access to the thesaurus-dictionary and all other resources, including the online magazine about language, creativity, and education and the VocabGrabber, which helps you discover context for new words. For more information, or to take a test run, [visit the site](#).

## THE MINDFUL BARD

Wanda Waterman

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



**Book:** Frances Fox Piven, *Who's Afraid of Frances Fox Piven? The Essential Writings of the Professor Glenn Beck Loves to Hate* (The New Press 2011)

**A Necessary Defiance**

Last year Frances Fox Piven got a request from a student wanting to interview her for a term assignment,

the subject of which was Piven's book *Challenging Authority*. Assuming that like many students this one was willing to make the long drive because it was easier to do this than to actually study and research her book, she agreed to be interviewed at her apartment.

Two guys showed up at the appointed time. She served them tea and cookies. Two weeks later, she found the interview on the Internet. The "student" had in fact been a conservative activist. As she dug deeper she discovered a network of hostile attacks against her and her husband and writing partner, Richard Cloward. In the meantime, right-wing media personality Glenn Beck was steadily railing against something he called the "Cloward-Piven plan for orchestrated crisis to collapse the system."

The slams proliferating through cyberspace were vitriolic, paranoid, and absurd. To get an idea, consider this [comment](#) from a reader on Glenn Beck's blog The Blaze: "The Wicked Witch is drooling at the thought of bloodshed. She's been incubating the seeds of civil unrest for decades. Planting them at every opportunity."

In her introduction to this book, Piven states, "I think the impulse to dismiss lunatic charges by the right in the hopes they will go away is a mistake. They aren't going away, because the attacks are effective."

*Who's Afraid of Frances Fox Piven?* is a retrospective collection of essays from Piven's long career as a promoter of the rights of the poor. Its publication now is her response to conservative jabs, which she feels disguise a profound contempt for the humble social stratum she's chosen to defend.

*"What we should do instead of ducking is rally to the defense of the individuals and groups that are under assault, and we should do that aggressively, proudly, even joyfully because we are standing with what is best in American politics, especially with the social movements from below that have sometimes humanized our society."*

**Frances Fox Piven, *Who's Afraid of Frances Fox Piven?***

Piven shines a soft light on the face of the poor. Yet she does so not from the perspective of privilege but rather from a grassroots level, carefully examining all of the factors that contribute to poverty as well as to the very understandable tendency of the poor to become unruly and disruptive in the face of the systematic silencing and neglect they experience.

She explains why the poor sometimes appear disagreeable in their attempts at self-aggrandizement and why our revulsion might form part of the complex system that keeps them from wielding the political influence so necessary to their own empowerment (and hence prevents the creation of a just society).

*Who's Afraid* came out just prior to the formal commencement of the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement in America, but it was timely with a cluster of indirectly linked anti-inequality protests across the country. A more apt stepping stone in the raging waters of current American discontent cannot be found; these essays clearly outline the conditions that led to current Western economic woes.

***"Who's Afraid came out just prior to the formal commencement of the Occupy Wall Street movement in America . . . these essays clearly outline the conditions that led to current Western economic woes. They also point the way out."***

They also point the way out.

One of the key issues for the OWS movement is the unequal distribution of wealth and the corrupt and irresponsible means by which this injustice has been permitted to grow to monstrous proportions. Piven discusses specific conditions from which it emerged, a three-decade process in which the poor were silenced, the market was increasingly deregulated, wealth hoards became ever more buttressed, normal avenues of correction and reform

were bit by bit blocked off, and the general populace was either completely ignorant or gripped with a paralyzing despair.

Piven emphasizes the need for an informed populace and an intelligent, time-tested set of strategies for implementing change, including a protest movement to compel Barack Obama to carry out the necessary reforms. She wisely notes that Roosevelt's platform of 1932 was very similar to those that had preceded it and that it was really the mounting unrest and rapidly growing protest movements of the Great Depression that compelled his administration to stop their ears against the howling of the elites long enough to tackle the tough issues with courage and savvy.

*Who's Afraid of Frances Fox Piven?* fulfills six of the Mindful Bard's criteria for books well worth reading: 1) it poses and admirably responds to questions that have a direct bearing on my view of existence; 2) it stimulates my mind; 3) it inspires an awareness of the sanctity of creation; 4) it displays an engagement with and compassionate response to suffering; 5) it gives me tools enabling me to respond with compassion and efficacy to the suffering around me; and 6) it renews my enthusiasm for positive social action.



## INTERNATIONAL NEWS DESK



### At Home: Fire of Love

Disaster can strike anywhere, anytime. And although wedding nightmares are common on sitcoms and soaps, they became a reality for one Nova Scotia couple when their wedding venue caught on fire. However, the pair had spent months preparing for their special day—and they weren’t about to let their plans go up in flames.

As *The Toronto Star* [reports](#), the couple—now Michael and Nancy Rogers—had less than an hour to go before their wedding ceremony when they were “informed . . . that the main lodge where [they] were supposed to be getting married was on fire.”

But they still wanted to go through with the wedding. “We decided that the most important thing was that we wanted to get married,” Nancy told reporters. Accommodating staff from the resort set up chairs in another building and arranged for the last-minute ceremony.

Michael and Nancy were married despite the smoke and sirens in the distance, as more than 10 fire departments battled the blaze. Later the resort staff helped the couple stage an alternate reception “at a local inn.”

“They now have their own special memory,” resort manager Danny Morton told reporters.

### Around the World: Pricy Puppy Chow

For a while, pet pampering was all the rage among wealthy trendsetters. Pet massages, upscale salons for poodle ‘dos, and sophisticated treateries catered to the needs of the high-strung pets of the celebrity world. But it’s not just the pets of Hollywood that crave the royal treatment—as one Florida couple recently found out.

As MSNBC [reports](#), the Lawrensons were saving cash to pay off a car loan. But before heading to the bank, they left a wad of money on the counter, paper-clipped and inside an envelope.

While they were out, their dog helped himself to the cash—and devoured \$1,000 worth, “leaving shards of \$100 bills strewn across the floor.”

The dog even ate the paper clip.

The couple induced vomiting and was able to “[dig] through [the] vomit” and “[piece] \$900 back together.” The remaining \$100 bill was too unidentifiable to be salvaged, but the rest were sent “to the Department of Treasury with a letter of explanation.”

**AUSU UPDATE: October 21, 2011****Bethany Tynes, President****AUSU congratulates new party leaders!**

AU students are spread all over Canada and the world, but AU's funding comes from the Government of Alberta, so it's important for us, as AU students, to remain aware of political issues in Alberta. Alberta's political parties have recently undergone some transitions, as both the Progressive Conservative and Liberal parties recently elected new leaders: Dr. Raj Sherman will now head up the Liberal party, while Alison Redford has been selected to lead the Progressive Conservatives. Redford was sworn in as Premier of Alberta on Friday, October 7. AUSU would like to thank all those who participated in the leadership races, and congratulate Sherman and Redford on their wins.

**Councillors training to serve you better**

All eight current AUSU councillors, as well as our two full-time student service staff, are currently involved in a Certified Student Leader training program through the National Centre for Student Leadership. This training covers critical issues such as successful communication, strategic planning, and conflict resolution, which we hope will better equip us to work productively together to serve the needs of our student members.

**Increased student representation at AU**

At most Alberta universities, two of the highest decision-making bodies are the Board of Governors, which provides strategic direction, and the General Faculties Council, which deals with academic matters. At AU, meanwhile, there has always been a Governing Council and an Academic Council—until recently! The Alberta Minister of Advanced Education and Technology has amended the Athabasca University regulations, moving AU closer into line with other Alberta universities. AU's Governing Council has now been replaced by a Board of Governors, and while this is mostly a change in nomenclature, the transformation as AU moves from an Academic Council (AUAC) to a General Faculties Council (AUGFC) will be more noticeable. AUSU is particularly pleased that undergraduate students at AU will now have two seats on AUGFC, as opposed to only one on AUAC. There will also be a reserved space on the GFC Executive Committee for an undergraduate student representative. This is great news, and will allow us, as undergraduate students, to ensure that our voice is heard within this important decision-making body at AU!

**What are your course materials preferences?**

AU is currently re-examining their course materials model. Currently, the cost of all undergraduate courses includes access to the necessary textbooks, and these are usually mailed directly to your door. This is convenient for many students, but many others have asked for the opportunity to look for bargains elsewhere, or to buy and sell used textbooks. What about you? How do you feel about the course materials system at AU? AU is asking students for their opinion! The question currently being posed to students is as follows:

In response to student feedback, AU is considering changing the way in which students access or receive their learning resources. Currently, all the learning resources costs are covered through tuition fees and the learning resources fee. These costs include textbooks, printed materials, access to the LMS and other digital resources, copyright fees for third party materials, and the administrative costs associated with the production of such

materials. For items that a student could purchase directly from a source other than AU (e.g., books, e-books), which of the following options would you prefer?

- To purchase materials directly from a non-Athabasca University source such as Amazon
- To have the choice to purchase course materials from either AU or a different source such as Amazon
- To purchase course materials from AU but have the learning resources fee reflect the actual cost of the materials for the particular course (for example, if the learning resources in Course A cost \$100, then the learning resources fee would be \$100)
- The status quo (a fixed learning services fee per course –currently about \$170)

Email us your thoughts and we'll make sure that they're voiced in the appropriate committee!

### **AU honorary doctorates**

Did you know that AU bestows honorary doctorates each year at Convocation? Do you have an idea for someone you'd like to see honoured by the university? Candidates should "have distinguished themselves in education, science, the arts, public service, or other areas, and have made significant life-long contributions to endeavours consistent with the mandate and purpose of Athabasca University." AUSU has a seat on the committee that nominates and selects the recipients of honorary doctorates, so to have your voice heard, drop us an email with your thoughts!

### **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!

. . . about our SmartDraw program? We've been arranging for a licence 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.

. . . there's a new AUSU website on the way? 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.

. . . AUSU has scholarships, awards, and bursaries for our student members? The next major awards deadline is November 1, but some bursaries are also available year-round. Make sure you check our site for more information!

### **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 at [president@ausu.org](mailto:president@ausu.org). You can also email our office at [ausu@ausu.org](mailto:ausu@ausu.org) or call 1.800.788.9041 ext. 3413. We'd love to hear from you!

*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](mailto:ausu@ausu.org).*



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## THE VOICE

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