

THE VOICE

MAGAZINE

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Tunisian Travels

The journey begins

Around AU

Convocation

Handwriting?

The pen is mightier

*Plus:
From Where I Sit
Health Matters
and much more!*



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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indicate if we may publish your letter.



THIS WORLD

Wanda Waterman



Tunisian Travels, Part I

Recently Wanda Waterman spent several weeks in Tunisia, where she crossed half the country, visited several cities and villages, and stayed with a traditional Tunisian family. This article series chronicles her adventures and experiences in the Maghreb.

Arrival in the Capital

In Tunis the night air is an energizing sea breeze from the nearby Mediterranean, a fragrance free of noticeable pollutants. There's also a distinct aroma

hard to pinpoint but which I later come to believe is the smell of concrete, or rather the difference of scent between my world of wooden structures and this one of clay, marble, sand, and cement.

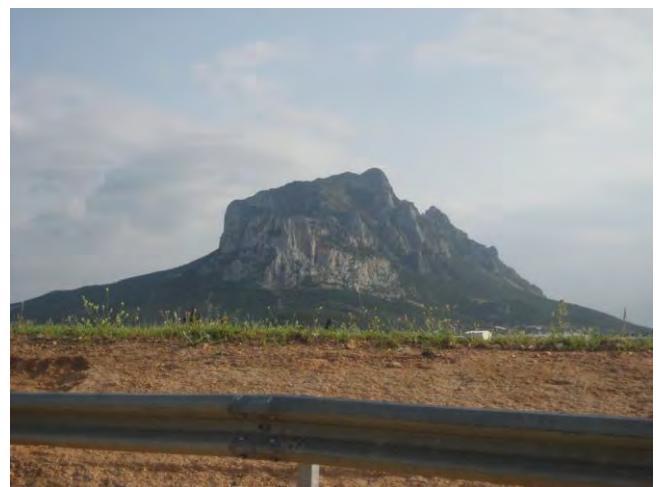
It looks like southern California, all palms and glamorous cafés and pretty people. But the contrasts of Tunis are evident: there is an old colonial section, traditional and somewhat dilapidated, and a newer, more posh and modern district catering to the shelter, food, and clothing needs of politicians, diplomats, and bankers.

Going South

As you drive from the capital toward the south you encounter more and more sand as the green bunches spread out. Olive groves are a common feature of the landscape, but in the desert regions the olives are smaller and they (along with their oil) have a more pungent flavour due to the hotter, drier climate.

The highway traverses the plains, hedged in by the edges of the Atlas Mountains. The peaks are imposing, stony, and bleak, as bare of vegetation as the surface of the moon. Tunisia was in fact the filming site of all but the fifth *Star Wars* movies, and fans often take the “*Star Wars* Trip” to visit the various film locations there.

Initially along the highway you see a lot of Renaults, Citroëns, and Volkswagens, as well as many scooters (mostly Peugeots), some carrying a husband and wife and even one or two children. After a couple of hours, however, traffic thins and you encounter carts drawn by donkeys, mules, and the occasional horse.



The Atlas Mountains loom over the Tunisian landscape.

Cacti have been planted as windbreaks along the highway. A blasé approach to public garbage collection has left the bags to fall apart in the elements with comical results; the thorns of the cacti are often decked with white and blue plastic bags that tremble and twirl like flags in the wind.

“The Tunisians look to olive oil for the same range of purposes for which my Irish grandfather would recommend whiskey—good for sore throats, wounds, skin problems, and the flu, among other things— but it’s also a delicious and very healthy accompaniment to every meal.”

Some of the concrete structures have been abandoned and are slowly caving in on themselves while others are in the process of construction. As a result, much of the countryside—for all its beauty—looks like the calm aftermath of an aerial bombing, with goats, sheep, camels, and horses peacefully grazing nearby.

At Home

In Gafsa (340 kilometres south of Tunis) we enter a typical concrete house, elegantly constructed with balconies, marble, ceramic tiles, and a small courtyard containing lemon trees, mint, and fava beans. The upper storey is the home of the eldest son, who for the time being is working in France. It appears to be a simple thing to build one of these houses and also to add to it, raising stories and adding extensions in any direction without ruining the proportions. The interior is cool and clean, with high ceilings, beautifully furnished but with little adornment.

We are embraced by family members of all ages, none of whom appears shy except for the littlest, who stares but doesn’t approach, and the man of the house, who conducts himself with dignity and reserve.

Cuisine

We eat sitting on the floor in the living room, around a small table. The whole family is not together at once, only those who wish to eat now. The food is exquisite, with fresh ingredients expertly cooked and seasoned. Pains have been taken to spare the tongue of the Canadian guest, and so I’m told which dishes “sting” (or *pique* in French—the Tunisians are known in the Maghreb as “the people of the *piquant*” because of their fondness for very hot foods). Platters of couscous appear, garnished with vegetables and mutton and a rich tomato sauce. We’re also served *briks* (a phyllo pastry stuffed with a kind of omelette), a basket of bread (baguettes as well as flat Arab bread), salad, and a bowl of olive oil for dipping.

The Tunisians look to olive oil for the same range of purposes for which my Irish grandfather would recommend whiskey—good for sore throats, wounds, skin problems, and the flu, among other things— but it’s also a delicious and very healthy accompaniment to every meal.



A bird's-eye view of the local architecture.

Food is taken separately to Baba (Dad) in another sitting room and to the 98-year-old Dada (Grandma) who's being cared for in a nearby bedroom. Two or more people will eat from one platter. I am continually urged to eat more. There's a lot of joking and laughter, and many questions about Canada. Political discussions are avoided at the dinner table, but crop up later in one-on-ones.

Afterward we have the choice of strong mint tea, strong red tea, or very strong Arab coffee, made by boiling very finely ground coffee beans in a small pot. I remember soldiers returning to Nova Scotia from the Middle East talking about this coffee and wondering where they might buy such fine grounds, so later I go with my hostess to find out how it's done. First we visit a nearby shop—one of many windowless closet-size businesses with doors open to the street—to buy a bag of coffee beans. Then we take this bag to another shop that holds nothing but a counter, scales, and a number of human-sized mills. A young girl puts the beans in a large hopper and grinds them to a dust, then bags them and carefully weighs the bag. When it comes up short she goes back to the machine to scrape out the last vestiges of coffee.

When it's time to sleep the unmarried women congregate in one room, the unmarried men in another. We are handed big fluffy blankets and pillows and each person takes one of several large comfy day beds or camps on a mattress on the floor.

(To be continued.)

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.



HEALTH MATTERS

Katie D'Souza



Spring Sprouting

It's at this time of year—when the warm breeze starts blowing and the sun actually feels warm instead of only looking so—that I find myself thinking about backyard-fresh garden produce. Vine-ripened tomatoes, plump zucchini, an oversized head of lettuce . . . But why wait for the summer months to taste it all? By sprouting, you can capture that garden-fresh taste right in your kitchen, and in any season, too!

How does it work?

Sprouting involves taking certain seeds (mung bean, alfalfa, soybean, lentil, cabbage, broccoli, spelt, and wheat, for example) and encouraging them to germinate. Once the seed has germinated into a sprout, the sprout is eaten. They can be enjoyed either cooked or raw.

Although sprouting might sound synonymous with hemp clothing or a “back to the earth” lifestyle, it's actually more common than you might think. In fact, sprouting is widely used in Asian cuisine (think spring rolls), and sprouts are finding their way into gourmet restaurants and onto dinner tables. You'll find more and more offerings that include sprouts in salads, as a garnish on burgers, or even in breads. Sprouting not only boasts numerous health benefits, but it's also a delicious way to be healthy.

The taste of good health

Different sprouts have different tastes as well as different nutrient profiles—and they're quite different than their vegetable or grain counterpart. In fact, it may be healthier to eat sprouted seeds than the seeds' popular product: the chemical reactions associated with sprouting affect the end product on both the macronutrient (proteins and carbohydrates) and micronutrient (individual vitamins) scales. For example, sprouting in general also increases the amino acid content of the sprouts, especially the amino acid L-lysine. Additionally, sprouting the cereal grains changes the sprouts' protein structure into a more bioavailable and easily assimilated form. Sprouted vegetables also boast a higher fibre content than their unsprouted forms.

On the vitamin level, the changes between the sprouted and the unsprouted are even more significant. For instance, the vitamin B1 (thiamin) content of bean sprouts is increased by a drastic 285 per cent when compared to the seeds themselves; B2 (riboflavin) is increased up to 515 per cent, and B3 (niacin) up to 256 per cent. Other vitamins, like vitamin C, are increased up to 30 times what's found in the unsprouted forms. And sprouting can even cause the formation of vitamins like beta-carotene (precursor to vitamin A) and alpha tocopherol (a form of vitamin E).

Easy to do

Sprouting seeds is simple and doesn't require any unusual materials. First, you need the seeds themselves, and you can purchase these at a health food store or grocery store. Mung beans and alfalfa are two of the most common seeds you will find (and they're one of the easiest to sprout, too!).

You'll also need a clean glass jar, paper towels, an elastic, and water. That's it. If you choose to you can also buy sprouting jars that have aerated lids, and this eliminates the need for the towel and elastic.

Experiment with different types of seeds, but avoid those from the Solonaceae family (potatoes, tomatoes, paprika, eggplant) and rhubarb, as these sprouts are harmful. Additionally, make sure that the seeds you buy are intended for sprouting rather than planting.

The amount of seeds to use for one sprouting differs depending on the seed type; consult the instructions on the back of the package. For mung beans, you'll need a tablespoon of the seeds. Once you've measured the correct quantity, rinse your seeds thoroughly in cool water several times, then drain the excess water and place the drained seeds in the jar. Dampen the paper towel, fold in half, and affix to the mouth of the jar with the elastic. Set the jar in a room-temperature area, in partial sunlight or in a cupboard (although sprouts grown in partial sunlight have higher nutrient levels), and let sit. Rinse the seeds with cool water two to four times per day, always remembering to drain the excess water, and re-dampen the paper towel lid as required. Initially, you'll notice the seeds swelling; then the sprouts themselves will appear as small greenish-white vegetation popping out from the seed itself. The sprouts are ready when they've been growing between three and five days and/or they've reached up to three inches in length.

Bigger isn't necessarily better; if you let your sprouts grow too long, they will begin to develop leaf growth, which means they're no longer sprouts (an exception to this is sprouted sunflower seeds).



Once they are fully sprouted, remove the sprouts from the jar, rinse again, and pat dry on paper towel. Set in the fridge, wrapped in a damp paper towel. Putting the whole thing in a plastic bag is optional, but don't forget the damp towel, or the sprouts will dry out quickly. Consume within a few days for maximum crispness and health potential!

A few words of caution

You may have concerns after reading news stories about contaminated sprouts. However, you can easily avoid or significantly reduce this risk with cleanliness and care. The best ways to avoid bacterial contamination of your sprouts are to rinse them adequately on a daily basis and, most importantly, not let them sit in stagnant water at the bottom of your jar. It's also important to consume the sprouts within the recommended amount of time.

It's fun to experiment with different types of seeds, but take note: not all seeds are appropriate for sprouting. Avoid sprouting seeds from the *Solanaceae* family (potatoes, tomatoes, paprika, eggplant) and rhubarb, since these sprouts are poisonous to humans. Additionally, make sure the seeds you purchase for sprouting are intended for this purpose. Seeds found in the gardening aisle have often been treated with toxic mould inhibitors.

Sprouting is quick and easy to do and is an inexpensive way to introduce a greater nutrient potential to your meals. Balance your budget, boost your health, and get sprouting!

Katie D'Souza is an AU graduate and a licensed naturopathic doctor. She currently practices in Ontario.

Disclaimer: The information contained in this article is for personal interest only; it is not intended for diagnosis or treatment of any condition. Readers are always encouraged to seek the professional advice of a licensed physician or qualified health care practitioner for personal health or medical conditions.

CLICK OF THE WRIST

Penny for Your Thoughts

With the demise of the Canadian penny, it's the end of an era. In honour of the lowly cent, this week's links capture the weird and wonderful of Canadian currency.

Twenty

The new Canadian \$20 bill has raised controversy over its unfamiliar image. The memorial featured, however, is the Vimy Memorial in France—which pays tribute to the more than 11,000 Canadians who died in World War I but whose remains were never discovered. This article explains the memorial's significance to Canadians' heritage.

Pretend Money

Most Canadians are familiar with Canadian Tire money, the retail giant's long-time shopping incentive. But although many dismiss it as inconsequential, it can add up—especially if you save it for 15 years, as did one Edmonton-area man. Last year his accumulated total, over \$1,000, covered the cost of a new lawnmower!

Melting

What's your penny worth? It may not be rare (for now!), but if you take its metal composition into account the humble penny is often worth double its face value. Check out this chart and compare yours.



IN CONVERSATION WITH . . .

Wanda Waterman

**Mak**

***Mak**, an alternative band from Montreal, has shown a startling ability to craft and arrange thoughtful, moving songs that draw on a wide range of musical genres, including jazz, rock, and experimental music. They've just released their self-titled debut album to rave reviews. Recently the band's vocalist, guitarist, and keyboardist Jason MacCormack took the time to answer some of Wanda Waterman's questions about songwriting, creative discipline, and how he first fell in love with music.*

Discovering Music

Jason MacCormack is the son of an immigrant and a Québécois. His immigrant mother worked as a barmaid, his dad as a DJ. "I grew up in the ghetto of Montreal," he says, "Hochelaga-Maisonneuve. I was bullied and loved skateboarding. Music was not part of my life until the age of 15."

But a penchant for music was quickly sparked: "I wrote a song for a play at school and that was it, I was hooked," he says. "I embraced the spotlight at all secondary school shows; then I went to music school, where I recruited my band (and learned stuff). School is a great thing, but I'm mostly self-taught."

Intimate Experience

What was Jason's most moving musical experience? "I was playing a show last year in Montreal and that night I felt so shitty about the girlfriend I had at the time and the fight I'd had with my dad a few hours before. In the last song of our set I started to cry while singing. From the start, you're already nude on a stage. That night I couldn't have been closer or more exposed to the audience. That kind of intimacy doesn't happen often."

Disciplined Artists

"The band is composed of very talented and dedicated individuals. That also helps in creating a constructive vibe when we work on the songs," Jason says.

The discipline is essential: "Music doesn't appear like magic. It's days and nights of hard work. I believe anyone can do anything if they have the will for it."

However, the band may sometimes err on the side of being overly disciplined, forgetting that they had originally embraced music for the sheer pleasure of hearing and creating it.

“It becomes a task more than a hobby,” Jason says. “When it comes to working on songs on my computer, I can spend from eight to ten hours straight recording and staring at that screen, which is a good and a bad thing. I do it until my body screams *OUCH!*”

Wellsprings

The band draws from an array of sources for inspiration. The song “Stone”—a mesmerizing ditty I have on continuous play in iTunes—was inspired, he says, by mushroom trip in the woods of the Mont-Royal Park in Montreal. Other sources include listening to stimulating music, including the works of Radiohead, Feist, Beck, and newcomer Ray Lamontagne.

“I either start with the music or a sentence that sounds strong to my heart and build up from there,” Jason says. “Depending on the song and the direction I want it to take, I work on it from there with the band or alone.”

Has the creative life changed him? “Maybe, in the sense that I’m just doing that right now, but I’ve always been really passionate about one thing or another at any given time,” he says.

The name Mak is a play on Jason’s last name. “I don’t feel like exposing myself as a solo artist,” he confesses, “but it’s very important for me to be known as a composer. That band name makes it pretty obvious. And it’s a lot of fun to play as a band.”



GREEN LIGHT

Sun Power

Working indoors under artificial lighting isn’t optimal for our health or that of our planet—or our mood, for that matter. But we can’t all move our desks outdoors. That’s why innovator SunCentral is working on a technological breakthrough that could bring sunlight to your workplace.

Even if you *don’t* have a window office.

As *The Globe and Mail* [reports](#), British Columbia-based SunCentral is designing “computerized collector panels located on the sun-facing exterior walls of buildings to gather and concentrate sunlight, which is transported and dispersed inside the building by special light guides.”

These light guides are made of highly reflective material that SunCentral hopes may someday become standard in prefab building panels. SunCentral plans to begin commercial production in 2013.

AROUND AU

Karl Low

Convocation



Most of us are too busy to spend too much time poking around the Athabasca University website. Usually we glimpse only the front page as we log into MyAU in search of the important stuff like our grades, extension registrations, and maybe the Library. However, AU has a lot more dynamic content—including many student resources—that can be uncovered with a little digging. This column will explore what's going on in and around AU: the useful, the important, or maybe just what's interesting to note.

This week, we will be taking a look at Convocation.

Because of AU's open course enrollment system, students may graduate at any time of year. However, each June AU holds its official annual Convocation ceremony. It is open to any students who graduated over the course of the previous year, as long as they can get their final grades in to the registrar by late April/early May.

Convocation is held in the town of Athabasca, Alberta. While it used to take place on the grounds of the university in a big red and white tent, for the past couple of years it has been moved to the regional multiplex just down the road in order to accommodate the increasing number of graduates and their families and friends who attend each year.

At most universities, convocations will have the graduates sitting in front of the stage. During the ceremony they will be called up and presented their degree and "hood"; they then sit back down again to watch the rest of the procession as well as hear speeches congratulating and encouraging the graduates in the next phase of their lives. In the movies, this is followed by the hat throwing scene.

At AU, things run a little differently. First, the graduates are all seated on the stage facing the audience. This makes sense because while at brick-and-mortar universities the graduates typically know one another, at AU most of the people the graduates know are sitting in the audience, facing them. Another significant difference is that at AU graduates submit a short autobiography, which is then read out as they are called across the stage. AU says that all of these unique traditions are done to keep the focus squarely on the graduates as they celebrate their accomplishments. In fact, the university notes that students who attend Convocation seem to strongly favour these measures. Unfortunately, however, only graduates who attend the ceremony are announced. The many students who don't or can't attend receive no individualized recognition at the ceremony.

To see what the whole thing looks like, you can view one of the recorded videos [here](#).

If you'll be attending in person, there are some special considerations that need to be taken. AU has arranged travel discounts with Air Canada for flights to and from Edmonton from May 29 to June 19, and with WestJet from June 4 to June 15. Information on these discounts can be found [here](#).

While there are accommodations available in Athabasca itself (see a list [here](#)), anybody planning to stay up there had best call early, as many of them are pre-booked far in advance.

Additionally, AUSU has arranged some deals with certain Edmonton hotels and is providing bus service to take graduates and their families to and from Athabasca. Write to ausu@ausu.org for more information about these programs.

If you're unable to attend Convocation this year, you can still watch the ceremonies live on the [Convocation page](#). Convocation runs from June 7-9, 2012.

CHRONICLES OF CRUISCIN LAN

Wanda Waterman





X Marks the Spot

If you've ever read a Western, you've probably encountered the passage where X marks the spot: the scene where an uneducated character makes his "mark" on a contract (and usually needs someone to point out where to do it). For centuries, good handwriting denoted a certain refinement, a higher level of education and class. But in a world that's embraced digital communication, is handwriting a skill that's even needed anymore?

Yes, according to several experts—and not because your perfect Palmer-style cursive is going to land you a plum job. Instead, learning cursive triggers parts of the brain in ways that digital communication simply can't match.

The benefits affect our "thinking, language and working memory—the system for temporarily storing and managing information," according to a *Wall Street Journal* [article](#). In that article, Virginia Berninger, a professor of educational psychology

at the University of Washington, notes that pressing a letter on a keyboard doesn't activate our brains to the same degree that handwriting does.

In fact, nothing seems to quite match the physical act of forming those shapes on paper, and there are brain scans to prove it. In a study conducted at Indiana University, kids were taught their letters in one of two ways: either by simply looking at them, or by printing them by hand. After the lessons, a functional MRI scan analyzed neural activity in the kids' brains. When shown the letters during their MRIs, the kids who had practiced printing had "far more enhanced and 'adult-like'" neural activity than their counterparts.

Karin Harman James, assistant professor of psychology and neuroscience at Indiana University, led the study, and she told the *WSJ* that "it seems there is something really important about manually manipulating and drawing out two-dimensional things we see all the time."

It's not just kids who benefit, either. In another study, adults who practiced printing or writing characters in a new language (or even new math symbols) had "stronger and longer-lasting recognition" of those characters when compared to the retention shown by learners who typed the characters on a keyboard.

Besides the cognitive advantages that handwriting provides, it also improves the speed and quality of written work. It might seem counterintuitive that handwriting could ever be faster than cutting and pasting on a computer. But in a 2009 study, Professor Berninger and her colleagues discovered exactly that.

In this [CBC article](#), Berninger noted that the study tested students on their ability “to complete various writing tasks—both on a computer and by hand.” When using a pen and paper, participants had a faster word-production rate, wrote more complete sentences, and even wrote longer essays.

So does that mean we should forget about all the benefits that come with digital learning tools, or go back to the days of ink-stained fingers? No, and in an interesting twist the *Wall Street Journal* [notes](#) that the practice of handwriting is getting a boost from “new software for touch-screen devices, such as the iPad.”

Think handwriting is unimportant? Think again: studies have shown that both children and adults who print or write rather than typing on a keyboard can work faster, learn better, and produce higher-quality work.

Apps for kids encourage them to trace the shapes of letters on the screen, while more sophisticated programs can help adults relearn the cursive skills they’ve forgotten.

Indeed, technology may just offer the ideal combination of memory-enhancing tools, giving us beautiful handwriting without the need for all that scrunched-up paper in the trash can. Now if only they had a way to eliminate writer’s cramp.

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?

Khan Academy

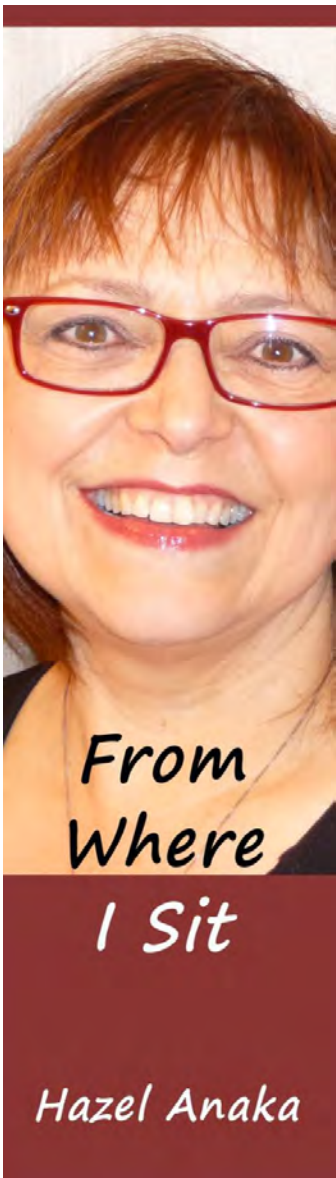


Searching for artistic inspiration—or the chance to relax while examining works of art? Need a brush-up in your math skills before heading back to university after a long break? Want some extra tutoring in basic finance or accounting to help cope with the demands of your new job? Lost in your university calculus course? Confused about copyright legislation and SOPA/PIPA?

Check out [Khan Academy](#), a free web resource that’s becoming increasingly popular. Khan Academy has the “goal of changing education for the better by providing a free world-class education to anyone anywhere.”

Its educational videos and “interactive challenges . . . and assessments” are freely available online and cover everything from addition to calculus to organic chemistry to test prep. Videos range from general to in-depth, and in addition to more typical academic subjects like math, science, and history, they include current topics like how bailouts work, extensive SAT and GMAT prep materials, and even brain teasers.

Although much of the recent media buzz has focussed on Khan Academy’s K-12 resources, it offers a wealth of material for students of all ages and learning levels, including university studies.



At Least My Head Didn't Explode

I'm happy to report that my head did not explode this past weekend. Trust me, it was a real possibility. The *New England Journal of Medicine* would have been quick to report the phenomenon. I can see the headline now: *Middle-aged Woman Takes Computer Course*; sub-head, *Brain Matter Everywhere*.

For four years I've been working on a contract basis with the publisher of a tourism publication. My role has involved writing, editing, and proofing the magazine. They are taking the business in a new direction and will need more help with graphic design. I'm always looking to pick up extra work, especially if it's interesting and can be done from my home office. Being a visual artist means I have a good eye for design fundamentals like colour and proportion. I am also attentive to detail and deliver what I promise.

What I lack is experience with a graphic design program. My research tells me that InDesign and a Mac are the industry standards. Slight problem, though: I don't own a Mac or have any experience using one.

Couple that with an intensive two-day workshop through a university extension program and you can see why my head was in jeopardy.

Prior to the course I spent an hour or so with a fine young man at an Edmonton Apple store. He showed me all the bells and whistles and the (apparent) ease with which the Mac does things. He recommended the 27-inch screen for my needs. Hell, we just got rid of our 26-inch TV; this thing would be huge.

From the first day in class, I was struggling to learn the finer points of using a Mac while watching and listening to the instructor try to explain what she calls a very "robust" program. I also attempted to translate the foreign language she was speaking into something that would make sense to me weeks later when I was home alone and in trouble. It wasn't pretty.

As the day wore on I became aware of the ache in my neck and shoulders. Trying to see this huge monitor through the bottom of my progressive lenses was putting my neck in a very awkward position. We talked about ergonomics. Was I about to spend \$2,000 on a desktop setup that would hurt me? Surely not all Mac customers are the young with perfect vision.

So now here's what I need to do. Talk to a salesman and find out if the monitor can move up and down rather than merely tilting. Try a 30 day free trial of InDesign 5.5. Decide whether it's better to buy the current version while I still remember a thing or two, or whether I should wait for the scheduled version 6 and risk forgetting everything. Oh yeah—and learn the program. All without my head exploding, from where I sit.

Hazel Anaka's first novel is *Lucky Dog*. Visit her [website](#) for more information or follow her on Twitter @anakawrites.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS DESK



At Home: Ancient Art

Much ancient artwork has faded over time, but new technology is bringing new ways to preserve and restore valuable works—without desecrating or altering the original.

As the CBC [reports](#), “Aboriginal elders and Parks Canada archaeologists have just completed a two-year project to photograph and interpret several ancient pictograph sites along the foothills and mountains in Alberta and B.C.” The sites are considered sacred and have not been altered by physical restoration attempts.

This means that until now, the ochre-painted drawings have been difficult to interpret with the naked eye. Now the photography project has allowed the “story [to] . . . re-emerge,” transforming “orange smudges” to “drawings of circles, arrows and people.”

Parks Canada archaeologist Brad Himour told reporters that they were “looking for a non-intrusive way to be able to record them for posterity.” The historical treasures “create . . . a record of the past” and allow Canadians, particularly Aboriginal youth, an even better understanding of their legacy.

Around the World: The Nap Diet

Trying to drop a few pounds? Then hit the “snooze” button on your alarm clock and get a bit more rest. There’s a new study linking more sleep and lower BMIs—and it’s got nothing to do with mistaking exhaustion for hunger.

As *The Globe and Mail* [reports](#), sleep deprivation “may . . . put your ‘fat genes’ into high gear.” This means that even if your diet and exercise habits are good, you’ll have to fight genetics a bit harder than you would if you weren’t short on sleep.

The study, which compared the sleep habits and BMIs of identical and fraternal twins, discovered that the amount of sleep we get directly influences the way our genes affect our weight. In fact, for individuals who slept fewer than seven hours a night, “70 per cent of weight variations were due to genetic factors,” compared with just 32 per cent for those who got more than nine hours of sleep nightly.

“The more sleep you get, the less your genes determine how much you weigh,” neurologist Nathaniel Watson told reporters. This means, he added, that “you can sleep yourself to a point where environmental factors, like diet and activity, are more important in determining your body weight than genetics.”

AUSU UPDATE



AU Students urge candidates to improve university funding

AU students are concerned about the financial health of Athabasca University and the effect of recent news stories on the reputation of the AUSU membership.

A recent CBC report notes that in recent years the university has made a series of reserve draws to cover budget shortfalls, draining the once \$30-million reserve fund.

Tuition and fees at AU, meanwhile, continue to increase despite the concerns of AUSU that education is becoming increasingly unaffordable in Alberta.

“I’m very concerned about AU’s financial situation,” says AUSU President Bethany Tynes. “AU is increasing student fees, observing hiring freezes, denying sabbaticals, delaying projects, and downsizing their offices due to a lack of available funds. We don’t want to see the quality of our education diminish.”

“At the same time,” Tynes continues, “I am confused by AU Board Chair Barry Walker’s comment to the CBC that AU is ‘in a very sound financial position,’ as the concerns we’ve noted do not support the notion that we’re financially sound.”

Chronic underfunding of public post-secondary education is a factor in AU’s financial stress. AU students have lobbied Alberta in recent years to address the shortfall; our members call on the candidates in Alberta’s provincial election to make post-secondary funding a priority in their platforms and to ensure that all Alberta universities are funded equally and sufficiently. Public post-secondary institutions need a reliable, predictable funding model that provides sufficient base operating funds to support a world-class education.

Athabasca University Students' Union is the largest students' union in Alberta, representing nearly 40,000 undergraduates annually.

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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.

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