

THE VOICE

MAGAZINE

Vol 20 Iss 40 2012-10-19

What Lies Beneath

Philosophers in tights

Organic Food

Sham or salvation?

Love & Death

Life but a dream

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



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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



No Way

When we were kids, it was all about the “no.”

In our first years, “no” was our favourite response. Come indoors. Put away your toys. Eat your spinach. *No, no, no!*

No was a bad word.

Once we left the preschool years, though, that “no” became a shining star—a goal to pursue, a standard, an ideal. “It’s okay to say no,” said the teachers and parents and the safety films we watched every year in elementary school assemblies. “No” to strangers. “No” to adults bearing treats and strange requests. “No” was a fallback, a safety lock. We had the power and we could use it.

Later, “no” morphed into cool. Say “no” to drugs, underage drinking, teen sex, bullying, and texting while driving. Say “no” to the bad and live your life. Be safe, be cool, be happy. Just say “no.”

Then something happened. We reached adulthood, and somehow “no” had become the bad guy once again. Why, I’m not sure. Yet we all know it’s true, even if we don’t outright say it: We’re not *supposed* to say no anymore. Turning down volunteer requests from the kids’ school feels wrong. Saying “no” to that board position or the chance to spearhead the office fundraising auction seems selfish. And skipping that party is just silly, right?

Intrinsically, there’s nothing wrong with volunteering or getting involved or taking on another social commitment—they’re all good things, things we want for ourselves and the community. And yet sometimes, the urge to say “yes” can overtake our lives.

Sometimes, it feels as though we’re always going. Every second of our lives has been scheduled or planned or allocated, and even the things we were looking forward to have become a chore, one more thing we *have to* do. We’re overwhelmed with work and worry. Life has turned into the proverbial hamster wheel. We not only can’t win, we can’t even take a step forward.

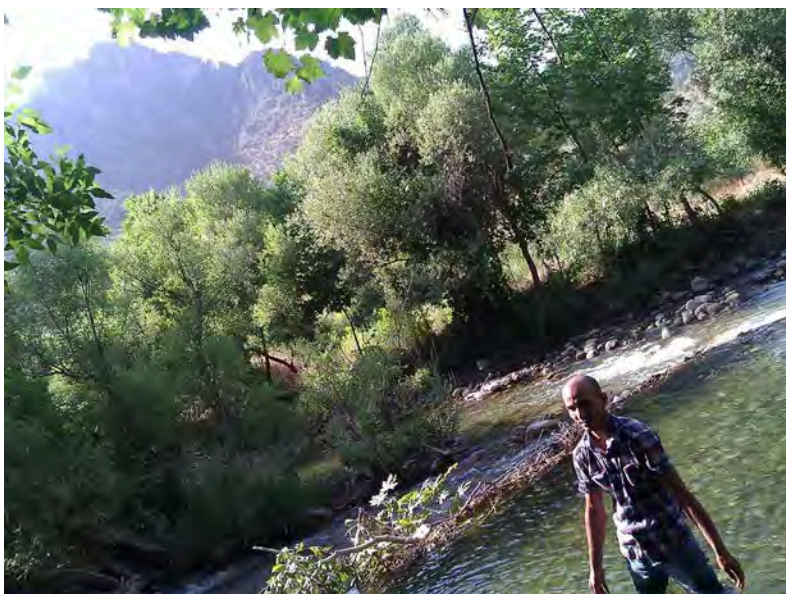
That’s when we need—for our own survival—to relearn the skill of saying “no.” Of realizing that we have limits. That we have priorities. That we can’t be all things to all people. That it’s okay to pause, think, and say “no,” freely and without guilt. That it’s only by saying “no” that we can get ourselves into a condition that will allow us to someday give an honest “yes.”

No, I can’t take on one more thing. No, I’d love to come but I’ve got a prior commitment. No, I’m already at capacity. No, my family/studies/work have to come first. No, I’ll give everything I have, but I can’t give more than that.

And whether we’re little kids turning down strangers with candy or grown-ups trying to take the reins of our own lives, it’s okay to say “no.”

IN CONVERSATION

Wanda Waterman



A Syrian Kurd

Part IV: Masters and Slaves

Moustafa Mala Bozan is a Kurdish poet and musician from Kobany, Syria. He's been corresponding online with Wanda Waterman for the past year, during which time he's been imprisoned, has lived in refugee camps, and has travelled over Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon. Read the first part of this series [here](#), the second part [here](#), and the third part [here](#).

No More Bread!

People the world over are still propagating the falsehood that if Bashir Al-Assad could only be removed from power, all would be well in Syria. Moustafa makes it clear that the problem is somewhat more endemic.

"While in the military service," he says, "a strange thing happened to me. Every section had its bosses and among the bosses there was a special mutual respect.

"I had a friend who was responsible for the kitchen. Every day I went to him for special food (bread, eggs, potatoes, and yogurt) for my friends and me. He always made food ready for me because I was in charge of tailoring and took care of his suits.

"One day I went to get the food as usual and found this kitchen boss talking to a soldier who was begging him for a loaf of bread. I was astonished at how my friend behaved; he was shouting in the man's face, 'There's nothing here to eat, not even a half loaf! Go away!'

"I picked up my meal (enough for ten people) easily while this one was starving. I shared my meal with him in spite of the anger of my friend.

"I said, 'We are the same—he is serving in the army as you and me, and he is asking to eat, not to feed his dog.'

"My friend got very angry and said, 'If you give him food, never come back here again to ask me for food!' I said, 'Okay sir, I won't.' And I never went back there again."

"Why should there be hungry soldiers in the Syrian army?" Moustafa asks. "Syria is the richest among the Arab countries, but the state's treasury is suffering from administrative rotteness. Those with no state

officials to support them and who can't afford bribes will be hungry and condemned as guilty at any moment."

Oh, My Heart

In the week that the video *Innocence of the Muslims* comes to international notoriety, Moustafa tells me about a film called *Aydil (Oh, My Heart)*, a documentary by Ziad Kalthoum about Kurdish women who've lost husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers during Assad's reign. His friend appears in it, carrying an *oud*.

***"A thief not caught
becomes a king."***

Kurdish proverb

Moustafa promises to send me a copy as soon as they can do a translation, but in the meantime he shares his screen with me and we watch it together. I've never seen anything like this film. The cinematography has a strange twilight look, and the voices are rough and real. The faces alone provoke a profound sympathy. In the end their losses trump any gains imaginable, their grief a reality that can never be negotiated away.

I Have Sixteen Slaves Like You

Moustafa sums up the rot at the core of Syrian society with the following story:

"Another event I witnessed was at a traffic jam. An old man was driving a taxi and a lady was driving a sports car. The lady made a mistake that could have led to an accident, and the old man rebuked her. The lady got out of her car and hit the old man violently, saying, 'How can you rebuke me? You haven't learned how to respect your masters!'

"She slapped him again, saying, 'Do you know I have sixteen slaves like you serving me in my house?' No one had the courage to stop her, but the policeman dared to beg her to forgive the old man. She finally did. I wondered what would have happened to the old man if the lady hadn't forgiven him. I think death would have been waiting for him.

"The low class and the high class are the matter here, the masters and slaves."



Finally, some common ground. As has been becoming increasingly clear, economic inequality is slowly destroying the West. Unfortunately the forms it takes are more palatable than those typified by snooty women slapping old men in public; here, the only outcry seems to be coming from the Occupy movement. But as long as we fail to see how Syrians are our brothers and sisters in a common struggle, we will continue not only to fail them as we have done, but also to fail ourselves.

"The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other. Our children see this, and learn to imitate it."

Thomas Jefferson

HEALTH MATTERS

Katie D'Souza



Organic Food: Sham or Salvation?

Organic foods are a hot topic these days, especially with the recent Stanford study suggesting that there's no nutritional superiority. Is the organic food market all a hoax? Or is organic still the way to go? This article offers some food for thought.

What Is Organic?

What is organic food? Generally, organic produce is grown without the use of chemical pesticides or toxic herbicides. Organic farms have strict regulations governing the growing process, including the use of fertilizers as well as other chemicals. Additionally, organic farms usually rotate crops regularly and undergo soil testing.

Animal products from animals and birds raised organically are required to have pasture feeding time or free space to move around. Organic farming requires more human work than conventional farming—after all, someone has to weed those rows of onions or beans if an herbicide isn't doing the job!

Conversely, “conventional” foods are those farmed in our typical North American style. Regular applications of herbicides and pesticides are used to control weeds and pests, chemical-based fertilizers and soil conditioners are common, and animals not required to have pasture space if it's not available.

Is There Really Any Benefit?

There's a constant debate over whether organic foods are more nutritious than conventionally grown foods. This not only refers to overall nutrient load, but also the presence and absence of certain nutrients. The 2012 Stanford study suggests that organic produce and conventional are equivalent in terms of nutritional benefits. But other studies have shown that because organic farming requires soil conditioning prior to crop growth, and since crops are rotated regularly, there is the potential for higher nutrient levels than in the conventional counterparts (where these mineral-saving strategies are not practiced as regularly).

What there is no debate about, however, is that organic foods contain significantly fewer pesticide and herbicide residues.

As crops grow, they pick up these contaminants from the soil and from direct contact (like spraying). This is, in turn, passed on to the consumer. These chemical residues are stored in our bodies' fatty tissues (including the brain).

Another benefit to organic farming is the environmental aspect. By avoiding pesticides and toxic herbicides, the organic farm is an eco-friendly system. This not only means healthy air, but also healthy soil, ponds and streams, flora, and fauna, since pesticide residues can collect in soil and are passed down the food chain to the rest of the natural world.

Beware of Shams

Convinced that organic food is worth a try? It's not always simple; at the grocery store, things can be confusing with all the "natural," "organic," and unlabelled products out there. Worse, not all allegedly "organic" foods are truly grown in an organic manner. Look for the new organic certification label, released by the Canada Food Inspection Agency to help spot shams; these products are grown according to strict standards. Be sure to check the labels on the food you're considering purchasing, and make sure you're paying for certified organic food.

Not all "organic" food is actually grown according to standards set by the Canada Food Inspection Agency. Look for the organic certification label to find the real thing.

Budget Shopping?

One frequently cited downside to organic food is that it is more costly. This makes sense; the production cost is higher due to the higher amount of human labour required; the cost is naturally passed on to the consumer.

If you have trouble fitting organic food into your budget, consider picking and choosing. The Environmental Working Group has created a "dirty dozen" list that details foods with consistently high pesticide content (ranging from most to least contaminated): apples, celery, sweet peppers, peaches, strawberries, nectarines, grapes, spinach, lettuce, cucumbers, blueberries, and potatoes. The EWG recommends that these foods be purchased organic whenever possible.



Other potential budget-saving options include purchasing organic food directly from the farmer or growing your own vegetables in a backyard or balcony garden.

Whether or not to go organic is a personal choice that is often in large part dependent on the budget. But whether your food is conventional or organically grown, don't forget to take time to respect it, enjoy it, and appreciate the work that a farmer put into growing it for you!

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.

GREGOR'S BED

Wanda Waterman



Recent Discoveries from the Realm of the Experimental and the Avant-Garde

Film: *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* (2011)

Director/Screenwriter: Nuri Bilge Ceylan

Cast: Muhammet Uzuner, Yılmaz Erdoğan, Taner Birsel, Ahmet Mümtaz Taylan, Fırat Tanış, Ercan Kesal

Genre: Art House, International, Drama

"Krishna was once asked what was the most miraculous thing in all creation, and he replied, 'That a man should wake each morning and believe deep in his heart that he will live forever, even though he knows that he is doomed.'"

Christopher Pike

The Long, Slow Waltz of Love and Death

The men are searching for the body of a murder victim. They're depending on the murderer, now in their custody, to show them where it is. As they drive into the night of a bleak Turkish countryside (a great setting for a staging of *Waiting for Godot*), they become increasingly frustrated with the murderer's failure to identify the spot where he buried the unfortunate victim.

Tensions mount. The murderer falls asleep a couple of times and the officer beside him is roundly scolded. The detective thinks the suspect is having them on, and at one point puts the boot to him in a fit of pique.

The detective, his Arab partner, the prosecutor, and the doctor reveal bits and pieces of their personal tragedies as they chat idly. Their dialogue is punctuated by false alarms; again and again the murderer must admit that the spot where he's told them to stop is not in fact where he's buried the victim.

We see flocks of birds dipping and soaring on their way south as the doctor fakes a cell phone call to keep from having to answer questions about the murder victim. Both life and death are things to flee. Human beings flee the irritations of family life by evading accountability and avoiding true communication. The imminence of death is the frightening truth behind the veneer of custom and social harmony, and the



discomfort and emptiness of life an excuse for running around in futile circles. Even the stirrings of sexual desire are just another bother, something reminding us of our mortality while bringing even more trouble.

"Life is but a dream for the dead."

Gerard Way

Still, life calls to us; and we can't resist the call, as witnessed by the young son of the murdered man, trudging sadly home with his mom and suddenly running back to kick an out-of-bounds soccer ball back to some playing children.

All the acting is excellent, but Taner Birsell, who plays the prosecutor, is phenomenal. Birsell obviously had to undergo a marked physical transformation to play an older, heavier man with a handsomeness blemished by birthmarks, a man who reveals a tragedy that occupies his thoughts and influences his decisions. The emotions pass like ballet dancers across his lovely, marred face.

The doctor clearly represents the writer, the one who observes, interprets, reports, and delivers the final verdict. Others seek him out for answers and also to attempt to control his interpretation of things. In the end he is left with the awful responsibility of attributing blame.

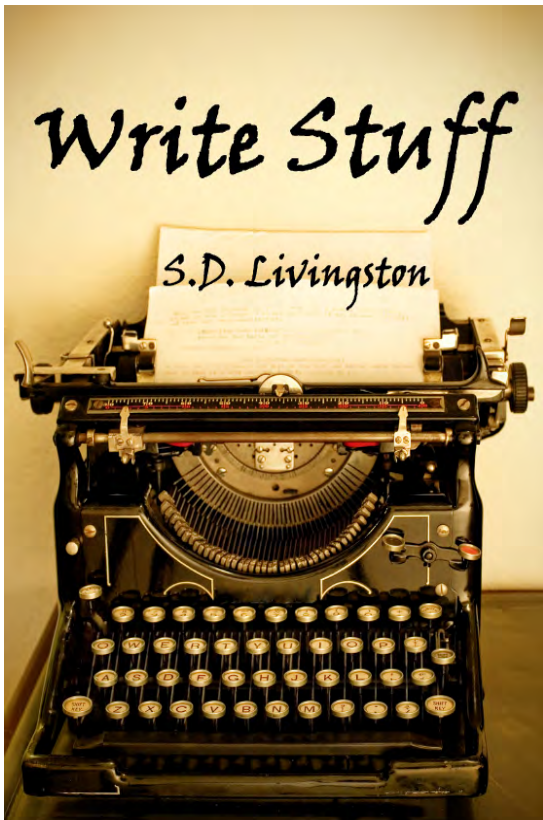
At one stop on the weird journey, the doctor wanders off to relieve himself. For a moment the lightning illuminates a rock sculpture of a huge face with a gaping mouth. It's as if the collective voices of the dead are crying out from the ground, saying, *You'll be joining us soon, comrade.*

He flees, stumbling clumsily on the rocky ground, sometimes looking fearfully back—a sweet metaphor for the human condition.

Death is the star in this film. The plot is dedicated to locating it, judging it, and coming to terms with it, or at least trying. Meanwhile life, the antagonist, is presented in Sartrean style—sticky, slimy, steamy, deeply irritating, and ultimately tragic.

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.





Philosophers in Tights

Most of the time, plain language efforts focus on the concrete, everyday world—on getting rid of the gibberish and making everything from cell phone contracts to medical forms clear and easy to read. But what about the big ideas, the worlds of philosophy or astronomy? To inspire the next generation of deep thinkers, it's not the complex ideas that should be simplified, but the way we express them.

It's a view that might be hard to embrace in the face of a general dumbing down of society—until we remember that it was Albert Einstein himself who said, "Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not one bit simpler."

Not that we should take an intellectual step backward and stop wondering and thinking and imagining. But if you've ever tried to push through the dense wall of a philosophy text, you're probably among the thousands of curious souls who have wondered the same thing: Why can't those grand, inspiring ideas be written in language that speaks to readers of today?

In the *Action Philosophers!* comic, Fred Van Lente and Ryan Dunlavey prove that it can be done. The comic's creators steer clear of reducing the byzantine theories of thinkers like Heraclitus and René Descartes to sound bites. Instead, they blend casual modern language ("You'd think his mad mental skills would have won Thales some props from his peeps") with the traditional language of philosophical writings—and illustrate the whole thing in classic comic book style.

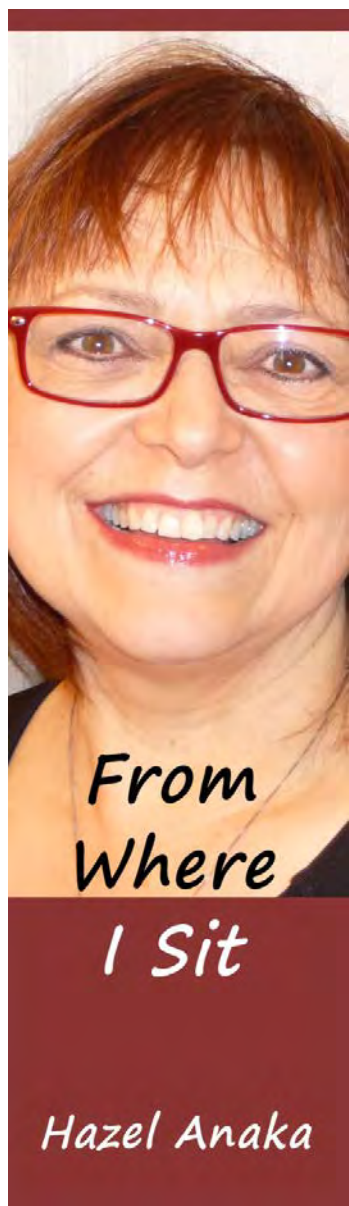
The result is accessible enough to engage a broad general audience, yet difficult enough to make them think.

It's an art to take complex ideas and make them clear-cut, to distill them to their core, and it's an approach that's rare when writers tackle big subjects. In fact, it's a lot easier to clutter those ideas with dense language that makes the topic seem more arcane than it already is.

But all that does is block the reader's view. It's a bit like creating a literary slab of granite instead of a sculpture. We know that Michaelangelo's *David* is in there (or perhaps a theory of Jung's), yet the writer has obscured that beauty instead of chipping away all the unnecessary academic-ese.

If we're worried about where our next big ideas will come from, about how a world that revels in pop culture can produce another Plato, perhaps we need a few more philosophers in tights.

*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!).*



A Nightmare

Hilary is in many ways the typical 27-year-old: full of dreams and projects but wanting to live each day fully right now. She's also exceptional in that she works crazy long hours, volunteers for good causes, travels for work and pleasure, has an active social life, and is committed to family. All that adds up to a huge time squeeze.

That's why I carved a chunk of time out of my own busy schedule to offer to help her finish some long-standing projects. I warned her that if I was giving up part of two days, we had to get something done.

I arrived about 6:30 on Thanksgiving Sunday and we immediately set to work assembling the six-foot tall Whittier bookcase she had stained and varnished. We knew from experience that the product was good, solid *real* wood. Between us we already have five seven-foot bookcases and an armoire. The cam locks are good quality and there are always a few surplus bits of hardware.

We both love the staging part of home décor, but this time we showed real discipline by moving on to the next project. That meant opening the two boxes of metal shelving stowed in the garage and carrying them bit by bit into her triplex basement. A couple of strong men could have kept them intact, but alas there were none. Sometimes working smarter also means working harder. *Damn.*

Before long we had those rolling storage racks assembled and in place. Again the quality was good. For \$99 each, they will last a lifetime. We began emptying and sorting the boxes that have remained untouched since her move a couple of years ago: Flowerpots, painting supplies, Christmas decorations,

gift bags, light bulbs, photo boxes, and more now had a home. Artwork and décor items will be arranged throughout her home next time.

By 11:30 at night, we were toast. We set our weary heads down, knowing that the worst lay ahead. We hoped that an early fresh start and reinforcements in the form of Carrie (and Grady) would help.

Not so. Hilary has turned one bedroom into a dressing room. She was using her smaller Ikea Expedit shelving unit to store scarves and part of her large handbag collection. It wasn't enough space, so she bought the five by five-foot/25-cubby version of the unit.

Oh my goodness. It took the three of us multiple trips to get it from the garage to the second floor. There were no print directions, and the online ones were the usual all-graphics-no-words version. The picture didn't match the product. There weren't enough wood dowels. The crappy little Ikea Allen tool was undersized for the job it was expected to accomplish. It was impossible to perfectly snug up each piece so

that gaps were closed and the thing remained square. One screw stripped, so a drywall screw is now needed.

Isn't there anyone in the world to give this company a run for its money? At least my blister has almost healed, from where I sit.

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

CLICK OF THE WRIST

Tough Break

October 20 was World Osteoporosis Day, which is dedicated to spreading awareness about risk factors for fragility fractures and breaks. "Stop At One [fracture]," proclaims the International Osteoporosis Foundation. Read on for more about bone health and how you can reduce your risk.

Just the Facts

Did you know that many broken bones aren't accidents? That after age 50, up to one in two women and one in five men will suffer a fracture? This brochure provides some hard-hitting facts about osteoporosis and fracture risk.

Risk Assessment

What's the fracture—including hip fracture—risk for you or your loved ones? For a patient over 40 years of age, use the WHO's FRAX risk assessment tool to discover the chance of a fracture happening in the next ten years.

Osteolink

If you or a loved one has osteoporosis, investigate Osteolink, the "first online or in-person social network for people with osteoporosis, their friends, families, and healthcare professionals." Osteolink is only offered in some European countries and Australia, but you can request notification of when it becomes available here.

Ounce of Prevention

How is your lifestyle affecting your osteoporosis risk? *Reader's Digest* has 15 tips for preventing the disease and improving your bone health.



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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