

THE VOICE

MAGAZINE

Vol 20 Iss 45 2012-11-23

Ingrid D. Johnson

Voice for the voiceless

The Watchers

Monitored e-study

Red vs. Green

Holiday shopping

*Plus:
The Mindful Bard
From Where I Sit
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

Way to Shop



It's the most wonderful time of the year. It's the busiest time of the year. For retailers, it may be the most profitable time of the year. But for me? I just look at the pile of sale flyers heaped up on my kitchen counter and I cringe.

Then I make a trip to the recycle bin.

I hate Christmas shopping. Instead of filling me with peace and love, it fills me with a distinct resentment. I get upset when I see rampant commercialism shoved in my face. I get furious when I hear stories of people getting trampled--*trampled!*--so someone can get a toy for \$15 off. And I hate it when retailers use social awareness as a weapon in their own profit-growing interests.

In this *Financial Post* [article](#), retail giant Toys R Us lashes out at online shopping--ironically, its big competitor in the battle for Christmas shoppers' wallets. Jerry Storch, TRU's chief executive, told reporters that the popular practice is "ungreen" and that people get so caught up in the moment that they don't give any thought to the carbon footprint they're creating.

On the other hand, Amazon.com counters that "The efficiencies of online shopping result in a greener shopping experience than traditional retailing."

There's conflicting research supporting both claims, but I think the answer is this: Christmas shopping, at least in its popular manifestation, isn't green, period. It's barely even human.

We buy because we're expected to buy--and buy and buy and buy. But ask almost anyone on your Christmas shopping list, and odds are good they really don't care about that big expenditure or the extra thing "just in case" what you bought isn't good enough. In fact, the more we buy, the more we guilt others into buying for us--and the cycle of greed and insecurity perpetuates.

And once again, we're being played for dupes by retailers, whether brick-and-mortar stores or online shopping meccas--the same retailers who appeal to our environmental awareness just like they prey on our inner insecurity.

The truly green way? Just buy less. The only way to combat crass commercialism? Just buy less. *Way* less.

And while we're saving trees and fuel, we might just end up saving ourselves.

IN CONVERSATION

Wanda Waterman



Ingrid D. Johnson

Ingrid D. Johnson is a Winnipeg-based singer-songwriter with a deeply soulful rhythm-and-blues feel that evokes the girl pop singers of the early '60s. With her band The Funky Fresh Crew, she released her debut full-length album What About Love? on October 9.

A Jamaican who came to Canada with her family at the age of four, Ingrid's contribution to her new country has been commendatory. Past work with

the Canadian Red Cross, the Respected Violence and Abuse Prevention program, Voices Manitoba Youth In Care Network, UNICEF, and finally her work as the spokesperson for the clients of the Laurel Center (a community resource centre that counsels sexually abused women with addictions) has allowed her to respond to the pain of her own past in a healing way. In The Closet Productions ("A Voice for the Voiceless") further promotes her mission to create music and art for positive social change.

Recently, Ingrid took the time to answer some of Wanda Waterman's questions about how art and social activism helped her cope with her difficult past.

Feeling Ugly

My childhood was riddled with abuse. Two different men sexually abused me before my 13th birthday. I never knew my father. I witnessed moments of violence in my home and I also endured emotional, verbal, and physical abuse. I was bullied in elementary school and always felt awkward, unloved, and unwanted.

I spent a lot of time alone. I felt ugly and was always afraid of getting into trouble. I also had some good memories, like being in a school play, singing in church and school choir, making up songs in my bedroom, writing my first poems, loving Michael Jackson, taking dance lessons, running and winning a long distance track and field race, etc.

Early Visions of Glory

I grew up in Winnipeg, after having moved from Jamaica at the age of four. When we first moved to Canada we lived with my grandmother on McGee Street. Then we moved to Ellice Ave., Edison Ave., Burrows Ave., and Polson Ave.

Then I went into foster care and moved around some more.

I listened to music all the time. I loved dancing and making up my own songs. I wrote poetry, sang in choirs, and also took band, but never had the discipline to stick to any instrument. However, I always had this vision in my head of flying like an eagle and dancing under a spotlight on stage. I always felt like I was meant to do something special—I just didn't know what that would be or when I would do it.

*“... my two vocal coaches
... celebrate my strengths
and are sensitive to my
weaknesses as a singer by
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the problem . . . It makes
learning so much more fun
and fruitful!”*

Speaking for Those Who Can't Speak for Themselves

When I was a child in foster care, I had foster parents who seemed to love the money they got for taking care of us more than they loved taking care of us. They bought themselves and their kids new clothes and other things and took us foster kids to Value Village for our clothes. So I stood up for my foster sisters and myself by telling my social worker.

After that we got our clothing allowance directly from our social workers in cash. My foster mother didn't like that, and pegged me as a troublemaker. I was a child she was glad to get rid of when it was time for me to move to a group home. Shortly after that, this family stopped taking in foster children.

The Blessing of Good Teachers

My most beneficial educational experience has been with my two vocal coaches. One is from Winnipeg and the other from New York City. They work together to teach me in a way that I can understand. They're always asking me what things feel like to me when they ask me to do a vocal exercise. Then they use my feedback to communicate to me any changes I need to make in my vocal technique.

They celebrate my strengths and are sensitive to my weaknesses as a singer by giving me techniques I can understand to help me fix the problem. They never make me feel like a hopeless failure. I love that. It makes learning so much more fun and fruitful!

Incredible Experiences

The most mesmerizing musical experience of my life was listening to my complete album and realizing how much God had blessed me and my five musicians. It also confirmed to me that as a singer-songwriter I could create powerful music with an inspiring message to uplift others.

To be continued . . .



PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE NEGOTIATION TACTICS

Wanda Waterman

PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE NEGOTIATION TACTICS

YOU MUST BEND TO MY WILL! I AM THE GREATEST SUPERHERO IN THE UNIVERSE!



NO, YOU'RE NOT. YOU JUST DEVELOPED A SUPERHERO COMPLEX BECAUSE YOUR BIG BROTHER BULLIED YOU. AND YOU BOUGHT THAT COSTUME AT WALMART.



YOU MUST STILL BEND TO MY WILL!

WHY?

BECAUSE I'VE SUFFERED SO MUCH!



TEXT BY WANDA WATERMAN, IMAGES PUBLIC DOMAIN



Day By Day

Calendar season begins in earnest in November. Mall kiosks spring up overnight, offering their wares. Larger vacant spaces are rented by calendar stores. Retailers like Staples and Grand & Toy carry a full line of dated planners in every size, description, and price point. Even Dollarama has a few affordable styles.

Seemingly there are calendars for every taste and purpose (though in my humble opinion there are way too many cat ones!). It doesn't appear that the move to handheld devices and technological solutions for self-organization has bit into the market. Some of us still like the tactile see-it-all-at-a-glance approach to knowing where we should be and when.

I especially like the small, purse-sized month-at-a-glance version and have been using it successfully for years. It's skinny and lightweight. When trying to pick a date for the next meeting or nail appointment, I can see all the openings at once. It makes counting six weeks ahead from the last haircut a snap. It works.

I've also got the big, thick coil-bound Browline Daily Planner. That thing now sets me back over \$35. It's got room for noting appointments every half hour from seven in the morning to eight-thirty in the evening. There are eight larger areas on the right side for a to-do list. Most important is the checkbox for a small thrill when you actually do the thing you intended to do. If I was in charge of the design I'd improve its usefulness by adding a full-page month-at-a-glance at monthly intervals. They have four (cheesy) pages dedicated to this at the front of the book. Inadequate.

Over the years I've had various desktop page-a-day calendars. The handbag ones were beautiful. The motivational ones just made me feel guilty because I wasn't *getting better every day in every way*. The cartoon ones made me laugh. The art masterpieces ones made me feel cultured.

My 2013 Word of the Day is all ready to go.

For the last several years we've used the Servus Credit Union's wall calendar as a command centre summary. It's taped inside the cupboard door nearest the phone. Its larger boxes capture everything from chiropractor appointments to evenings out with friends. It lets each of us know what the other is doing. Or would, if Roy kept his schedule updated.

On my desk under the clear plastic liner of my blotter are the 2012 and 2013 yearly calendars found at the back of merchant calendars. I just need to be sure I'm looking at the right one!

There's something quite lovely about starting a brand new calendar. It's full of possibilities and represents a fresh start. But the one thing a calendar can't do is make us live each day as if it was our last. That takes mindfulness and hard work, 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

In Bloom

The skies are grey, but your surroundings don't have to be; with indoor-friendly plants and fresh-cut flowers from the florist's or grocery store, you can bring a bit of bright colour into your home. This week's links offer some tips to choose and keep the best and longest-lasting blooms.

Language of the Flowers

It's common knowledge that different colours of flowers evoke different moods, but did you know that the type of flowers themselves convey a message? The ancient Japanese art of Hanakotoba looks beyond the bouquet to the symbolism behind the blooms.

DIY

There's no need to go to a florist's to get a superb bouquet; DIY arrangements can make just as beautiful a statement. *Real Simple* magazine gives the basics of flower arrangement, as well as some manageable projects to get you started. Want more? Google and Pinterest are full of ideas!

Live Long and Prosper

Now that you've selected and arranged your bouquets, how to keep them fresh and intact? You can use the flower food that often comes with the flowers' packaging, but there are alternative methods, too. Here, *Reader's Digest* lists some of the most popular.

Inside Game

If you want your blooms to last even longer, consider growing flowering plants. Geraniums, impatiens, and miniature roses are all good choices for winter gardening. The *San Francisco Chronicle* gives suggestions on how to best cultivate flowers indoors.





Hall Monitor

Remember that teacher who always seemed to know when you were passing notes or doodling in your textbook? The one who could spot you chewing gum in the back row even when she had her back turned? Well, that's nothing compared to the latest academic surveillance tool: e-textbooks that monitor every page you read—and report your study habits to your professor.

Digital reading's not the big news here. Whether skimming an e-book or using a course's online reading room, students have been working with digital texts for years. But CourseSmart, a company that provides digital course materials, has a new tool that infiltrates the space between student and text.

As the *Wired Campus* blog [reports](#), the tool gathers data on the most minute details of a student's reading habits, including "how much time they spend reading, how many pages they view, and how many notes and highlights they make." The data then gets compiled into an "engagement score" for that student.

The premise is that instructors can measure student engagement with texts. Are the students who read the material getting noticeably higher marks? If not, does that signal a problem with the material itself? As well, collecting data can alert professors to students who might be having trouble managing their time, and allow a prof to offer help before the problem gets out of hand.

In theory, not a bad idea. As a real-world application, though, it's got problems. The first are issues surrounding privacy. Sean Devine, chief executive of CourseSmart, explained to *Wired Campus* that students can opt out of being monitored. But will students who don't opt out have a clear understanding of how their data might be used in the future?

Data mining is big business, and corporations are hungry to use (and profit from) detailed data in all kinds of ways—some they probably haven't even thought of yet. If a student allows a university to collect this kind of detailed data that's attached to their name, there had better be thorough, transparent terms that guarantee that data can't be used for any reason other than feedback on a specific course. Will those be in place before schools start using the program?

Then there's the simple fact that the results seem very easy to skew. It doesn't take an A student to realize he can occasionally swipe to the next page of his history text while playing a video game. A professor could end up seeing several students with top-notch "engagement scores" and failing test grades. Does that mean there's a problem with the textbook itself, or with student study habits? It's impossible to know, and in this area the CourseSmart Analytics tool doesn't offer any improvement over paper texts.

And what about the student who simply won't (or can't) learn from e-textbooks? The student who hunts down a paper copy of the book or prints the assigned digital readings? There won't be any record of her study habits in the system, even if she pores over every line of the material from cover to cover.

The idea of including a student's digital note-taking in her overall engagement score has flaws, too. Many students make notes directly in their textbooks, whether they use pen on paper or stylus on screen. But plenty of others don't. They prefer to write theirs in a notebook or on flash cards or even type them into a separate document as they study. Will instructors remember to take this into account when they're compiling a student's score and don't see any digital note-taking in the text?

For profs with a uniform group of students who all study and take notes in the same way, the CourseSmart Analytics tool might offer useful feedback. But the ways that we learn and the methods we use are as individual as every student on a course roster, and there's no software tool smart enough to monitor that.

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!).

"If a student allows a university to collect this kind of detailed data . . . there had better be thorough, transparent terms that guarantee that data can't be used for any reason other than feedback on a specific course."

DID YOU KNOW?



If you have undergraduate courses ending December 31, 2012, you'll want to note the University's special holiday exam procedures—and order your final examinations as soon as possible.

If your course contract date is December 31, you must submit your exam requests before the University closes for the holidays. Athabasca University will be closed from December 24, 2012, at 4:30 pm MST until January 2, 2013, 8:30 am MST. No examinations will be shipped during that period.

Exam requests received after the close of business on December 24 will be treated as Late Examination Requests, and the Late Examination Request Fee will be assessed.

However, if you submit your exam request before the holiday closure, you will have until January 15, 2013, to take your exam. This is not a course extension; all other course components, including essays, projects, and quizzes, are due by the December 31 course contract date.

For further information, check out the holiday exam policy [here](#), or contact the Information Centre at 1.800.788.9041.

AU Holiday Exam Procedures

THE MINDFUL BARD

Wanda Waterman



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

Film: *She Dreamt That I Died* (2011)

Director: Matias Mariani

Genre: Documentary

Postmodern Canterbury Tales in a Brazilian Slammer

The interview subjects wear different-coloured prison fatigues that look like ER scrubs. They sit facing the camera in what looks like a classroom. Behind them is a blackboard, on which some of them draw maps of the prison and explain what goes where.

It seems like they're our teachers. But then they're sitting behind what looks like a small desk, and so they also appear to be students.

They come from all over the world. As they talk they paint mental pictures, some clear, some foggy, of how they ended up serving sentences in Brazil. You wait for prison life horror stories, but they never come; apparently these inmates are well taken care of and are not required to mix with dangerous types.

Soon you realize that the film's not meant to be so much a poster advocating for prisoners' rights as a kind of postmodern *Canterbury Tales*, each story a different window on the hypocrisy and vice of the age. This time it's not England, but the global village; the travellers are from all over the world, and instead of meeting at a wayside inn they share their stories in a South American clink.

Occasionally they look directly at the camera, but just as often they look in different directions to address their comments, suggesting there's a crew huddled around the camera. We can also guess that this crew is rather unresponsive, judging by the number of times the subjects look for affirmation. (*You see? You know? You understand? Was that good?*)

The film's title comes from a Hungarian prisoner, who recounts a dream of her daughter's in which the daughter dreamed that the mother had died. The girl's father told her not to worry; it wasn't a sign that the mother had died, but rather a sign that the daughter was coming to terms with her mother's absence.

One young woman in the film, a singer, is particularly mesmerizing.

*"Soon you realize that the film's . . . a kind of postmodern *Canterbury Tales*, each story a different window on the hypocrisy and vice of the age."*

It's amazing to listen to her, not just because of her direct gaze but also her remarkable sang-froid that carries almost to the end of her speech. She frequently declares her love for those she's left behind (or who've left her behind), and even though she hints that some of these relationships were abusive she sees this as normal in a love relationship. Her acceptance of it adds a tragic dimension to her story.

What's especially wonderful is the lilting quality of her voice, rising and falling in cresting waves as she voices her perplexity:

"My whole life is a puzzle . . . I've tried so hard to be the best person I can be . . . I just seem to win and then lose and win and then lose . . . Coming to Brazil to sing I was thinking, this is my breakthrough! And a guy gives me a bag of shoes and I am in prison . . . I don't understand anymore what the universe has planned for me."

It's a kind of *No Exit*; at first you think, *This really isn't as bad a fate as I'd thought*, and then you see how irrevocably we're at the mercy of others. Fate is a drug-dealing psychopath, and he's got a package he wants you to deliver.

She Dreamed That I Died manifests four of the Mindful Bard's criteria for films well worth seeing: 1) it is authentic, original, and delightful; 2) it poses and admirably responds to questions that have a direct bearing on my view of existence; 3) it stimulates my mind; and 4) it makes me appreciate that life is a complex and rare phenomenon, making living a unique opportunity.

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.

"Think! We are prisoners and shall always be.

Fortune has given us this adversity,

Some wicked planetary dispensation,

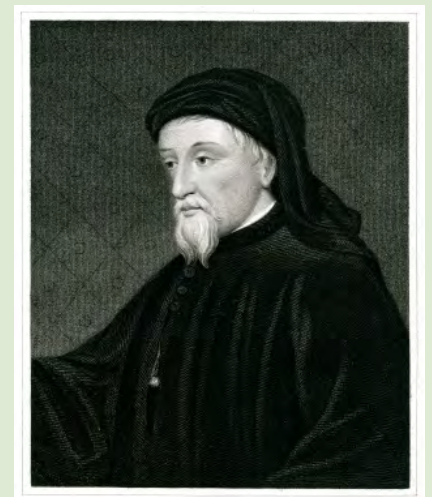
Some Saturn's trick or evil constellation

Has given us this, and Heaven, though we had sworn

The contrary, so stood when we were born.

We must endure it, that's the long and short."

Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Knight's Tale"



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

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