

THE VOICE

MAGAZINE

Vol 21 Issue 04 2013-01-25

Stay on Track

Healthy brain

Sent Home

Lessons learned

Love & Mortality

A boy and his dog

*Plus:
From Where I Sit
Write Stuff
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.



HEALTH MATTERS

Katie D'Souza

**Time to Focus**

Focusing on a task—or a list of tasks—can be challenging for many of us. And for AU students, distance learning without the “traditional” structured classroom approach can pose an even greater difficulty for effective focus. If you’re not convinced that your brain is as sharp as you might like, check out some of these options below.

Brain Food

Are you feeding your brain? Our muscles and cells require fuel to function effectively, and our brain is no different. Possibly the most important macronutrient for effective brain function is moderate amounts of “good” (healthy) fats in your diet. Such healthy fats include fish oil, olive oil, nut fats, and avocado. Animal fats should be kept to a minimum, and trans fats excluded completely.

In addition to supplying your brain with healthy fats, you should also be aware of how other aspects of your diet can impact brain function and, consequently, your ability to focus. For instance, food allergies often result in insidious symptoms of fatigue and inability to concentrate (often referred to as “brain fog”). Gluten, found in wheat, spelt, and rye, can trigger this in some susceptible individuals. Nor is gluten the only culprit; even a basic allergy to almonds can have the same effect.

Brain Blood Flow

Is your brain receiving sufficient nutrients and oxygen via blood flow? Even a modest reduction in blood flow to the brain can negatively affect your focus. To ensure optimal blood flow, try a daily dose of 200 mg of *Ginkgo bilboa*, a well-researched herb that has been found to improve cerebral blood flow. One note of caution, though: if your blood pressure is high, or you are taking blood thinners or are anticipating impending surgery, don’t use this herb.

Sleep

Is your sleep optimal? Are you getting a minimum of seven full hours of sleep, preferably starting at 11 p.m.? Traditional Chinese medicine uses the concept of the organ clock, in which different organs actively rejuvenate themselves at different times. According to this clock, being in bed by 11 p.m. each night maximizes full-body repair.

Additionally, the quality of your sleep can affect your ability to focus on that assignment or put in the last few hours of studying for an exam. If you’re waking multiple times during the night or tossing and turning in your sleep, you may need to do some relaxation exercises or meditation before bedtime to “calm” your brain activity, with the goal of more restful sleep.

Rewards

Sometimes the problem is less physiological and more psychological, and all that's needed is a reward system in place to keep you hanging in there. Small, short-duration rewards are the best way to improve focus on an at-hand task and still get the job done quickly. Rewards can be as simple as taking a five-minute walk around the block or allowing a timed Facebook check-in for a change of pace. I don't recommend food rewards, as this can lead to overeating and unhealthy weight gain.

Can't focus? Check your diet—you may need to up your intake of healthy fats or look for allergens or other triggers that create a brain fog.

Focus problems may be a challenge, but there is help. Envision the goal ahead (that finished assignment, or those post-exam celebrations) and use some of the tips above, and you may be amazed at how effectively you can use your time.

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.

DID YOU KNOW?

DegreeWorks



It takes a lot of planning to map out an academic career. But when you're working with information in several different media, the process can be time-consuming and frustrating. However, the future is promising: AU has launched DegreeWorks, "a comprehensive academic advising and degree audit solution" that communicates directly with AU's internal student information system and streamlines program planning.

DegreeWorks helps students plan their educational futures by "automatically [retrieving] a student's academic record . . . and [organizing] it into an educational plan on the web, identifying program requirements, courses completed and courses still needed to complete a degree."

Students are also able to "explore 'What if' scenarios to measure the effects of changing programs or adding majors or minors" and check GPAs based on projected future course grades.

It is user friendly, and AU has advisors available for students who need help navigating the system.

For more information on DegreeWorks, visit the [information site](#).

DON'T GIVE UP ON ME**Maxie van Roye**

You say, "It's not working out"

You say you can't cope

But when you give up on me

You're putting into words what I feel inside

You're proving to me that I was right:

I can't do it

It's too hard

Why should I even try?

Are you surprised when I get frustrated? Are you surprised when I wander away from my work? Are you surprised when I stop bothering, too?

Did you think I wasn't seeing? Did you think I wasn't learning? Did you think I wasn't taking cues, mirroring them in my own life and attitudes?

You didn't teach me, and I didn't know why.

You didn't teach me, so I existed in a half-limbo of confusion and anxiety.

You didn't teach me—but I learned.

I learned that when there's a problem, you should walk away from it.

I learned that if a challenge looks too challenging, you should stop before you start.

I learned that if you can't clearly see the future, you shouldn't create a vision.

I learned that you shouldn't believe or dare to dream.

You said I couldn't learn much. You said there was no point. You said I'd just get frustrated and give up.

But you gave up instead.



ANTBOY IN "NOT MY FIGHT"

Wanda Waterman

ANTBOY IN: NOT MY FIGHT



I'M BACK!

HELLO AGAIN.



... FRESH FROM A NIGHT OF CRIME-
FIGHTING AND SMARTASS COMEBACKS!

HUZZAH. YOU KNOW, THEY COULD
REALLY USE A GUY LIKE YOU IN SYRIA
RIGHT NOW.

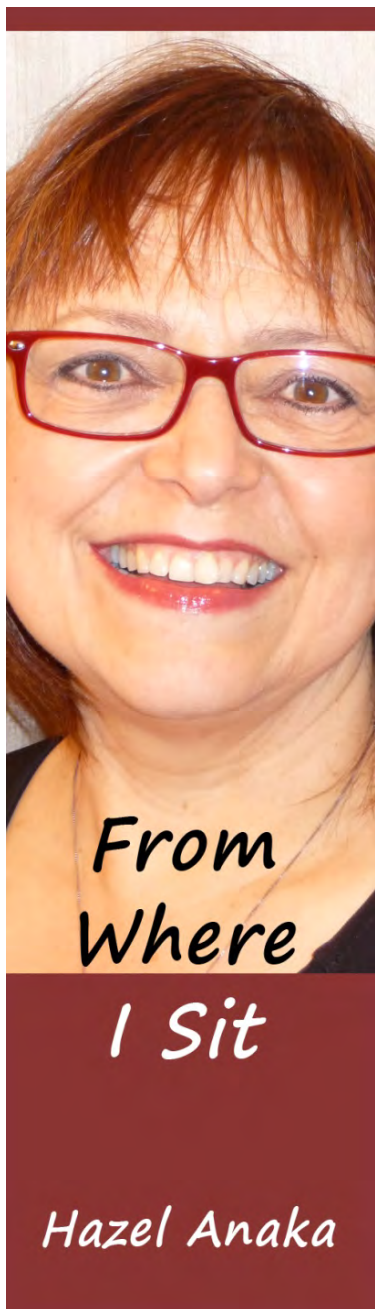


NOT MY FIGHT, LITTLE BUG-DUDE. MY JOB IS
KEEPING AMERICA CLEAN AN' SMELLIN' LIKE
A ROSE!

SOOOO, HOW LONG
HAVE YOU BEEN
WORKING
AT THE WHITE HOUSE?



WRITTEN BY WANDA WATERMAN



The Right Direction

When I showed up for my ten o'clock hair salon appointment, I was surprised to see all the stylists in a semicircle. I thought I'd walked into a staff meeting; instead, it was an in-service training session with a guest instructor. The topic was men's haircuts.

During the two and a half hours I was there, I heard plenty. I was impressed that the salon owners, one of whom is my stylist, bring in a guest every month. Such an easy, convenient way to hone skills while keeping the staff enthused and on-trend with the latest developments. I wondered if that was standard practice in most salons.

The session began with the instructor demonstrating a new technique using slow, step-by-step instructions on a male mannequin head. Questions were asked; notes were taken. Common-sense things, like greeting the male walk-in client with an introduction and a firm handshake, were discussed. The advice to keep spray bottles on cup warmers (to prevent that icy blast of water we all hate) made me smile. Such a simple thing could make the experience so much more pleasant. At one point it sounded like group therapy when the instructor asked, in classic Tabatha style, what the owner was like to work for and with.

Then it was time for the stylists to put scissors to hair and try out what they'd observed. Each one worked on an individual mannequin, and all were coached and corrected and asked to try this instead of that. There was emphasis on posture and ergonomics of motion.

During a break, the instructor, who is also a salon owner in Edmonton, came over to talk to me. She does this training internationally for a US-based company. *How'd you land that sweet gig*, I asked. *When your flight's delayed*

it's not that glamorous, but really it was just good fortune, she said.

I said it was reassuring to me that the stylists were continuing to learn and improve. She said that back in the day, if you did poorly in school you became a hairdresser. Now the standards are higher; you need a high school diploma, math, and some science.

As my colour was being rinsed, I wondered aloud why now, after hundreds of years of cutting men's hair, did there have to be a new technique to get the job done? Her response was that it's necessary to teach people how to do the latest styles—the pompadour, the undercut, and the faux-hawk. *Pompadour? You mean like young Elvis?* I asked. *More like James Dean*, she said. *So this is to teach a new generation of stylists how to do some of these old 'dos*, I said. *Yes, and to be a refresher for the older ones.*

I personally see the trend as more of the *Mad Men* 1950s-60s influence on all things fashion. Sometimes looking back is really looking ahead. This fly on the wall is glad my salon is looking in the right direction, 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

Express Yourself

As Toronto begins a new and controversial program examining the value of graffiti in the city, it's a good time to take a look at how this art form is growing and evolving. While the debate rages—art or not?—check out these links for a new look at what graffiti and street art are all about.

Best of the Best

Some of the street art out there is pretty fascinating. The Street Art Utopia blog showcases creations found around the world. Check out some of the readers' favourites—you'll never think of graffiti the same way.

Virtual Tour

Want to travel the world's streets in search of inspiration? The Street Art View site, "a collaborative collection of sites from Google Street View showcasing street art all over the globe," allows you to zoom in for a close-up view of street art around the world. See something local that piques your interest? Because the site is connected with Google Street View, you're able to pinpoint locations on a map and explore the area further.

GreenGraffiti

Not all street art requires paint. The GreenGraffiti movement, which uses pressure washers to create "clean" artwork amid the grime of the streets, has morphed graffiti and eco-friendliness into a unique marketing strategy. *The New York Times* discusses the controversy.

Debate

Even artists themselves disagree on the purpose and permanence of graffiti and street art. This CNN article, which interviews an Atlanta street artist, lays out a few of the differing viewpoints.



THE MINDFUL BARD

Wanda Waterman



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

Film: *Frankweenie*

Director: Tim Burton

Cast: Charlie Tahan, Frank Welker, Winona Ryder, Catherine O'Hara, Martin Short, Martin Landau, Robert Capron

"MR. RZYKRUSKI: Your country needs more scientists. They should make more. You should be a scientist."

VICTOR: Nobody likes scientists.

MR. RZYKRUSKI: They like what science gives them, but not the questions."

from *Frankweenie*

The Very Mortal Deadlock between Love and Power

Escape and Engage

For the creative mind, escape is both a good thing and a bad thing. Yes, artists need those escapes that renew us and spark new ideas; but the escapes should also help us engage better with reality and assume our responsibility as arbiters of positive change.

The first purpose of this column is to recommend books, music, and film that inform and stimulate the artist's imagination, and the second is to encourage mindfulness—that state of consciousness in which one becomes aware of reality as it is, a state which ideally evolves into a readiness to respond with compassion to the suffering in the world.

Awakening the Inner Child

There's something about animation that awakens the inner child, that delightful catalyst of creative energy that we hope we still carry with us. As children we watched animation to escape from the imagination-numbing strictures on our lives, all while maintaining our sense that nothing was really on our shoulders. A benevolent clockmaker was looking after the happy endings, and so we could explore the universe with abandon.

What's Wrong With Raising the Dead?

Tim Burton is a master of this genre and also at making deep thought fun, of presenting the secrets of the psyche and the collective unconscious in a way that makes them salient.

Frankweenie, for example, raises an ethical question: What's wrong with raising the dead? Wouldn't it

be wonderful to revive someone you adore? The problem is that as love wanes, power waxes monstrous, and in this vale of tears, love wanes more often than we'd like to admit.

As in Mary Shelley's original myth, *Frankenstein's Monster*, and the 1931 film *Frankenstein*, to which *Frankenweenie* pays a kind of bizarre homage, two strong motives conspire to compel us to try to raise the dead. These are 1) a desire to vie with God for power over life and death; and 2) a longing to retrieve from the grave mortal creatures from whom we can't bear to be parted.

Victor Frankenstein loves Sparky, and not just as a companion; they have a creative partnership in the films they create together. Thus is the viewer, especially the viewer who creates, primed for the horror of Sparky's demise.

Weird Science

Victor's science teacher looks like Boris Karloff with a Dali moustache. He voices, in a dramatic East-European accent, the scientist's worldview (as well as representing the reality that America gets most of its scientific brains from other countries). A chalkboard lecture sets up the interest in lightning, a symbol of conflict and quickening. It seems that this is a classroom full of gifted—and very weird—kids, a true artist's haven. But being surrounded by geniuses has its dark side.

The Conscious Thwarting of the Grieving Process

When Victor loses Sparky the first time, his parents, as families often do, prevent him from grieving properly. The father's hands are actually on Victor's neck as Victor yells and tries to run to his dog. They make the normal clumsy attempts to comfort him, ignoring the reality and depth of the emotions of bereavement in the hopes that things will get back to normal, when in fact the loss has signalled a permanent change. Then they leave him to mourn alone at his dog's grave, thus jeopardizing the very healing process they want expedited.

Eclipse of the Heart

Later, Victor is more amazed at having been able to bring Sparky to life than pleased about his precious dog having been returned to him; love is eclipsed by the heady rush accompanying the accomplishment of an amazing, fate-defying feat. But the power we wield, no matter how intoxicating, is limited. Our love, however, is tapped from something much bigger.

Frankenweenie manifests seven 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 provides respite from a sick and cruel world, a respite enabling me to renew myself for a return to mindful artistic endeavour; 4) it is about attainment of the true self; 5) it inspires an awareness of the sanctity of creation; 6) it displays an engagement with and compassionate response to suffering; and 7) 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.



Quinoa and Critical Thinking

The digital age and its avalanche of content have turned us all into lazy thinkers who've lost the capacity for independent thought. Sound familiar? It should, because it's a theme that plenty of people moan about. But a quick look at the comments of major publications reveals a different story—one that shows our collective critical thinking skills are alive and well.

The main argument is that, because it's so easy to post our every thought to the world, quality has given way to quantity. We simply can't keep up with the flow of information, never mind taking the time to ponder it, so we take the easy way out. We skim headlines, never question anything deeply, and would rather fritter away hours on funny cat videos.

To some degree, that's true. And then there are the folks who commented on a recent *Guardian* [article](#) about quinoa. Hardly the stuff of political drama—unless you're talking about its role in the global food supply chain. When the author wrote that "Bolivians can no longer afford their staple grain, due to western demand raising prices," she skewed the piece heavily on the ethical ills of "the meat avoider's larder."

Which prompted several astute questions, like [this one](#): "Do you have any statistics to back up your claim that 'the shopping baskets of vegetarians and vegans swiftly clocks up the food miles' relative to the 'shopping baskets' of non-vegetarians? How do the foods eaten primarily by the latter compare in this regard?" Several similar comments pointed out facts that had been glossed over or completely ignored by the journalist, and those remarks offered a far more informative take on the topic than the original article had.

And in the *Globe and Mail*, a recent article on the death of Aaron Swartz stirred an interesting debate among [commenters](#), including one thread with various references to the theories of John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, and the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakunin.

Are most of these articulate discussions still littered with posts that are little better than a three-year-old's tantrum? Of course, and that's no different than any other facet of society. We're an incredibly mixed bag of humanity, for better or worse.

Yet for every puerile or inflammatory rant, there's a reasoned, thoughtful commenter who raises the collective bar. Indeed, to overlook that fact plays into the very assumption we're talking about: that we're hopelessly unable to look at the public conversation in anything more than a shallow, passing way.

Now I think I'll go read the comments section while I eat my quinoa.

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!).

INTERNATIONAL NEWS DESK



At Home: Quit While Ahead

It's no secret that smoking cigarettes negatively impacts your health, and that quitting could save your life. But did you know that the earlier you quit, the better chance you have at achieving the lifespan of someone who's never touched a cigarette?

As *The Toronto Star* [reports](#), a new study by Toronto's St. Michael's Hospital shows that quitting "before age 40 can restore the life expectancies of smokers to virtually normal lengths."

Research has shown that smoking typically "[cuts] a decade off a smoker's life," but it's possible to gain back that longevity by quitting as early as possible. Dr. Prabhat Jha, head of St. Michael's Centre for Global Health Research, told reporters that "those that quit by age 30 have pretty much the same survival curves as never-smokers."

Quitting by 40 will gain back nine of the years the smoker might otherwise have lost, and quitting by age 50, six years. However, researchers caution that while longevity may be regained, overall health will still be affected by every year spent smoking, and "[the] chance that smokers will develop lung or other types of cancer remain higher and linger for years after they've butted out."

Around the World: Prepare to Die

Air travel security is taken seriously by flight attendants—perhaps a little *too* seriously, as one New Zealand man found out.

As Yahoo! News [reports](#), Wynand Mullins was asked to remove his t-shirt because of its theoretically threatening message: "My name is Inigo Montoya. You killed my father. Prepare to die."

The famous classic line—from *The Princess Bride*—was deemed "intimidating" to "concerned" passengers on the plane. A flight attendant told Mullins to "put on a different shirt" and that she would "attempt to find him [one]," but she did not give him an alternative shirt.

Amid the amusement of some of the passengers, who like many others were familiar with the movie and the line, Mullins kept wearing the shirt—though he told reporters that he "wouldn't be surprised if they had someone watching me the whole time."

For his own part, Mullins doesn't appear offended, telling reporters that "[the] whole experience was a bit over the top, but also a bit comical."

AUSU UPDATE

Bethany Tynes



AUSU e-newsletters a success

AUSU has been piloting the use of e-newsletters to contact our student body over the last year. We began by sending these newsletters to students registered on our website, and after a very positive initial response, we are now sending e-newsletters to all students currently enrolled in any AU undergrad course, as well as all students registered on our site who wish to receive email. We're looking forward to keeping in closer touch with our members, and hope in future to be able to send regular monthly e-newsletters to all members (though we'll also respect your right to unsubscribe). If there's something you'd like to see included in our newsletters, please let us know!

Instructional model survey

Last June, AUSU learned that AU planned to move all undergraduate courses to a call centre model (like the one currently used in AU's Faculty of Business) beginning in September. We felt that this was a very major change, and was surprised that the university had not conducted consultation of AU's students or academics. AUSU drafted a survey and sent it to all our members via e-newsletter. Over 2,500 of you took the time to fill out this survey, giving us a wealth of information about what's important to AU's undergrad students. The AUSU Executive is now working to make sure that these important student perspectives are communicated to the university, and we have presented our survey results report to a number of AU community members and committees, including CUPE 3911 (the AU tutors' union) and the Board of Governors (AU's highest governing body).

DegreeWorks now available

We've been waiting for AU to roll out their new DegreeWorks system—and it's finally available to students! If you started an AU program after September 2010, you can now use DegreeWorks to see how your courses fulfill the requirements of your program. DegreeWorks is available online anytime, and can instantly help you see which courses you still need to complete on the way to your credential. Let us know what you think of DegreeWorks, and we'll make sure we let the university know how they're doing meeting student needs.

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. You can also e-mail our office at ausu@ausu.org or call 1-800-788-9041 ext. 3413. We'd love to hear from you!

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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