

THE VOICE

MAGAZINE

Vol 21 Issue 07 2013-02-15

U of A?

Merger rumours

Book Dating

Love at page one

School of 2013

The new distance ed

Plus:

*The Mindful Bard
From Where I Sit
and much more!*



CONTENTS

The Voice's interactive Table of Contents allows you to click a story title to jump to an article. Clicking the bottom right corner of any page returns you here. Some ads and graphics are also links.

Features

Distance Education Goes Mainstream	3
Gregor's Bed: <i>Haiku for a Season</i>	5
Library of the Future	7
Comic: Antboy in "Fighting the Power"	8

Columns

Write Stuff: Romancing the Tome	9
From Where I Sit: What I Did on My Mexican Vacation	10
The Mindful Bard: <i>Fat Kid Rules the World</i>	11
AUSU Update	14

News and Events

Did You Know?	4
Click of the Wrist	6
<i>Voice</i> Holiday	12
International News Desk	13

From Our Readers

Letters to the Editor	2
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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.



DISTANCE EDUCATION GOES MAINSTREAM

Tamra Ross



The genesis of Athabasca University isn't well known to students. For one thing, AU is not named after the town; that's largely coincidental. AU originated in Edmonton and was named for the University of Alberta's Athabasca Hall. The word Athabasca is Cree and, when spelled with a K instead of a C, is broadly used to refer to the peoples, languages, and geographical features of the US and Canadian North.

In the early '80s, AU was either floundering or thriving (I've heard many versions of the tale) and northern Alberta was in the midst of an oil boom: in a controversial decision, AU was moved, lock, stock and campus, 100 miles north to the town that shares its name. It is no more the "University of Athabasca" than Montreal has a "University of McGill," but you can forgive the assumption.

At the time of the move, distance education (DE) was already on the menu and selling well. As it happens, the population up north didn't swell much and DE became the make or break proposition. The first cohort was small: AU executives still tell the story of the first AU convocation, in which only two degrees were awarded and someone goofed up by switching the parchments.

By the early '90s AU dominated as the largest DE provider in the country, serving students across Canada and in 70 nations. It was the first North American university accredited in both the US and Canada, while AUSU was the first SU in the world (we know of) exclusively serving DE students. Annual growth was staggering: many years exceeded six per cent. I recall a span of a few years in which our membership grew from 23,000 to 35,000! By the glorious late '90s AU execs aimed for 100,000 students, AU was on top of the North American DE market, and competition was negligible. But while Y2K didn't bring the cataclysm everyone feared, it works as an ersatz timestamp for a major shift in distance ed.

With the growth of the Internet, DE went from a niche market to the next logical step in delivering education. Students increasingly used the web to locate research materials and word processors to write papers. Email was quickly embraced. Universities began developing courses to be delivered online via interfaces like WebCT. Overseas, the idea really took hold, with major efforts in the UK and Australia driving the market (the Moodle platform was developed in Australia).

Today, most universities are at least dabbling in DE, and the growth is accelerating. Students are increasingly selecting courses à la carte from multiple schools, benefiting from fee-saving options from portals like Canadian Virtual University, Thompson Rivers, and others. A recent discussion with our student council revealed that most of us have taken courses from multiple post-secondary schools.

So where does this leave AU? With more competition, growth is down to under two per cent (that's a reduction in growth, not attrition!). DE development is surging ahead, and our competitors enjoy luxuries AU doesn't have: they are smaller (for now), and their courses were developed for online teaching from the get-go, while AU has a massive catalogue (800+ courses) largely developed for print delivery. The

transfer to Moodle took years, and most courses need updates to take best advantage of the online format.

It's hard to guess where AU will rank in a decade, but I suspect students will regularly take courses from multiple schools, building programs from a de facto international university. This bodes very well, or poorly, for AU, depending on how you look at it. What is clear is that so much has to change: Revenue Canada must realize that "full-time" may mean part-time at multiple schools; providers of health insurance and other services will have to think beyond programs limited to full-time students of a given school; and transferring courses must be faster and easier. If things don't change, students will fall through the cracks for taking advantage of the wealth of educational opportunities available to them.

I worry that schools and service providers are not adjusting fast enough. Do your school's career services span the country/globe? Does your health plan apply if you leave the province while studying? How useful is your campus food bank if you are hungry in another city? *Maclean's* ranks universities but continues to focus on schools rather than programs, and non-academic features that may ultimately be offered separately from the alma mater (. . . speaking of terms we'll have to redefine). A typical university IT plan takes one to two years to develop and spans five years, but if you buy into even a modicum of Kurzweil's theory, such plans are likely to be out of date soon after development and well before they expire.

What is your vision of the future for education? You've probably been asked this many times, but what I want to know is this: what scares you? What services and options are you worried about losing? Write us a letter and let us know, at voice@voicemagazine.org.

DID YOU KNOW?

W3Schools



Back in the day, it was all about learning the "three Rs." Now, with the explosion of information technology into our everyday lives, many of us are more concerned with keeping up with the three Ws: specifically, the www, the worldwide web.

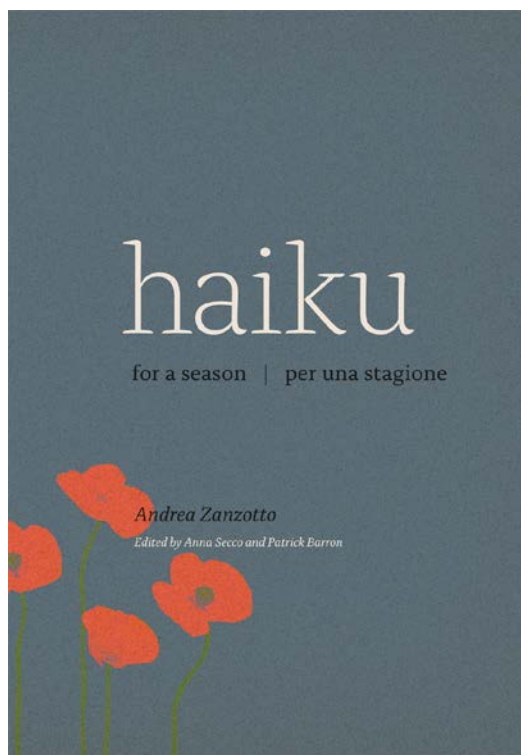
It's becoming more and more common for employers even in fields unrelated to information technology to expect prospective employees to show a basic familiarity with HTML, the web, and maybe even CSS or Java. And even if you're working your dream job already, staying current with the technology will help you keep ahead of the game—or at least not feel quite so lost in the sea of tech terms.

The W3Schools tutorials, freely available online, offer users the opportunity to learn the basics of web development or brush up on their skills. Similar to Code Year, though less formal, W3Schools still structures its material and lessons in a logical way, allowing users to start out gently and move on to more difficult skills later. Those who want to go beyond the basics can use the W3Schools materials to obtain their certification in a particular coding language.

Even if you're not specifically interested in taking a tutorial at this time, you'll want to bookmark the site for its handy reference pages, forums, and more.

GREGOR'S BED

Wanda Waterman



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

Book: Andrea Zanzotto, *Haiku for a Season*

*"Joy of July, source of all joys
in the shape of haiku or, maybe, other poems—
sweetly, palely in nature*

sleeps the writing

The little volcano named July

lets flow a tender lava for everything—

let life be something

more than a dream"

Andrea Zanzotto in *Haiku for a Season*

Splendour in the Poppy Field

It's thanks to this slim little volume, which Zanzotto carefully crafted in the years between 1984 and his death in 2011, that yours truly the humble lay critic first encountered this wonderful poet and his image-rich inner landscapes, even though he's thought to be one of the most prominent European poets of the 20th century, noted also for his translations and a stint for Fellini (*Casanova* and *E la nave va*).

Strictly speaking, the poems in *Haiku for a Season* are not haiku; rather, they approximate homages of which Ezra Pound would have heartily approved, a whittled down imagism more effective than most of what passes for the form today.

Zanzotto chose this approach because he saw what he described as a "glittering energy" in the minimalist lines, an elan evoking the ideograms of Japanese language. He was enamoured of the haiku's simplicity and magic elements. If, as Northrop Frye said, the poet in the modern world exists to keep the primitive mindset alive, the haiku perhaps still exists to quicken the primitive essence of postmodern poetry.

Zanzotto wrote these poems first in English and then in his native Italian—the translations face each other—and even if you don't know the language it won't hurt to read the Italian verses aloud: you'll pick up meaning from familiar shreds of Latin roots and you might also hear that melodious linguistic oboe that carries the essence of these spare words.

A frequent motif is the poppy, whose red colour and opiate qualities have long rendered it a symbol of sleep, both nocturnal and eternal. Demeter was said to have created the poppy to put herself to sleep after the loss of her daughter Persephone, but in Zanzotto's mythos the poppy is the thing that silences

dreams, visions, the pen, and the sense of being truly alive.

Perhaps the title signifies a soporific state both for the poet and the culture he lives in, a condition that simply can't last, and a dream landscape ripe with signs of an impending awakening.

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.

CLICK OF THE WRIST

Bling of the Day

The jury is still debating what history will record as the theme of the 2000s, but so far it looks like the 2010s are shaping up to be the decade of DIY design. Forget the stuff hanging on racks in the mall—items made “just for you” are the bling of the day.

Your very own bobble

If creeping people out is your goal, you can't go wrong with a custom bobblehead designed to look just like a balloon-skulled, glassy-eyed, limp-necked, version of you! Bobbles come in a huge variety of poses and can be designed as single people, couples, or even pets. You simply choose a pose, then customize the figures individually for skin tone, eye colour, hair style, and clothing, and you can add accessories such as glasses, hats, or tattoos. “Skilled artists” will then carve your likeness onto the face of the toy, based on a photograph you provide. You can even choose from a wide range of custom wedding cake toppers, but these appear to be limited to mixed gender couples. Get with the decade!

You may need more than an Allen key

If you have trouble assembling IKEA bookcases with the tools provided, go no further; for those who have mastered the Allen key and are ready for more, this is your site! IKEA Hackers modify or repurpose IKEA products to create unique items. The resulting “hacks” are featured on this site with pictures and instructions. While some are incredibly simple (e.g., using wardrobe doors for a headboard), others are for the more advanced hacker: consider the Tertial Lamp Chandelier, comprised of a dozen goose-neck desk lamps. It likely draws upwards of 700 watts and puts out enough heat to let you use your dining table as an Easy-Bake oven, but hey, your friends won't have one!

It's like cooking, sort of . . .

Why settle for M&M's candy in the standard colour assortment when you can make your own? Yes, there is an app for that: sort of. On the M&M's web site you can create custom mixtures of the candy by choosing up to 3 colours from a selection of more than 20. But don't stop there; you can change the text or add clip art, and design custom packages too. Order a batch in your wedding colours to go along with your doppelganger cake topper, and you are truly master of the DIY bling.





LIBRARY OF THE FUTURE

Student Information Sessions

*The coordinating for the AU library is pleased to announce a series of webinars to consider the **Library of the Future**. All AU students are welcome and encouraged to attend.*

Tuesday, February 26, 2013 (9:00 – 10:30 am)

“From Gatekeeping to Gate Opening: An Evolving Role for Academic Libraries,” by Steven Bell, Associate University Librarian for Research and Instruction at Temple University, and President, 2012-2013 of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL).

Monday, March 4, 2013 (3:30 – 5:00 pm)

“Libraries of the Future: An Australian Research Library Perspective,” by Phillip Kent, University Librarian at the University of Melbourne, an Executive member of the Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL), a Director of CAVAL Ltd, and recently elected to the arXiv Member Advisory Board at the University of Melbourne.

Thursday, March 7, 2013 (9:30 – 11:00 am)

This session is an opportunity to discuss the presentations given by Steven Bell and Philip Kent and to discuss the proposed AU Library vision statement, mission, and mandate.

Please use this link to access the webinars: <https://connect.athabascau.ca/lotf/>.

Reminders and further information about each session will be sent out prior to each session. The sessions will be recorded and archived at AU Space. Everyone is welcome to participate.

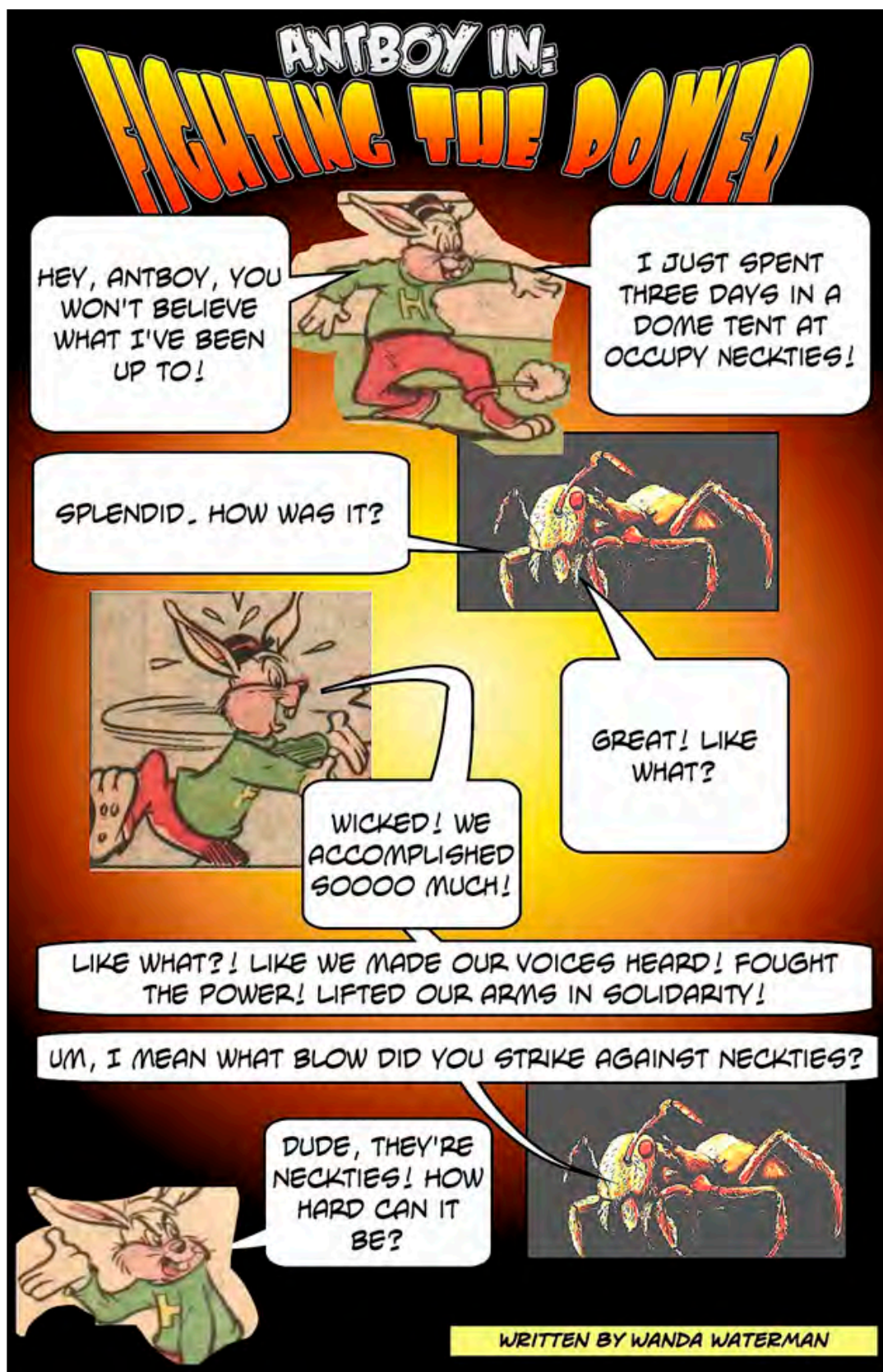
As you may remember, a series of interviews with university stakeholders was conducted in the late spring regarding a vision for the Library of the Future. The major themes that emerged from the interviews were disseminated through an email communication to all staff. These themes envision the Library as: portal to collections, resource for information literacy initiatives, strategic laboratory, digitizer, and contributor to the knowledge community.

The AU Library of the Future coordinating team is comprised of Elaine Fabbro, Tony Tin, Doug Kariel, Mike Gismondi, Steve Schafer, and Cindy Ives.

AUSU urges students to take part in these sessions to ensure that our future library reflects the diverse needs of our membership!

ANTBOY IN "FIGHTING THE POWER"

Wanda Waterman





Romancing the Tome

Smiling, cherubic Cupid, that traditional symbol of Valentine's Day, is always pictured holding his bow and arrow. And more often than not, he manages to find his mark. But if Cupid wants to improve his aim, he'd be wise to start carrying a book. Because if there's one scene that says hearts and flowers these days, it's the book scene—specifically, your local library.

It shouldn't come as a surprise, really, that book lovers are a romantic lot. After all, centuries of readers have indulged in some of the most romantic tales ever told by way of the page. *Wuthering Heights*, *The English Patient*, *Gone with the Wind*, *Outlander*: enduring love stories, each and every one, and those four titles barely scratch the surface.

So where are lovers of literature finding love in real life? Look no further than the library, where speed reading's given way to speed dating.

The Vancouver Public Library's central branch first gave the idea a try in February 2012, after hearing about a similar event in San Francisco. The name for the Vancouver event? Read Dating, of course.

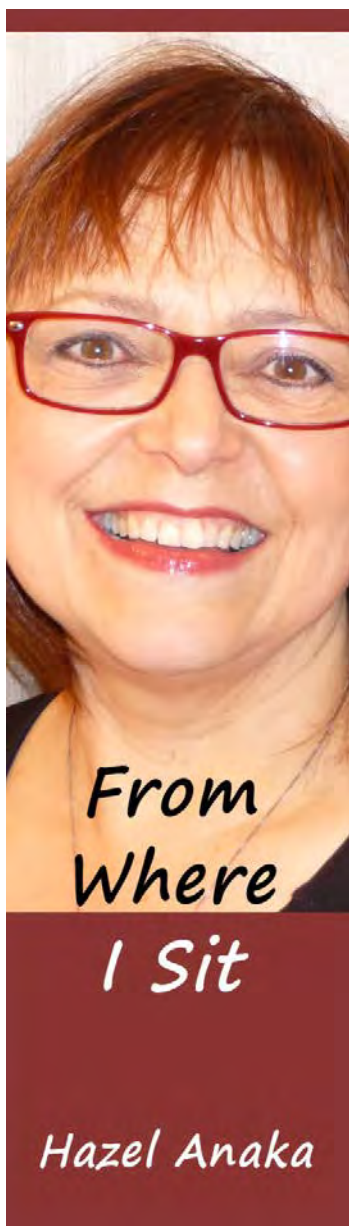
As this *Globe and Mail* [article](#) reports, literary singles moved “around the room, spending four minutes each with about 20 others, all armed with a favourite book.” To allow a greater degree of privacy, participants could choose to go by the name of a favourite literary character. The books are a great conversation starter, and their genres and titles can also be a way for their owners to say a lot about themselves before saying a word to potential dates.

The idea of read-dating has become something of an international hit. Back in 2006, *The Independent* [reported](#) on a library in Belgium that had started “bib-dating” events (that's the Dutch term for library dating). In keeping with the literary focus, participants could let someone know they were interested by writing a note “to be placed in the book of the person they would like to meet again.”

Closer to home, Toronto, Saskatoon, and Halifax are among the Canadian cities whose libraries have tried blending passion and pages. There are read-dating events specifically for the LGBTQ community too, and several dating websites that cater strictly to book lovers. One of them, a UK site called Book Lover Dating, quotes Dawn Adams on its [homepage](#): “Show me the books he loves and I shall know the man far better than through mortal friends.”

Clearly, book lovers have a soft spot for romance, and the best part is that you don't have to wait until next Valentine's Day to get your fill: It's right there waiting, between the pages.

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!).



What I Did on My Mexican Vacation

I was one of 33 people who traveled to the Riviera Maya for my niece's wedding. Plans were in the works for about a year. It would be the first time our extended family had done any such thing.

January 27 was travel day. Five bridal couples and their guests made for a relaxed, party-like flight. We landed safely and got settled into a very nice resort. Just over 24 hours later, I was in a Mexican hospital.

Roy, Greg, Carrie, Grady, family friend Carla, and I had just sat down for a meal in one of the à la carte restaurants. In mid-sentence I drooped over onto Carla. In a matter of seconds or minutes—no one agrees on this—I felt someone wiping my face with a damp cloth. When I came to, I saw a look of terror on Carrie's face; saw Grady crying, heard Roy talking. They said I slumped over and couldn't hear or respond when they talked to me.

In minutes the resort doctor was at my side. I was aware of people staring as they helped me into a quad outfitted with a stretcher. Greg took my purse. I was taken to the doctor's treatment area and had three or more paramedics attempting to help me: oxygen by cannula, an IV, questions to answer, and concerned murmuring by all. I had the presence of mind to know the insurance papers were in my purse and Roy needed to make the call. Resort people shuttled him around to get my passport from the safe. At one point the doctor couldn't get a BP. I was clammy and vomited black stuff. The doctor said I needed to get to a hospital to be sure I wasn't having a heart attack. Ever the skeptic, I asked if this was a scam!

In the meantime, Carla was caring for Grady and Carrie was breaking the news to Hilary. We were off to the *hospiten* at Playa del Carmen and I remember

lying in the ambulance for what seemed like a long time as Roy was getting a file number from the insurance company and pre-authorizing \$1500 of care on our credit card.

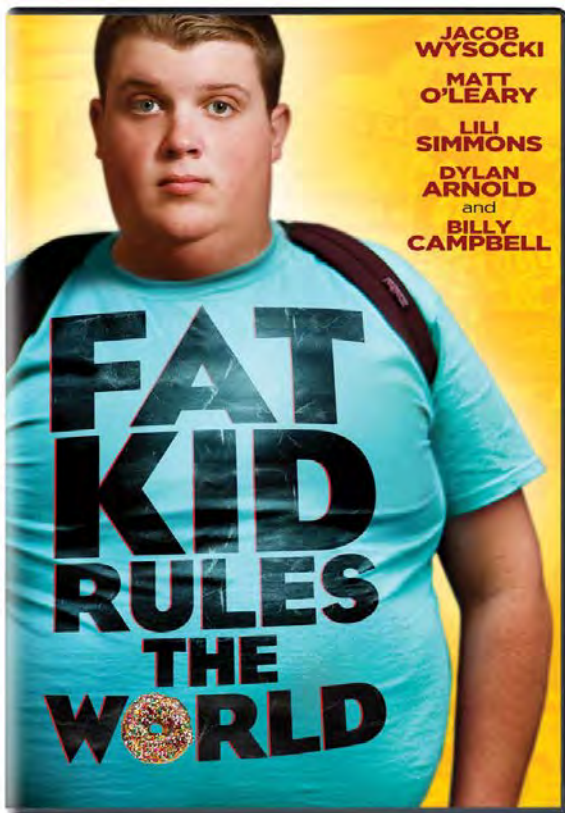
More questions from a female doctor, an electrocardiogram, blood work, and urinalysis followed, as did another bag of electrolytes by IV and a visit by the gastrointestinal guy. Concerned that I was dehydrated, anemic, probably bleeding, they wanted to keep me for observation, an endoscopy, surgery, a transfusion, whatever was needed. I signed myself out with the promise I'd see my own doctor and get an endoscopy at home and that I'd return if I felt worse in the next few days.

As I write this I've kept my promise. Blood work confirms there's a problem and an emergency endoscopy and colonoscopy are scheduled. I'm grateful for the swift competent care I received in a tropical paradise; a holiday I won't forget, from where I sit.

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

THE MINDFUL BARD

Wanda Waterman



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

Film: *Fat Kid Rules the World* (2012)

Director: Matthew Lillard

Cast: Jacob Wysocki, Matt O'Leary, and Billy Campbell

"Misfits aren't misfits among other misfits."

Barry Manilow

Observing the Folly from a High and Lonely Place and Consenting to Join It

Have you ever painted yourself so tightly into a corner that when an obviously dysfunctional person came along and offered you a hand up you had no choice but to accept?

And even after that person wrecked your life and the friendship ended, you couldn't help but look back at your

relationship and thank your lucky stars for all the things that weirdo brought into your life?

Meet Troy: fat, unattractive, uncool, and always depressed. He walks in front of a bus and is rescued by Marcus, a druggie musician who'll turn Troy's life around in exchange for the privilege of raiding Troy's medicine cabinet and wallet on a regular basis.

Naturally, Troy accepts, and with a little coaxing becomes the drummer in Marcus's punk act. Then stuff starts happening. His relationship with his family is forced to turn a new corner, away from the slough of despond. He has to deal with grief at his mom's death and bitterness at having been a social leper during the most important period of his social development. Girls start to notice him. He even writes a song expressing his angst and fury and starts to figure out what he really stands for as opposed to the image of himself he's always seen reflected in the eyes of others.

The film is granted authenticity by actor Jacob Wysocki, whose voice is the summation of an incredible acting presence evoking deep intelligence, concern, profound suffering, calm, and peace all at once. First time feature Director Matthew Lillard, better known as an actor, builds on this by illuminating Troy's inner thoughts through an interesting gimmick: Troy's daydreams are the product of a reactive emotional intelligence and range from gruesome to erotic to terrifying.

External forces play a strong role in Troy's transformation. There is the Bad Dad: a cop, a symbol of the establishment and oppression. As in *Anna Karenina*, we're at first encouraged to see Bad Dad as someone to hate as we sympathize with the protagonist. But in the end it's Bad Dad who's the only one who

sincerely loves and who has the strength of character to withstand extreme grief without caving in to his own weaknesses.

The punk band, too, transforms Troy by placing him in a new context. His role as a drummer comes with all the favours being in a band might entail, and because it's punk no one is allowed to say that he can't play because he's too fat, too nerdily dressed, too depressed, or too anything. This is a cogent view of the essence of the punk ethos that refuses the hip in favour of the outcast. (In effect, Malcolm McLaren's stylized leather and safety pins were a complete and unfortunate misunderstanding of true punk.) Witness the Canadian band, Fucked Up, with its obese, schizophrenic singer who flaunts his body on stage and shouts the anthem "Crooked Head" to broadcast his mental condition like a flame-red freak flag. There's also the young guy in the film *The Rejected* who wore shorts to show off his mechanical leg, and Beth Ditto posing her unfashionably plump naked body on a magazine cover among the sticklike mannequins.

"In the end it's Bad Dad who's the only one who sincerely loves and who has the strength of character to withstand extreme grief without caving in to his own weaknesses."

That's really why those of us who love punk, do. Come on, did you think it was actually about the music?

If that's not enough, there's also a death-by-vehicle motif representing the refusal to suffer loss: in the first case the loss of a sense of self and in the second the impending loss of a friend who has compelled Troy to know himself.

Fat Kid Rules the World manifests seven of the Mindful Bard's criteria about for films well worth seeing: 1) it is authentic, original, and delightful; 2) it harmoniously unites art with social action, saving me from both seclusion in an ivory tower and slavery to someone else's political agenda; 3) it provides respite from a sick and cruel world, 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; 7) it makes me appreciate that life is a complex and rare phenomenon, making living a unique opportunity.

VOICE HOLIDAY

It's that time of year, the time when millions flee the winter blahs for sunnier climates, snowy adventures, or a week spent curled up in front of a cozy fireplace.

Here at *The Voice* we'll be taking a two-week break while we refocus, recharge, and get ready for the next step for *The Voice Magazine*.

The Voice will be on hiatus from February 16-March 3, so there will be no issue on February 22 or March 1. We'll be back to our regular publishing schedule with the March 8 issue. Meanwhile, keep sending in your comments, letters, and submissions. We always love hearing from our readers!

INTERNATIONAL NEWS DESK



Around the World: Passwords from the Grave

Survivalists in Great Falls, Montana may have felt a little vindicated yesterday as the Emergency Broadcast System on KRTV in the area began broadcasting the message “Civil authorities in your area have reported that the bodies of the dead are rising from their graves and are attacking the living.”

It turns out that hell was not full and the message was the work of hackers who had broken into the Emergency Alert Systems. The vulnerability appears to be that many of the affiliate stations have not changed the passwords on the Emergency Alert System from the default set by the manufacturers.

Had the alert been real, however, you should be reassured to know that the Center for Disease Control has a zombie attack strategy already prepared.

So sleep easy, but change your passwords.

At Home: Zombies Kept Out Of Canada

In keeping with the theme, only yesterday the Canadian federal government vowed to keep zombies out of Canada, and today that is backed up with the cancellation of Quebec’s zombie apocalypse training scenario. The feds had nothing to do with the cancellation, as Public Security Minister Stéphane Bergeron ordered the change in the theme because he thought that was overtaking the importance of the training event.

Those behind the event say that the zombie theme was chosen to force officials and personnel to think “out of the box” to solve problems. However, the zombies have now been replaced with a more traditional but less entertaining flood; the exercise will go on as scheduled.

Individual Canadians should take a look at our government’s own Emergency Preparedness site for additional information on how to handle any emergency.

Except zombies.

AUSU UPDATE



Dear Members,

You may have recently seen information on the internet speculating about the future of Athabasca University. These reports suggest that the Alberta government may broker a merger between AU and University of Alberta, and that this may result in drastic changes to the services and programs offered to students AU students.

We want you to know that AUSU is aware of these rumours and is actively investigating the source – we will keep you informed as we know more.

We can tell you that AU is governed via a bicameral structure with two main governing bodies: the General Faculties Council (formerly Academic Council) and the Board of Governors (formerly Governing Council). AUSU has representatives on both of these governing bodies and we can confirm that there has been no formal discussion of a university merger among these groups. The AU president, Frits Pannekoek, has also assured the press that there is no truth to the rumour. On behalf of our members, we are seeking more information from the Board of Governors, the minister, and AU executives.

At this time we simply have no evidence that a merger is being seriously considered by AU, the U of A, or the Alberta government, and we note that among the many committees and working groups of AU, planning and development for the future continues as usual.

We know that our members are worried and want more information. We will update you as soon as we know more. At this time we do not feel there is any reason for students to worry or make changes to their study plans.

Do not hesitate to contact our office if you wish to talk about this or any other issue affecting AU students.

AUSU.

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.

CLASSIFIEDS

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

THE VOICE

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