

THE VOICE

MAGAZINE

Vol 22 Iss 01 2014-01-03

Bumps on the Road
Prioritize Organization

Not a Bad Legacy
Paging Dr. Killem Quick

Espresso to Go
Technology and Writing together

Click to discover more of
2013'S Top Picks!



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.

Feature

Best of the Voice – 2013..... 3

Articles

Bumps on the Road, Part I..... 5

This World, Indian Winter, Part I..... 7

Manic Santa 12

A Book in the Hand: *E-text Initiative* 14

Relative Maturity..... 22

Columns

Write Stuff: *Espresso to Go* 10

Writer's Toolbox: *A Very Good Place to Start* 15

From Where I Sit: *Not a Bad Legacy* 4

Maghreb Voices: *Tunisia Days, Part III*..... 17

Mindful Bard: *Frankenweenie* 20

AUSU Update..... 25

News and Events

Did You Know?..... 13

Comics

Chazz Bravado: *Reaching Higher*..... 24

***The Voice
Magazine***

www.voicemagazine.org

500 Energy Square
10109 – 106 ST NW
Edmonton AB
T5J 3L7

800.788.9041 ext. 2905

Email
voice@voicemagazine.org

Publisher

AU Students' Union

Editor-In-Chief

Tamra Ross

Managing Editor

Karl Low

Regular Contributors

Hazel Anaka
Katie D'Souza
S.D. Livingston
Wanda Waterman

The Voice is published
every Friday in HTML and
PDF format.

For weekly email
reminders as each issue is
posted, fill out the
subscription form [here](#).

The Voice does not share
its subscriber list with
anyone.

© 2014 by *The Voice*

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.

BEST OF THE VOICE - 2013**Karl Low**

We start off the year as tradition dictates, with our annual Best of *The Voice Magazine*. I've chosen for you various articles from through-out the year that I think best represent what the Voice was about during 2013. To aid me in this, many of the writers gave suggestions for what they thought were their own best articles, and even a few readers suggested articles they thought were deserving of the honor.

This year, I've tried to provide a little bit of information as to why each article was selected. You'll find issues close to home, and explorations of far away. A review, a comic, an editorial, articles that give us questions or make us see from another point of view, even if just for a few seconds, are all part of what makes *The Voice Magazine* what it is for AU students.

This year, I hope to bring not only more like these ones but also more articles that will resonate specifically with us as AU students. We're a community of students scattered across the globe with amazing variety and diversity, but what we all have in common is the hunger to expand our minds and abilities, and the desire to do so without having to bow down before the typical restrictions to location, personal situation, or availability that is requires of a bricks and mortar institution. We are willing and able to pursue and take responsibility for our education on our own terms, at our own pace. This strikes me as something rather amazing, and certainly something that we should celebrate more often.

That said, all that is coming up. What we have for you now is, ultimately, my selection for the Best of the Voice Magazine for 2013. If you disagree with my choices, or think that there's some article that really should have been included, by all means, write and let me know. I'm always willing to publish a letter to the editor, so what better way could there be to make sure that some article or author you've seen gets more attention.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Karl'.

P.S. I'm still waiting for the winner of our Voice Reader Survey to get back to me. If you have a gmail account that you've used to contact AUSU in the past, or that is on file with AUSU now, please double-check to make sure my "A Winner is You!" email didn't get pushed to the spam pile.



Not A Bad Legacy

If we are really, really lucky we get to grow old. We bitch and moan about the nuisance and inconvenience of aging, but when you consider the alternative, for most it's a no-brainer.

We have a front-row seat to the end stages of the process with Roy's 95-year-old aunt. She is confused about her whereabouts and thinks the closets and cupboards she sees hold the objects from her apartment. We see her refuse to eat the "garbage" they're feeding her at the hospital.

But she is a feisty old gal, and I am taking notes for both how to and how not to age gracefully. As someone who loves to call a spade a spade, I admire her outspokenness. Most old people don't suffer fools gladly and feel they've earned the right to stop pussyfooting around the truth as they see it.

When a palliative care physician came to assess her suitability for either long-term care or hospice, we sat through the now-familiar questionnaire. When asked to write a sentence, Roy's aunt wrote "Time to leave." When the doctor and Roy stepped into the hall to talk, she whispered, "Jackass." She said, "He calls himself a doctor? Roy could do the same."

Her referring to him as Dr. Killem Quick reassures us that her sense of humour is intact despite the indignity of becoming dependent. It's a damn fine defense, and one I intend to copy.

We were stunned when a bed in long-term care opened up about a week after we picked three options. Because she was declared incapable of making her own decisions, Roy's role as enduring power of attorney kicked in. And our work began.

Giving notice at her apartment, disposing of its contents, cancelling utilities, and assuming her banking were at the top of the list. We moved a nightstand and some photos of her beloved dog, Barney, to decorate her space in her semi-private room. What was harder was digging through her dresser drawers and closet trying to figure out what to take to the new place. We wrote her name on neck tags, because items go missing with communal laundry service for a hundred people.

We wonder if the things I selected were her favourites or items that simply hadn't been purged for whatever reason. It felt invasive to be handling undergarments, to see that we all hang onto items long past their serviceable lives. Some of the items we're donating look like they belong on the set of *Mad Men*.

When we die or make our final move to a place like long-term care, we lose control over our stuff. The cliché about not being able to take it with you is true. Picking through the stuff of her life was both easier and harder than I imagined. Harder because it was sad grunt work; easier because much of it was going to an agency that transitions the homeless into homes. That's not a bad legacy, from where I sit.

From issue 11 on March 29, this article of Hazel's stood out because of the vivid characterization of Roy's aunt, and because of how it touches on many of the themes Hazel has dealt with throughout the year.

BUMPS ON THE ROAD, PART I

Maxie van Roye



What's a student to do when a crisis arises?

Things were going well; out-of-my-mind busy, but well. The house wasn't particularly clean, but full-time work and part-time school, coupled with family and volunteer commitments, meant that something had to slide. Work was moving along, and for the first time ever I'd become really excited about my studies. I'd narrowed my focus, selected more challenging courses, and added another class to my course load. I was ready. I could handle it.

And then.

Then came the crisis.

My son, who has special needs and whose emotional and behavioural issues had always caused tension at home, at school, and on the playground, was abruptly dismissed from his school. They were unwilling to accommodate his needs; he was disruptive; and to be honest, he wasn't learning anything. It was time to begin the process of creating an individualized education plan with a new school, one that hopefully would accept him, embrace him, and want to help him. In the meantime, on top of work, school, and the emotional exhaustion that accompanies raising a child with special needs, I would need to homeschool him until we could find a permanent school placement for him.

Wrecks

As you move along on your educational journey, chances are you'll run into some obstacles. When it's something small—a nasty bout of the flu that derails your schedule, or a big work project that eats into your study time—it can be incredibly frustrating to navigate around it. But sometimes these “bumps on the road” are more like full-on wrecks: windshield smashed, bumper twisted, maybe even flames flickering out from under the hood. When it's a question of something serious, like divorce, death in the family, financial crisis, or an issue with a child, it's hard enough to figure out how to deal with the problem itself, let alone things like work, education, and other commitments.

In a time of crisis, studying from home has its advantages. It does allow for a more flexible schedule; it does mean a certain freedom to shift priorities and lifestyle. But it also means that figuring out where everything stands is a bit more confusing.

In this series of articles, we'll take a look at some coping strategies that may help you navigate your way through the crisis and safely to the other side.

Don't Prioritize, Organize

When we meet with an obstacle, we're traditionally urged to redefine our goals, at least temporarily; in other words, to prioritize, to decide what's important and what's not.

Often the perception is that the crisis takes precedence over everything else. And in a way, it does; I *have to* teach my child right now. I *must* come up with the paperwork to get him the help he needs. He *requires* weekly therapy and at-home intervention. But so often the emphasis on prioritization is taken to mean that everything else should go by the wayside.

That's dangerous thinking. "Prioritize" doesn't necessarily mean letting go of your dreams and commitments in favour of that nebulous notion of "more important." Nor does it mean pretending that your pre-existing commitments don't matter. In fact, doing so can drastically increase your stress levels, not to mention prolong the emotional and physical damage to yourself, since you'll have to deal with catching up with the mess later, after the more immediate problems are resolved or stabilized.

So often the expectation is that in a time of crisis, nothing else is important. But that kind of attitude can damage us physically and emotionally and can prolong any crisis situation. Instead of prioritizing in the traditional sense, try organizing.

Instead of trying to prioritize, organize. Start out by writing a list of everything going on in your life: the big stuff, like work, school, and of course anything referring to the crisis, but also smaller commitments (cleaning the bathrooms, doing the banking, grocery shopping) and regular practices and habits (weekly yoga class, calling your mom, curling up with a novel). Make it a major brainstorming session. Enlist your partner, friends, and kids: what do I need to do? What do I like to do? Whether it's important or not, write it down.

But now what? What if everything is important? Don't the dishes have to get done eventually? What about those clients? Who's going to take care of my kids while I get caught up in my history class? And how do I explain all this to the people to whom I have commitments?

Once you've got that list in place, you can move forward with the next step in organizing. In next week's article, we'll take a look at a better way of prioritizing and discuss why you can and should ask for help—and where you should be looking.

Originally published on Feb 8 (issue no. 6), Maxie never did submit the second part of this series, but it was selected both as a reader pick and as a piece that remains relevant and useful to those us taking AU courses today.

THIS WORLD

Katie D'Souza



Mumbai: a city of contrasts.

Indian Winter, Part I

It's chilly in Canada! Home after a five-week trip to India to visit my husband's family, I've found the return here definitely shocking to my system. And it's not only the contrast between 30-degree days and unseasonable snow. The palm trees, the street life, the roaming chickens and cows, the dust blowing in the windows, and the myriads of people: India is truly a different world. In this next series of articles, I'll attempt to paint a small portrait of some of our experiences in India's largest city, Mumbai.

At Home

Our Mumbai apartment (apartments are called "flats" in India) was in the popular Vakola area, where some of my husband's relatives also live. Housing costs have appreciated so extensively in India that in Vakola, a one-bedroom flat costs over \$350,000 in Canadian dollars. The flat we stayed in was relatively luxurious: about 800 square feet, with a small bedroom, shower room (no hot water unless you preheat the gas-powered water heater in the bathroom), washroom with toilet (a luxury, since many apartment dwellers share communal washrooms), sitting room, and kitchen.

The kitchen in particular was something I had to get used to. There was a washing line strung across the room to hang clothes to dry; otherwise they dry in the sun outside the window. The stove wasn't your typical North American four-burner stove, complete with an oven. Instead, it's a two-burner countertop stove, powered by gas, not electricity. Unlike gas stoves here, in India it's rare to have a gas line from outside connecting automatically to such appliances; you have to purchase gas cylinders (a similar size to what you'd use to fuel your propane BBQ). The gas vendor is seen frequently about the neighbourhood, pushing his hand-cart filled with the large cylinders, and he'll bring them up to your flat. He has to carry the cylinders up and down hundreds of stairs, since elevators are not a usual commodity. A typical gas cylinder for a family of four lasts just under a month, and the government subsidizes the purchase of a quota of cylinders per year.

Down on the street below our flat, there was a lot of activity. There was a convent across the road, operating one of the most popular Catholic girls' schools in the area. In fact, when admission time rolled around, the streets filled with hundreds of parents, anxious to secure school admission for their daughters. These lineups start outside the school several days in advance, with parents sleeping nights on the dusty pavement in order to hold their spot in line. This ordeal doesn't guarantee school admission, however; rather, the lineups are merely to gain the coveted admission forms.

At the Market

One of the hallmarks of India is its myriads of tiny shops. A weekly grocery expedition at a major chain store isn't necessary, and definitely isn't the norm; instead, a one-minute walk down the road (or, in some cases, the lower outdoor level of your apartment building) yields hundreds of shops selling everything from fresh fruits to meats to candies to juice to made-on-the-spot *lassi* (sweet milk-and-yogurt shake). Although fridges are common in many homes now, daily shopping for fresh food is still a high priority; there's always someone shopping the market for ingredients for that night's dinner. In addition to standing shops, come-and-go vendors also display their goods at certain locations and key times. Indian entrepreneurship amazes me! The well-travelled church path near our flat was a popular vendor spot; as hundreds exited the church on Sundays and weekday evenings, vendors appeared like magic, selling coconuts, fresh fruits, and seafood, or dress goods and religious items.

"Mumbai is a city with 20.5 million inhabitants, but in some parts there's still a refreshing rural air. The neighbour a block away had goats and chickens wandering freely outside his house . . ."

Most of the market produce—fruits, vegetables, fish, seafood—is “pick your own” style; either you or the vendor handpicks the pieces you select. Pre-packaged produce isn't considered fresh (although in my opinion, it keeps the flies off). Even eggs are handpicked, carefully slid into a plastic bag, and then wrapped with newspaper. It still amazes me that not one egg ever broke in transport to our flat.

Of course, it wouldn't be an Indian market without bargaining. If you're looking for “fixed price” items don't visit your local market shops. Most shops carry items with no marked price, and haggling is an accepted (and fun) way to shop.

Around the City

Mumbai is a city with 20.5 million inhabitants, but, in some parts there's still a refreshing rural air. The neighbour a block away had goats and chickens wandering freely outside his house, and in the early mornings his rooster could be heard crowing loudly. In the fresh mornings, some of his more adventurous hens did the neighbourhood rounds, spending luxurious afternoons relaxing in the roadside dust. Every once in a while, a captive elephant would sway down the main street, pulling a load.



The author's daughters relax outside their flat.

But lest you gain the impression that Mumbai is exclusively tiny shops, wandering chickens, and people everywhere, think again! Goregaon West, an up-and-coming section of Mumbai, is home to some of the most fashionable malls you'll find. The prestigious HyperCity and Infinity make downtown Toronto's Eaton

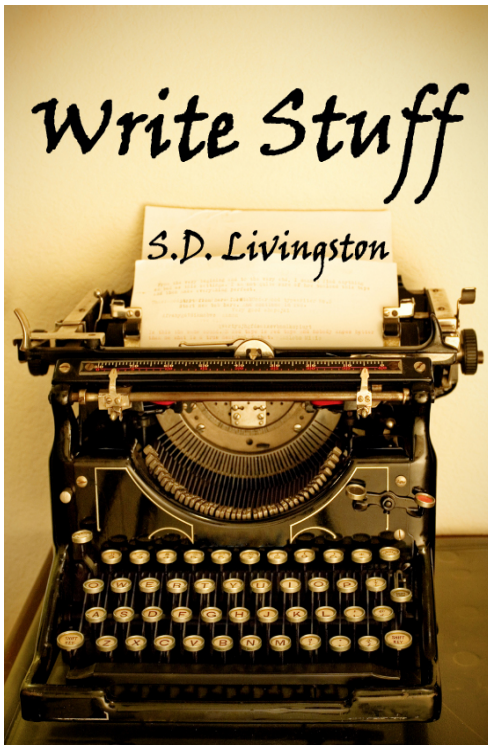


New construction as the city expands.

Centre look humble. The floors are marble, the shops exclusive, expensive, and spotless, and the food courts are superb. The larger department-style stores have children's play areas, where children can amuse themselves with all manner of large toys while their mothers shop. Additionally, modern strollers (a treat, since strollers are not common in India) are available for your complimentary use while shopping.

Next week, we'll take a peek at some of the Mumbai inhabitants. From local customs to refreshing attitudes, our Indian experience was one to remember!

Originally from the May 03 issue (no. 16) of The Voice Magazine, this article was the first part of a four part series where writer Katie D'Souza gave us a unique look at India from the view of someone who'd never been, but was not there as a tourist. The whole series is worth a read to help us realize just how different, and similar, we all are from across the globe.



Espresso To Go

How do you take your Espresso? Medium-dark with a hint of Dickensian workhouse? Or perhaps you prefer something lighter, like Mark Twain's *Library of Wit and Humor*. Whatever you choose, it can be ready in minutes at the Espresso Book Machine—a device I was lucky enough to see in action.

The Espresso I saw sits in a sunny corner of the University of Toronto bookstore (the branch in the gorgeous Beaux Arts building on College Street). I have to confess, the machine looked nothing like I'd expected. With its historic location in mind, and my own vague notions of bookmakers, I'd envisioned something in a grand wooden cabinet; maybe something reminiscent of the Victorian era, with its moving parts discreetly hidden.

The Espresso Machine is anything but. Instead, it's a complex piece of modern engineering that blends an industrial printer, book-

block maker, inkjet printer, and proprietary software to create books from digital files—on demand, in any language, in as little as 10 minutes.

On Demand Books, the company behind the Espresso, offers a video of the machine on their site. But the truly creative part is the way people have been putting it to use, and our U of T guide had dozens of stories. (The university calls its Espresso service the BookPOD.)

One Espresso customer was a self-published author in Australia. Her books are part of a popular presentation she gives—and it just so happened that one speaking engagement was in northern Ontario. Rather than having her books printed in Australia and shipped halfway around the world, the author simply uploaded her PDFs to the U of T bookstore. They loaded them into the EspressoNet software and printed her books, and she picked them up on her way through Toronto.

Other writers, many of them academics, use the Espresso a little closer to home. One book our guide showed us was by a specialist who writes a series about forests in different areas of the world. When he's getting close to a final draft, he'll use the Espresso to print a few copies for his beta readers, other specialists in the field. Instead of a bulky stack of papers, they get to see a book that's close to the finished product, and can give him feedback on everything from the cover to chapter breaks.

Then there's the man who's recording over 80 decades of personal knowledge about Toronto's history in his memoir, preserving it for family and friends. And several professors who developed a textbook used the Espresso to present their idea to faculty—and had it approved as a course text.

The Espresso's a boon to readers, too, since it allows them to print copies of hard-to-find books from one of the many publishers working with On Demand Books. You can also send a PDF of public domain books,

like those at Project Gutenberg, and print your own copy of a work that would be next to impossible to find anywhere else.

There are, of course, detractors—like those who say that, unless a book is part of a publisher's print run at a traditional printer, it's not really a book.

Which is ridiculous. The Espresso can't produce hardcovers or special touches like coloured endpapers and deckled edges, but the paperbacks it produces are just as much books as anything sitting on Chapters' shelves. In fact, as I compared a still-warm copy of an Espresso book with one from the U of T bookstore's stock, there was virtually no difference at all (an embossed title and slightly thicker cover stock were the only things I could spot).

And the price is definitely right, with an average-sized paperback costing about the same as it would in a retail store—though prices will likely vary from one location to the next.

So whether you're in Manila, Abu Dhabi, Fairbanks, or one of the dozens of Espresso locations in between, stop in and pick up a good book to go.

S.D Livingston is the author of a couple of columns within The Voice Magazine. This one is an example of her previous column, "The Write Stuff", which focused on subjects that might be of interest to other authors. Published on February 13, in issue number 5, it was chosen as it can also be seen as a transitional piece that incorporates both her interest in writing, and her interest in new technologies. Her new column, "Primal Numbers", continues to explore new developments in technology and considers the consequences in ways we may not have thought about.

MANIC SANTA

E.L. Farris



I'm tapping out this article from the waiting room in my psychiatrist's office. Okay, to be totally honest, it's the waiting room in the psychiatric wing at the local hospital, but I'm fine. Really, I'm fine. I'm just grabbing another script for Lamictal, which is what I take to treat bipolar disorder.

We have this scary idea of what constitutes mental illness, and usually it's ugly or strange. Say the words "mentally ill," and most of the time we expect to see someone like the bedraggled homeless woman who punched me when I gave her a few dollars at 18th and M in Washington, DC. Or we envision Russell Crowe playing the brilliant but mumbling professor from *A Beautiful Mind*.

I'm sort of relieved that the popular show *Homeland* has drawn a more accurate picture of what someone with bipolar disorder looks like. Carrie Mathison is a high-powered CIA analyst who fights terrorists and brings a brilliant, imaginative mind to bear, solving problems that bedevil everyone else at the Agency. She even solves cases when she's in the middle of a full-blown manic episode. She's powerful. She rocks. And she's mentally ill.

Like me.

Bipolar disorder doesn't look scary all the time in ordinary life, either. Not for me, at least. Usually it's a little bit of a hassle, and sometimes it's downright funny. Like the time I took all three kids toy shopping, and instead of saying a robotic "No, no, no" to everything, I said "Yes." I said yes to Lego. I said yes to Barbies. I even said yes to Lego plus Barbies, which is pretty much what the pink Lego are: a girly-girl interpretation of a building toy. And then I started saying yes to things the kids hadn't even asked for, like a remote Hummer, and a toy helicopter, and even one of those racing red rideabouts that the neighbours' kids kept driving through my flower garden. Oh, and the neighbour's kids? I said yes to toys for them, too.

I said yes so many times, and with such enthusiasm, that my middle child, the responsible one, and thank God I have one, actually put his hand on my arm. "Hey, Mom? Are you sure you really . . . we're supposed to get all of that?"

I smiled at my son, who was eight at the time. He looked just like my husband when he was worried. Vertical lines ran up and down his forehead, and even as he cast a forlorn gaze at the five large, brightly-coloured Lego packages stacked in one of the carts I was pushing, he added, "Do you really think Dad will be okay with this?"

And as I stood there in the bicycle aisle, I realized that we didn't need to buy helmets for all the children at the local elementary school. And then I started to shake a little, because just a few minutes ago I'd been overcome by this really generous, seemingly sensible wish to do just that. And even with a law degree

from one of the best universities in the country, I'd almost spent thousands of dollars that we didn't have—on toys. Toys for more than just my family.

I got very quiet. I was trying so hard not to cry, not to burst into tears of shame. I realized, as I slowly returned the humongous stack of items to the shelves, that I'd needed an eight-year-old to bring me back from the ledge of a manic shopping episode.

This was one of my first episodes with the manic side of bipolar disorder. No one got hurt. I didn't shred the family's credit. I didn't drink or get high, or wander off to Vegas for a few days. I suppose that I could and would do those things, but it's why I take my meds, get plenty of sleep, and see my therapist regularly.

This is the other side of what mental illness can look like. We're your neighbours, your mothers, your sisters, and your wives. And often the worst thing we'll ever do is try to play Manic Santa in the suburbs.

Another reader selection, E.L. Farris' candid reveal of mental illness was first published by The Voice Magazine on August 30, 2013 in issue no. 32. The article was selected not just for its unique perspective or its honesty, but also because it's simply damn good writing, and we're proud to have published it.

DID YOU KNOW?



Code.org

Code.org is a non-profit organization that wants to increase the number of students, particularly underrepresented groups such as women or students of color, who are taking computing science.

Their current campaign is to try to get people to learn one hour of coding skills, skills that will be invaluable in just about any career that people intend to follow in the next 20 years. After all, if you don't know the basics of how computers follow instructions, it can be very difficult to see how the instructions we give computers to do the tasks we want turn out to give us results that are anything but what we want.

The Code.org site has a number of tutorials on various programming languages, as well as tutorials and games that simply help to illustrate to people how computers work, and how easy it can be to make them work for us. If you've ever felt like throttling your computer because there was some simple function that it just wasn't doing, this site can be the start to you turning that frustration into a way to fix your problem, and perhaps even help all the other people like you out there who were suffering through the same thing.

A BOOK IN THE HAND: E-TEXT INITIATIVE

Christina M. Frey



Prefer to cozy up with a Kindle or Nook? Love flipping through onscreen pages on your iPad? Enjoy the ease of reading the same book across devices?

Or do your eyes glaze over when you try to read e-text? Do you prefer the feel of a hard copy, the rustle of pages and the familiar weight?

The answer is as individual as the reader—and we're just talking about reading for pleasure. When it's a matter of reading for learning, a whole host of other questions come into play.

While some are comfortable learning in an all-online setting, others find screen displays visually difficult to navigate or generally distracting. And according to researchers, it's more than just personal preference; educational professionals are still debating whether missing out on things like spatial memory will affect students' ability to understand rather than merely memorize the material. In some subject areas, like math and the sciences, the application is clear, but it's not limited to books involving equations. Experts also question whether studying material via e-texts as opposed to traditional books

affects our reading comprehension on a higher level (like our ability to make inferences and extrapolate).

In the midst of this ongoing debate comes Athabasca University's new e-text initiative: to eventually change all course texts to e-texts.

It's ironic that AU, long known for accommodating students requiring ultimate flexibility, is implementing a program that in practice is quite inflexible. Currently, e-text-only courses are limited to a selection, but as the initiative continues to roll out, students will receive only e-texts in course materials packages. No hard text option will be directly available.

Although students are not prohibited from purchasing textbooks or printing out hard copies of the e-books (at the cost of paper and ink, it might be preferable to purchase a text), the university will only subsidize the e-text. Since students are already paying for their course texts as part of the tuition package, the "choice" to find and purchase hard copies of texts is essentially a choice to pay double.

In addition to cost issues and personal study habits, there are a myriad of other considerations, including online/offline features, limited-duration accessibility, visual issues, and more. In the next few weeks, we'll discuss these in further detail and speak with students about their concerns over how the move to e-texts will affect them. If you feel passionate about this, make your voice heard! Email us at voice@voicemagazine.org and tell us about your biggest e-text concern.

We republish this particular editorial from our June 7, 2013 edition (no. 21) as it is the first notification from The Voice about AU's move toward e-texts, and, even at that point, was already beyond the point of no return for the university. In the last 6 months, many concerns have been raised by students, and while some have been addressed, the issue most frequently raised—that unlike every other post-secondary institution that has done this, AU will not be passing on any cost savings to students—remains.

Writer's Toolbox

Christina M. Frey



A Very Good Place to Start

“Let’s start at the very beginning,” Julie Andrews warbles in *The Sound of Music*, telling the von Trapp children that it’s “a very good place to start.” And in the academic writing world, whether you’re putting together your first university paper or creating your doctoral thesis, the beginning is always, always a very good place to start.

Unfortunately, it’s often left until the last minute—or overlooked entirely—at the expense of the entire written work.

A good, strong opening paragraph is crucial to a cohesive paper or essay. In some ways it is the most important part of your paper since it sets the tone for the rest and provides both you and your

audience with an outline of what you are going to say and how you are going to say it. It is the first time your audience will see not only your writing style but also the structure and quality of your arguments.

What?

What should a good introductory paragraph look like? Many describe an opening paragraph as a road map to the rest of the essay, and that’s an excellent model to follow. A strong introduction should introduce the topic, flowing from general to specific; describe the argument; and outline the steps (analysis) that will prove that argument.

The style should reflect the nature, tone, and content of your paper, so while an opening paragraph has elements of an outline, it shouldn’t read like one. “First I will do this. Then I will do this” is a good outline strategy, but an opening paragraph should be interesting and engaging, looking to argument strength and sentence variation to make it stand out.

But don’t get too hung up on creating the perfect “hook,” either. Engaging your reader is important, but a flashy lead-in is unnecessary (and diminishes your argument). Instead, focus on creating a good link between the reader and the topic or argument, keeping the tone even and professional. As one former English teacher I know puts it, “Don’t overdo it. You’re not selling used cars, you’re writing a paper.”

When?

The best time to start writing the opening paragraph is, well, the beginning. While some advocate holding off until later in the writing process, making the introductory paragraph your very first task offers benefits that you’ll miss if you skip the introduction and move directly to the rest of the essay.

Why?

When you're ready to write your essay, you should have a good idea of what you want to say, but you may be less clear about how to get it out of your head and onto the paper (or screen). Forcing yourself to summarize everything into a single paragraph is an invaluable exercise that will require you to organize your ideas—crucial to a cohesive paper. It will also provide you with a good plan to guide you through the structure of your paper. You'll be grateful when you get to argument number three and aren't sure in which direction you should be heading.

Last Words

When you've completed writing out your analysis and arguments, it's always worth a second look at your introductory paragraph. Frequently you'll find that your approach has shifted slightly, whether in terms of argument or analysis. If your opening paragraph is no longer an accurate road map to your essay, then go back and revise it—even if you're technically ready to write your conclusion.

The opening paragraph is an introduction not just to your paper but to your argument. Keep it concise, cohesive, and even, and make sure it reflects your argument, analysis, and the main point you're trying to get across. If your opening paragraph lays out your argument in an understandable, engaging, and informative way you won't need anything else to keep your audience reading.

Christina M. Frey is a book editor and a lover of great writing. Chat with her on Twitter about all things literary @turntopage2.

The first of our popular column "The Writer's Toolbox" was originally published in the November 01, 2013 issue (no. 41) shortly after I became the editor. It holds a special place for me as Christina was my first "new" writer and one of my best editors for my own writing. I was very excited to know that she'd be sharing her knowledge with the entire AU student body. Observant readers may note that this reprint uses the current column graphic rather than the very odd picture I'd initially selected for the column. Call it part of my learning curve.

MAGHREB VOICES

Wanda Waterman

Tunisian Days III: Same Crazy Kitchen, Just Different Cooks



"Comme aux pires moments de la colonization. Mais cette fois, la colonization est interne."

~Soufiane Ben Farhat,
La Presse de Tunisie, 24 October 2013

"By time, indeed, mankind is in loss, except for those who have believed and done righteous deeds and advised each other to truth and advised each other to patience."

[Quran, Surat Al-Asr]

Tunisians often ask me what I think of Tunisia. My response usually goes something like this: "I love Tunisia. I don't love what Tunisia is doing to you Tunisians," to which I receive somber nods and downcast eyes.

A recent study marked Tunisians as the unhappiest people in the Middle East. The jubilant anthem of the Jasmine Revolution was followed by a blues song. You can see it in their eyes, hear it in their conversations, and witness it in businesses and cafes; there's a dark cloud blocking out the Mediterranean sun, a "why bother" attitude that runs the gamut from apathy to surliness to desperation.

The Lurking Dragon

The interim ruling party, Ennahda, which appeared at first to have been a moderate Islamic party, has revealed a salient weakness—if it truly is weakness and not covert cooperation—in its dealings with the country's biggest enemy, terrorists. This, coupled with a perceived effort to monopolize power and an unfinished (and democratically lackluster) constitution has led to a loud call for this government's resignation.

Ben Ali, the second President of Tunisia, is gone, having taken with him his corruption, excess, and worldliness. But now that the boulder has been moved aside we can better see the lurking dragon: a network of zealous Islamists with an appalling lack of respect for the teachings of Islam.

Down: Leaders, National Guard, and Police

Since the revolution, Tunisia has witnessed the assassinations of two liberal leaders and Tunisian security forces have lost more than 25 members to terrorist attacks that also wounded over a hundred more. Eight of these murders occurred in the last few days. All attributed, so far, to Salafist extremists.

Security forces have been fighting a losing battle trying to control the terrorism menacing the country. The information network that enabled Ben Ali to remain mostly on top of the Islamists is now dismantled, leaving police and soldiers at times woefully unprepared. In the current economy, the resources necessary to launch a successful crackdown just aren't there.

Sexual Jihad

Unemployment, ignorance, and hopelessness have left many young women prey to an atrocious proposition: serve God by providing physical satisfaction to Syrian jihadists.

The Ministry of the Interior has recently succeeded in stopping 6,000 young women from going to join the jihadists in Syria. Unfortunately, countless before them were recruited, with the aid of brainwashing and dollar-waving, as part of a "sacred" mission to provide sexual favours to jihadists.

Many of these girls are returning pregnant to Tunisia, a country that doesn't tolerate out-of-wedlock births. Ennahda has promised to help them but one must question any such promises coming from a country that doesn't have the resources to aid these girls in raising their children.

How does this happen? Raised in a country that frowns on bare arms and public romantic displays, how is a girl talked into servicing Islamists in a foreign country? How is her brother talked into planting a bomb in an elementary school? The answer I get is always the same: the young have no future and are easily persuaded, while the terrorists are brilliantly persuasive.

Suspicious

The accusation that rings in the media and in the mouths of the more savvy citizens is that Ennahda has, at best, failed to provide security forces the resources they need to protect the people from terrorism. At worst, it is deliberately giving free rein to the terrorists to foster instability they can exploit for more power.

If the terrorists ever carried a scent of glamour, it's gone rancid. The growing unrest in the streets is fearless and adamant. Protests are populated by Tunisians of all ages—some obviously traditional Muslims, some not. They're angry at the deaths of guards and police. Guards and police who also happen to be their family members, friends, and neighbors. Maybe Ennahda believes the instability is exploitable, but the people look pretty stable to me, and I don't think that at this point they'll be easily cowed into submission.

Fight Smarter, Not Harder

As much as the West may live in fear of Islamist terrorist attacks, the threat of terrorism within Middle Eastern countries, Muslim against Muslim, is far greater.

Islamophobia has somehow persuaded the West to withhold aid to Middle Eastern countries living under the threat of domestic terrorism. But helping Tunisians to fight smart and providing security forces with logistics experts and adequate resources (medical care, technology training, and safety—not weapons) can only help us. The alternative is to watch the downward spiral, and it won't be pretty.

References:

- "Tunisie : Nouveau report du dialogue national sur fond de troubles sécuritaires," *Jeune Afrique*, 24 October 2013
 Abdellaoui, M.H., "Soudain, la stupeur et la colere . . ." *La Presse de Tunisie*, 24 October 2013
 Ben Farhat, Soufiane "La Tunisie martyre," , *La Presse de Tunisie*, 24 October 2013
 S.D. "Un tribute trop lourde," *La Presse de Tunisie*, 24 October 2013
 Zogby, James, "Arab Spring: Alive and Well in Tunisia," <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/james-zogby/arab-spring-alive-and-wel b 4049053.html>

The third part of Wanda Waterman's series exploring Tunisia, this article was first published in issue no. 41, on November 1, 2013. It was selected because it combines the views of Tunisia and terrorism that may be familiar from the news with those of the people who actually live there and are experiencing the problems. It lets us see that underneath the news exist real people who attempt to live normal lives while the news carries on around them.

THE MINDFUL BARD

Wanda Waterman



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

Film: *Frankenweenie*

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 *Frankenweenie*

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.

Frankenweenie, 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.

On January 25, way back in issue no. 4, *The Voice Magazine* published this review of *Frankenweenie*. It's been selected for the Best of the Voice as a review that informs about the movie while giving us interesting questions to think about when we're beyond it. It also encapsulates within it just what "The Mindful Bard" column is all about. The fact that I'm a Tim Burton fan, myself, was really just icing.

Relative Maturity

Barbara Lehtiniemi



Maturity is a bitter disappointment for which no remedy exists, unless laughter can be said to remedy anything." Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.

I view the state of maturity as relative, relative to me, that is. In my arrogance, I consider myself the epitome of maturity. Those individuals younger than me can only aspire to ascend to my level. Those who are older, poor things, must surely be in decline. Strangely, this view is static—it does not alter as I do. I am always the benchmark of maturity, against which all others are judged. (This includes, I confess, my younger self whose maturity level when viewed today seems occasionally cringe-worthy.)

Before enrolling at Athabasca University I was accepted as a full-time mature student at a bricks and mortar university. I had misgivings about attending, not the least of which was that I was decades older than most of the other students. There was also the matter of distance, as I live quite a stretch from the nearest university town, and the concern that full-time studies would interfere with my semi-retired lifestyle.

Yet on student orientation day in August, I went to join my future classmates. I found myself, lined and grey and withered, navigating a sea of first-year students, fresh and buoyant and loud. Trying to blend in, I scampered after the leader of the campus tour while the other students surely thought I ought to be in the parents' group. Later on, I tried to strike up conversations with other students while they studiously avoided eye contact. Only parents, I found, felt comfortable talking with me.

Despite that particular university's claim that they accept a large number of mature students, I sensed their notion of maturity was quite different from mine. To me, as noted earlier, mature means very close to my mental and physical age. It means someone who has worked for decades, raised children, is widely-read, and well-travelled. To institutes of higher learning it can simply mean a student who has not gone directly from high school to university.

By that definition, a student in their early twenties is mature. And, relative to an 18-year-old, they are. But relative to someone who has nearly hit the half-century mark—not so much. How can 20-somethings be thought of as mature? Are they not just starting out on the long, wearying road to maturity?

And so, that orientation day, I felt my enthusiasm waning. Although learning in a classroom setting appealed to me, was this going to be worth it? I had envisioned being stimulated by lively discussions and insightful questions. This was still possible but I worried about the downside of being surrounded by the young and inexperienced. Perhaps those unseasoned, tech-savvy youths look to the future and see limitless opportunity. I look ahead and see a fast-approaching horizon. Finding common ground seemed unlikely. Would I just feel impatient waiting for classmates to catch up? Or worse, would they show me up? It was an unpalatable thought.

It was time for a re-evaluation. I had initially dismissed distance learning as being under-engaging and lacking in stimulation. And so it can be, but not to the extent I feared. Arguably, the engagement level is increased simply by having to work harder at comprehension. I have found what it lacks in lively classroom discussion it makes up for in sheer convenience. I can thumb my nose at weather forecasts and traffic reports. I can take off for an out-of-town visit with little regard to a fixed schedule. I can bake a cake while I write an essay.

Most importantly, in my classroom of one, I can smugly bask in unchallenged maturity. I neither have to suffer the perceived vacuity of youth nor the tiresome wisdom of elders. And I certainly don't have uncomfortable reminders of my long-ago younger self nor my rapidly-approaching horizon.

This was the first article published by The Voice Magazine from our newest writer, Barbara Lehtiniemi, on November 29, 2013 in issue number 45. It's included in our Best Of issue because it brings home what The Voice Magazine is about and for, AU Students.

COMIC

Wanda Waterman



Originally published on June 28 in issue no. 24.
 It made me laugh.

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.

How could I not include the most often reprinted article in The Voice Magazine?

CLASSIFIEDS

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

THE VOICE

500 Energy Square - 10109 – 106 St NW - Edmonton AB - T5J 3L7
- Ph: 800.788.9041 ext. 2905 - Fax: 780.497.7003 attn: Voice Editor

Publisher Athabasca University Students' Union
Editor-In-Chief Tamra Ross
Managing Editor Karl Low

Regular Columnists Hazel Anaka, S.D. Livingston, Wanda Waterman, Christina M. Frey

www.voicemagazine.org

The Voice is published every Friday in HTML and PDF format.

Contact *The Voice* at voice@voicemagazine.org.

To receive a weekly email announcing each issue, subscribe [here](#). *The Voice* does not share its subscriber list.

© 2014 by *The Voice Magazine*