

# THE VOICE

## MAGAZINE

Vol 22 Issue 13 2014-03-28

## Meeting the Minds!

Interview with your Educators

## AUSU'S AGM

A Student's View

## Inside Llewyn Davis

Depressing done Right

*Plus:*

*Primal Numbers*

*The Writer's Toolbox*

*and much more!*



MEETING THE MINDS

A NEW VOICE COLUMN



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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



**We love to hear from you! Send your questions and comments to [voice@voicemagazine.org](mailto:voice@voicemagazine.org), and please indicate if we may publish your letter.**

## EDITORIAL

Karl Low



## Renovations Underway

Have you noticed the new AUSU Voice [Facebook page](#)? If not, that's okay, things are just getting started with it. A few people have, and if you're one of the ones who've already given us a "like", thanks! I have to admit, I don't know what doing that actually means, but it sounds nice, right?

I'll be honest, I've never quite gotten Facebook. I don't understand calling people friends who are, at best, acquaintances, and I really don't understand the appeal of posting the various things you do in life for others to examine, critique, cheer, or what have you. Not knocking those who do, I just don't quite get it. And yeah, twitter's even worse. I tend to believe that any thought I have which can be compressed into 144 characters or less is probably missing something important. But that's just me, and I know well enough that these forms of social media are how a larger and larger number of people are keeping themselves connected to what matters to them. Which means that if I want *The Voice Magazine* to matter I need to make sure it's where people can find it and remember us.

Which brings me to my second piece of news, our e-mail reminder list is now fully moved over into Mailchimp, and, wonder of wonders, the subscribe link works again! Plus, the new system allows for full color e-mails, pictures, and live-links. That's right folks, *The Voice Magazine* has caught up to the last decade, future, here we come! And if you're not already on the list, then you could be missing out, [subscribe](#) now!

In truth, though, this is a great advancement for us, and in the next few weeks, be prepared to start seeing some different things happen with *The Voice Magazine* as we start playing with developing a new graphical look and updating our style from what it was when the site was first built over ten years ago.

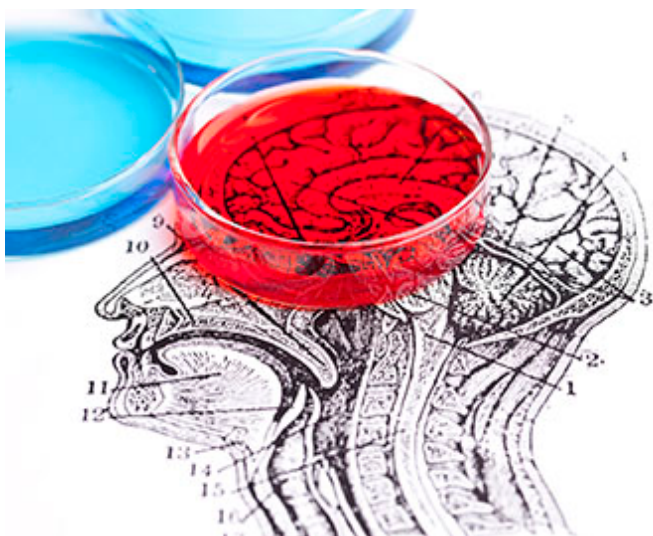
Most important this week, however, is the introductory installment of our new column, Meeting the Minds. A few weeks ago, I put out a call to tutors, academic experts, and faculty to please contact *The Voice Magazine* if they were willing to be interviewed. The response floored me, to be honest. And having interviewed a number of them already, I have to say I'm so surprised that AU isn't already trumpeting these people to the moon and back. The amount and diversity of knowledge that AU students have available to them when they take their courses is amazing.

So I hope that you enjoy reading this first installment of Meeting the Minds, with new installments planned each week for the next few months, sooner or later we should have one of the people you're already taking a course from. Maybe you'll find out something to give you that extra edge in your assignments. If not, at least you've still got all the great stuff we usually have in *The Voice Magazine*, so enjoy while we rush headlong into the future!

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Karl'.

## Primal Numbers

S.D. Livingston



### X and Why?

In most places and most times, biological gender wasn't open for debate. You either had two X chromosomes or an X and a Y, making you female or male. From toys to jobs to bathrooms, tradition drew firm lines between the sexes. Now, a Saskatchewan mom wants the province to remove any record of a person's sex on birth certificates. Is it political correctness gone too far, or a change that's long overdue?

As the CBC [reports](#), Fran Forsberg is the mother of a transgender child named Renn. Six years ago Renn was born biologically male, but ever since the age of three has identified as female. Renn has her family's support, but not the government's—at least not when it comes to changing the youngster's birth record to read "female" instead of "male."

Although Forsberg "submitted reports from a physician and psychologist confirming that Renn identifies as a female," the Vital Statistics Agency refused to change the birth record. That's because, in Saskatchewan, authorities will only change the sex on a birth certificate after an individual has had sex reassignment surgery. Now, Forsberg has filed a human rights complaint on behalf of Renn, and would ideally like to see the province remove sex designations altogether from birth certificates.

To be honest, my first reaction was skeptical. Not about the fluidity of gender—research has long shown that gender and sexual identity are remarkably unfixed, and, as this *Boston Globe* article [reports](#), there are well-established clinics that evaluate and treat transgender kids. Instead, my skepticism was based on practical matters. After all, a person's sex is an important method of identity on all kinds of documents, such as driver's licenses and passports. Isn't it?

Marginally, yes, but not nearly as important as other features, like a person's height or photograph. Indeed, if sex were that important as a method of identity, why do license and passport photos only include a person's head and shoulders? Biometric measurements, such as fingerprints and retina scans, are far more reliable for identification, and their commonplace use makes sex designations even less vital.

That case has already been made in Ontario, which ruled in 2012 that individuals can change the sex on their birth certificates whether or not they ever choose to have sex reassignment surgery (though they do have to be over 18 and provide a physician's note that confirms which gender they identify with). The B.C. government is set pass a similar law.

There are, of course, useful reasons for identifying people by sex. In a doctor's office, hormonal differences matter whether you're talking about cancer rates or reproduction.

But as an identifier on general documents, it doesn't make as much sense. Society and laws evolve and, as Forsberg told the CBC, a person's birth certificate used to include their race and their father's occupation. No doubt there'd be an outcry if governments tried to include that data now.

In a world where females are still so often considered second-class citizens, where women routinely earn less than men for the same work, the shift toward taking sex out of the equation is a refreshing and overdue change. Some countries are already moving in that direction—Australia and New Zealand, for example, allow “citizens to mark an ‘X’ for gender on their passport, rather than ‘M’ or ‘F’.”

When it comes to sex on birth certificates, maybe it's about time we stopped asking X or Y. Indeed, the better question now should be “why?”

*S.D. Livingston is the author and creator of the Madeline M. Mystery Series for kids, as well as several books for older readers. Visit her [website](#) for information on her writing.*



## Council Connection

**Karl Low**

Last week, AUSU Council had its annual AGM. Unlike the previous AGM, this one was fairly routine, with no changes to either the Bylaws or the Elections Policy discussed or made. This left the session as primarily a presentation of what major projects Council accomplished over the past year (specifically the health plan referendum, the addition of the Lynda.com subscription for all AU undergraduate students, and the newly upgraded, more mobile friendly website), the challenges faced (the unexplained AU executive exodus, the southern Alberta floods, the announcements of a unilateral shift to e-texts and the call-centre model, and the drastic funding cuts and resultant service cuts at AU due to the Alberta Government's 2012/2013 budget), and some upcoming plans (mostly in the form of more website functionality such as fully online awards applications).

AUSU also presented its financials, which showed that, even with the lowest student union fee in Alberta, and over \$150,000 going to provide the Lynda.com service for three years, AUSU still managed to have less of a deficit than originally budgeted for. In addition, adjustments to the investment strategy were made that will apparently allow the Lynda.com subscription to be carried indefinitely should students feel it is a worthwhile add to their membership.

After the official meeting, the Q&A session that followed was both informal and informative, with discussion ranging from AU's current timeline (or lack thereof) for finding a new President, to discussions on students in Ontario and other provinces outside of Alberta needing to write not only to their own MLA's to encourage them to allow AU to expand properly into those provinces, but also to write the Alberta provincial government in order to convince them that students who invest in an Alberta education are worth supporting no matter where they currently live. And I can't forget to mention the discussion about cows standing on phone lines. You never know what might happen at an AUSU meeting, it seems.

### Attendees

#### Students:

*Karen Amy  
Joe Gaetan  
Barb Lehtiniemi*

#### Councillors:

##### Outgoing

*Toni Fox  
Bethany Tynes  
James Ramsbottom  
Ashley Charlton  
Craig French*

##### Ongoing

*Jason Nixon  
Kim Newsome*

##### Incoming

*Alexander Poulton  
Bonita Arbeau  
Megan Daigneault  
Corrina Green  
Christine Villeneuve*

#### Staff:

*Tamra Ross  
Sarah Maddock  
Karyna McDonald  
Karl Low*

# MEETING THE MINDS

## A **NEW** VOICE COLUMN



*Dr. Janine Keown-Gerrard has been a tutor and academic expert working at Athabasca University for 8 years now. Her courses include PSYC 304, PSYC 356, MATH 215, ORGB 300, and COMM 243. She tutors and advises approximately 150 students.*

*Dr. Keown-Gerrard was recently interviewed by The Voice Magazine, and here is the gist of what was said:*

**Psychology and Math seem to be an unusual combination, what brought you to start in this particular combination of fields?**

When I was an undergrad, I wanted to be more of a regular clinical psychologist. At the time, I was volunteering for elderly and palliative care and it seemed to be the next step along that career path although I felt like something about it was missing for me.

I had nearly completed my degree but needed another option. The course I took was one in industrial-organizational psychology (I/O Psyc); basically, psychology of the workplace, and I fell in love with it. Here was something that often relied heavily on objective measurement and that spoke to the math nerd in me. I've always been a math and stats girl and I/O Psyc relies heavily on research and measurement in that way. At the same time, whereas my more traditional psychology courses seemed to be about how to help people who were struggling achieve the status quo, I/O psyc was more about looking at high performers and seeing how to help people achieve their maximum, and that was just a better fit for me.

Fortunately, I'd maintained a solid GPA and had my research experience as background, so when I applied for grad school, they accepted me and I've continued that way since, attaining my MSc. and Ph.D. in the field.

**What are the common pitfalls you see students running into?**

There are a few, and I'm sure others will tell you self-discipline, but I think one of the largest are how some students are hesitant to contact their tutors, and they miss out on the guidance that we can offer.

Because some students are hesitant, they tend to contact us primarily by email, but don't realize that if they speak on the phone with us, they can usually get a lot more information. For instance, sometimes when students are having difficulties, they may not even realize that they have an incorrect understanding of certain earlier concepts in the course, so when they ask a question about later material, the answer they get may not be as helpful as it could be. When we're on the phone, however, we can better read where the problem is exactly and so help quite quickly. As it is though, only about 5% of the students who contact me do so by phone.

Of course, many tutors are welcoming but some aren't, so it really falls to the students to take on the responsibility to, perhaps, push past their comfort zone to contact their tutor and ask some good questions. So that's the pitfall I most often see: students taking the path of least resistance, and only really using us as tutors when they run into trouble. But we have so much more information and ways that we can help out, and since they're paying for it, they really should take advantage while they can. A lot of tutors are happy to give this information if someone's interested, but some you do have to work to get it out of them, so a good way to go is to be prepped, have a list of open ended questions you can ask them.

**What is interesting to you currently in your academic field?**

I started out working at a consulting firm doing leadership development. There were many hours involved and a lot of travel to client sites, where I'd coach managers on how to build their skills further. Unfortunately, the hours and the travel simply didn't mesh well with my life, especially as my partner is a farmer and rancher here in Alberta.

So now I'm more interested in the area of academic coaching: how do you build student skills to get them to succeed. I've started working in that area with some of the local high school students, helping them with things like test anxiety, how to ask their instructors questions that get the best results for them, how to prepare for exams and take better notes, basically all areas of academic coaching, so my interests are more in the applied areas of the I/O Psyc field currently.

**And outside the field?**

I have three small children, so it kind of revolves around them with kids' activities, hockey games, parent councils, as well as being involved in my partner's cattle and grain farm and building the community around here. Between that and AU, there's not a lot of time for other interests.

**What is your opinion on AU's move to e-texts so far?**

My experience is that it has its benefits and its drawbacks. Policy-wise, I'm of the understanding we're stuck with it, so students are best off trying to find and use the benefits now. The technology we have for it seems quite good, allowing us to highlight, make notes, access through multiple devices, and of course search for specific terms—something that can be hard to do with physical books if they don't have a good index.

But people learn to learn differently. In my courses, I was a visual learner, when I was researching I'd have journals and books and papers spread out around me. The option for electronic journals and the like simply wasn't there. But with e-texts, that's not easily possible without spending the extra money to get print-outs of the material. So the question people have to ask themselves is do they take on the challenge of trying to change the way they learn to best utilize the e-text format, or do they take on the challenge of trying to change the way that e-text can present the material so that it conforms with how they're used to learning, or a combination of both?

**How about the shift to the call-centre model?**

I work in both, but, personally, I much prefer the tutor model, because the call-centre puts a barrier between the students and myself. Building a tutor-student relationship is still about building a relationship, so as a tutor, I put a lot of effort into that first contact message that we're required to send. I find that's a really important piece of the tutor model, that first contact. So I put extra effort into it, I'll make it personable and give a little information about myself. I'll also look at the student's class record to try to personalize the letter specifically for them and ask them some questions on what they expect and how they tend to work. Also, if a student doesn't reply, I'll follow up just to try to start any sort of dialogue between us. Once they do reply, I

can then give them more information about the course that may relate to them directly, which provides good reason and reward for them to continue the dialogue and get as much as possible out of the course and me.

With the call-centre, however, it's difficult to even start to build those relationships, so it's much easier for students to take that path of least resistance again and only look for more information or instruction when they're having a problem.

### **Have you any thoughts on social media use at AU?**

I haven't used it a lot. The problem that I've seen with it is that there has to be a gathering place that people utilize. I've looked into the Facebook pages (including the one made by the psych centre) but the activity there seems to be too infrequent to make it really useful. There's a lack of structure around how it's used and who it's used by, etc, to make it a really good resource, and so it's easier for students, who are already leading busy lives, just to not bother with it at all.

### **What do you think AU really should do to improve itself in future?**

Tutors want to be engaged too, but AU needs to realize this. They've gotten rid of the tutor conference which was one place where it was easy for tutors to get in contact not just with each other, but with the course co-ordinators and faculty in the AUFA. There's very little connection between tutors and AU proper. There are lots of emails, but these mostly revolve around things that happen at the AU offices and so affect administrative staff or faculty, not the tutors.

This can make it hard for tutors to feel like they're a part of something larger, something good, which in turn can make it harder to pass that feeling on to students who are taking their courses here. Perhaps a required meeting for tutors and faculty every quarter would be really useful to help us as tutors and faculty to learn from each other. AU offers technical training on the various things we need to do our job, but little developmental training for tutors to bring us out and encourage collaboration between all of us.

## **Click of the Wrist**

## **Universal**

Recently scientists discovered evidence confirming inflation theory, which states that “the universe expanded by 100 trillion trillion times just after the Big Bang.” Physicists celebrated and called the news “beautiful.” The rest of us just shrugged and tried to act intelligent. If your astronomical knowledge is not, well, astronomical, click through these links and get yourself up to speed

### **Sixty Seconds**

Learn about the universe in animated 60-second clips? Yes please! This series, narrated by California Polytechnic professor David Mitchell, is sure to entertain and illuminate.

### **Not Relative**

The theory of relativity is hard even for adults to figure out, but this explanation—aimed at kids—makes it much clearer. There are no illustrations, but the language and examples are non-threatening and simple enough for a physics-phobe to understand.

### **Digging Deeper**

If you'd like to study astronomy and astrophysics in more depth, Open Culture's list of free online courses is an excellent resource. From schools like Berkeley, Missouri State, and MIT, these audio and video courses are freely available over the web and via iTunes.



## Maple Syrup in One Easy Step

**Barbara Lehtiniemi**



enjoy.

For those fond of maple syrup, the simplest way to get it is to buy it. It takes only moments, but may set you back more than what you'd pay for a nice scotch. Some Canadians, however, are fortunate to live in the major maple-syrup producing areas of Ontario and Quebec. Those maple syrup lovers have an additional option: find someone who makes their own and get on their Christmas list.

We make our own maple syrup (forget it, our Christmas list is full) and I can tell you how to make it in one easy step: Take a large quantity of maple sap and boil it down to 2.5% of its original volume. That's it. Serve on pancakes and

Okay, it's a bit more involved than that. Maple syrup is a labour-intensive product. The process is at the whim of the weather and can't be rushed. These days, other syrup producers use expensive and efficient equipment to speed the evaporation process, but we still make syrup the traditional way—outdoors over a wood fire.

### Step 1—Tap the trees

After weeks of watching weather conditions and forecasts, we determine, or rather guess, the optimal time to tap. Ideally, we want to set the taps just before the beginning of a period in which the daytime temperatures consistently rise above freezing and the night-time temperatures consistently drop below. We drill a small hole in each maple tree about two feet from the ground (digging through snow when necessary) and then gently tap a spile into the hole. We've modified our spiles, adding a short piece of tubing and wire, to accommodate our unconventional collection method.

### Step 2—Collect the sap

Traditionally, maple sap is collected in buckets hung on the spiles, but we use bags. Our maple bush is on a woodland property hundreds of kilometres away from our home, so we don't have the opportunity to collect sap daily. We fasten food-grade plastic bags to the spiles with wire. The bags, protected by a strong supporting outer bag, can hold a couple dozen litres of sap. Back at home, we monitor weather conditions online and judge when the time is right to collect and boil. Then it's back to the maple bush, to gather the sap, transfer it from the bags to large bins, and carefully slide the bins down the snowy hill to the sugar shack.

### Step 3—Begin the boil

We set up an outdoor sugar shack—a three-walled structure with a simple boiling stove. Our wood-fired stove is two halves of a metal drum, split vertically down the centre and laid horizontally, like an opened clam shell, on concrete blocks. We build a wood fire in the drum halves, and place the four boiling pans on top. Each pan represents a different stage in the evaporation process—from raw sap (pan 1) to finished syrup (pan 4.)

### Step 4—Boil and evaporate

As the sap heats and boils, the water content steams away. There is a lot of steam produced, which is why our sugar shack has an open wall and an angled roof. The steam is why you should not try boiling sap in your kitchen—everything will get covered with steam, which dries to a sticky mess. We transfer the thickening sap from pan to pan, filtering it at each step. From raw sap to finished syrup takes about 6 hours of boiling. Each litre of sap will yield less than 2 tablespoons of syrup.

**Step 5—Watch and test**

We watch the final pan, called the boil-off pan, very closely. As it nears the critical point, it froths rather than bubbles. Some syrup producers rely on thermometers but we rely on 30 years experience. When the syrup drips thickly off a ladle in a "w" shape, it's time to take the pan off.

**Step 6—Pour into jars**

We handle the finished syrup quickly. We filter it one last time then pour it into sterilized jars. Each batch yields one to three jars; we'll boil off batches every couple hours over the course of several days. The shack becomes our daytime home and we cook our meals over the fire. Only at night do we retire to our heated trailer for a brief rest.

By the end of three or four days, the spring temperatures are rising and the snow is melting into mush and mud. We drag our precious golden cargo on sleds to our vehicle. After washing all the equipment, we steam ourselves clean in an invigorating sauna. Syrup-making in an exhausting process, and every year we pledge "this is the last year." And every year, the smell of spring in the air brings a longing.

*Barbara Lehtiniemi is a writer, photographer, and AU student. She lives on a windswept rural road in Eastern Ontario*

**INTERNATIONAL NEWS DESK****At Home and Abroad****At Home: Bringing Facts, Not Coffee, to the Table**

*The Star* has an article about a new report being released in Ontario that goes some distance to combatting the notion that university degrees are not preparing people properly for the workforce. While lately there have been a number of reports giving the impression that university graduates are unable to find employment beyond being a barrista, in reality, it seems that university graduates are more destined for jobs in their field, with higher salaries, than those with other credentials, including community colleges.

University graduates also earn almost a million dollars more over their lifetimes than their community college equivalents, and almost one and a half million more than those with only a high school diploma.

**Around the Globe: British State Schools Better Than Independants**

Here in North America, it is generally believed that people who have the money to send their children to private schools are getting a better education for their kids. However, recently in *The Independent*, it was reported that this does not seem to match with reality over in the U.K. The study found that children who came from independent schools (the equivalent of our private schools) were like to do worse than students who have the same grades that came from state schools.

Perhaps the idea that a privately run education is necessarily better is merely a myth propogated by those very schools which hope to get your money. No reasons for the differences in post-secondary attainment were examined. However, when we remember that parents have no easy way of confirming whether their children are getting a good information, and combine that with the expectation that private schools make our kids perform better, it does not seem unexpected that private schools may simply be artificially inflating the grades of their students in order to please their paying customers: the parents.



## Taking Time to Savour

My recent stay at a downtown Edmonton hotel coincided with the city's annual Downtown Dining Week. The 2014 version, the eleventh one, ran from March 14 to March 23 and involved many of Edmonton's most popular and pricey downtown restaurants.

This event, sponsored by the Downtown Business Association, is a way to showcase some of its members. For ten days patrons can enjoy lunch or dinner for \$15, \$25 or \$50 at any of thirty different restaurants.

I was happy with the increased number of interesting and affordable choices within walking distance of the hotel. But, on Monday afternoon when I tried to buy something at the Canada Place food court for Tuesday's in-room breakfast, virtually all the vendors were already closed. I guess when all the federal government employees have had their afternoon coffee break most of the vendors close. I suppose I could have gone to the donair shop on Jasper Avenue but that option didn't speak to me.

If some part of the promotion is to get people looking, thinking, and talking, it worked. Trying to pick a restaurant forced me to the web to research which ones were offering what. First, I checked the entire listing to eliminate those who were only offering dinner. Next, I stroked off those whose menus didn't appeal to me. Location was less of a factor because the participating restaurants were located within a few short blocks of where I was staying.

I ended up choosing Ruth's Chris Steak House. The online reservation thing didn't work so I called to reserve my table for one. This was not the first time I've eaten alone in a snazzy place; nor will it be the last. I like to think it takes a bit of chutzpah and self-assurance.

The dining room quickly filled and I was indeed the only solo patron. I had Demi Lovato's *Staying Strong 365 Days a Year* for company. Actually, it was an inspired choice because the one page per day offerings are perfect for reading interrupted by wait staff or discreet people watching. Lovato uses a combination of quotes, her own words, and a daily goal to inspire anyone desiring introspection or working through a problem.

I remembered to notice the plush, well-appointed interior with massive chandelier, heavily swagged draperies, white linen draped tables, original art, and comfy upholstered chairs. Each server—male or female—wore a crisp white shirt, tie, black tuxedo style vest, black slacks, and black apron.

My food was exquisitely prepared and beautifully plated. Only when I saw a woman taking a photo of her entrée did I kick myself for not thinking of doing it myself. It no longer qualifies as food porn if you've mixed it and moved it and dug into it.

And it proves, yet again, that the simplest of ingredients are transformed in the hands of a talented chef. Taking the time to savour it is the least I can do, from where I sit.

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

## Writer's Toolbox

### Getting Possessive, Part IV

Christina M. Frey



The past few weeks we've spent exploring the possessive case. We've looked at singular common nouns, plural common nouns, and proper nouns. Now it's time to get into some of the tricky little exceptions—the ones that stump writers the most. This week we'll discuss how to handle compound hyphenated words and joint possessives, and the following week we'll wrap it up with some unique expressions as well as a few formatting notes.

#### Compound possessives

Compound hyphenated words (like *sister-in-law*) are confusing to put in plural form, let alone possessive and plural possessive. The general rule is this: **add the possessive form to the final element in the compound, even if it isn't the element that takes the plural.**

*Example A: Her mother-in-law's enthusiasm was disconcerting.* Here we have the singular compound made into possessive.

*Example B: Her husband was raised by two women, so she has two mothers-in-law.* This is the plural compound.

*Example C: The women agreed that their mothers-in-law's attitudes were nothing like the stereotypical norm.* Here the plural compound—*mothers-in-law*—is made into possessive form. It's one of those things that's grammatically accurate but uncomfortable to be around (like the stereotypical mother-in-law). In cases like this, it's often advisable to restructure the sentence and avoid the awkward construction.

#### Joint possessives

Sometimes two nouns appear to possess an item or thing, and the question arises: which noun takes the possessive case, or do both? The answer is that it depends on the nature of the possessing and the item possessed.

If the two or more nouns possess one single thing—for example, “my mother and father's house”—then the final noun (or second if there are just two) takes the possessive form.

*Example D: I liked going to visit my mom and dad's general store.*

If the nouns each possess a separate thing—for example, “my mother's and father's temperaments”—then both nouns take the possessive form.

*Example E: I remember my mom's and dad's stories, and how different they were.*

The distinction is important, because the wrong possessive could give the wrong impression.

*Example F (possibly incorrect, depending on meaning): I went to a party at Sarah's and Robert's house.* This is incorrect; if Sarah and Robert maintained the house together, it would be written "Sarah and Robert's house"; "Sarah's and Robert's houses" would only be the correct form if Sarah and Robert had separate houses (assuming the party progressed from one house to the other).

*Example G (possibly incorrect, depending on meaning): Sarah spent this past summer at her mom and dad's beach houses.* The way this sentence is written implies that the beach houses were owned by both her mom and dad together. That's fine if her mom and dad had joint ownership, but if they were divorced and had separate ownership they'd not likely appreciate the implication of togetherness.

*Example H: Sarah spent this past summer at her mom's and dad's beach houses.* This sentence indicates that the different beach houses were owned separately by her mom or by her dad.

Next week we'll move on to nouns that are plural in form and singular in meaning as well as special expressions of time and intent; then we'll wind up this series on possessives with a few formatting notes to keep in mind. Take a deep breath, review the past articles in the series, and get ready for the homestretch!

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

## DID YOU KNOW?

## Fair Elections Act



The federal government is currently preparing to pass Bill C-23, an act called the "Fair Elections Act". This bill has been decried by many legal professors, constitutional experts, and students groups as an attack on democracy. CASA, the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, has called on the government to withdraw the bill completely, saying "This act will place needless restrictions on Canadians and can do only harm to the democratic process."

At issue is a procedure called vouching, which allows a registered voter the ability to vouch for another voter who might be missing critical identification at the election polls. This is seen to affect students in particular due to their attendance at schools out of their home riding, which would require them to provide proof of address to Elections officials to vote. Unfortunately, since many students also live with room-mates, such official documentation may simply be unattainable, rendering a very large number of post-secondary students without any ability to vote for the MPs in the riding where they spend the bulk of the year.

Additional concerns include the bill legalizing the "in-and-out" measures the CPC previously plead guilty to using to get around riding spending limits, and removing custody of the "robocalls" case from Elections Canada to the Director of Public Prosecutions, who is directly responsible to the Justice Minister instead of all Parliament.

## AUSU's AGM All Those in Favour?

Barbara Lehtiniemi



Athabasca University's Student Union must be doing things right.

The AUSU Annual General Meeting was held March 26 by teleconference. In attendance were members of student council, both outgoing and incoming (the changeover to the newly-elected council takes place next week.) In addition to the council members, all student members of AUSU were invited to attend. Only 3 or 4 did.

I've served on a number of public boards, and I've learned a lot from those experiences. One thing I know for sure is that, if the board is doing everything right, no members of the public bother to come to meetings. If, however, the board makes a wrong or unpopular decision, the public swarms the next meeting.

There was no such drama at the AUSU general meeting this week. Other than a discussion of the weather—a raging storm in Nova Scotia forced Tim Hortons there to close—the meeting was civilized and friendly.

The meeting was held by teleconference. Attendees phoned in from across Canada on a toll-free line. Tamra Ross, AUSU's executive director, took attendance as each caller was announced. Members of AUSU in attendance (those on council and/or those enrolled in an AU undergraduate course) could move, second, or vote on any motion during the meeting.

The primary purpose of the meeting was to review the [AUSU 2014 Annual Report](#), which includes the financial statements for the year ending September 20, 2013. The annual report, available as a pdf download from the [AUSU website](#), is a well-organized, readable document. Because of this, and because most attendees were on council, only brief discussion was needed before members voted and passed the motion to accept the report.

The meeting lasted only 30 minutes. Some attendees lingered on the phone afterward for informal chat and questions not related to the meeting's agenda.

For a teleconference it went very smoothly. Other than a persistent echo that some found distracting, the phone lines were clear. So clear that I noticed a bit of background noise from the various callers' households: a dog barking, paper rustling, and what sounded like supper preparations. Rather than distracting, those sounds served to make the meeting seem more intimate. Hopefully AUSU will continue to do things right, otherwise everyone may want to participate next year!

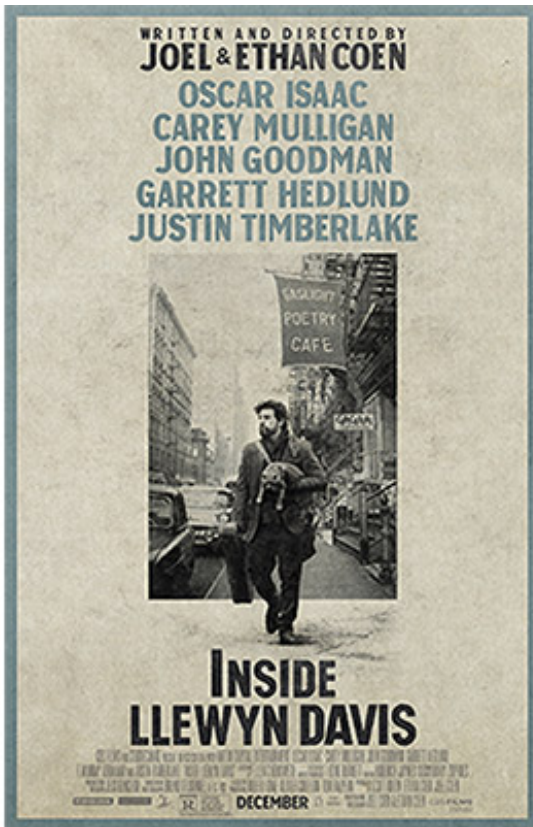
I enjoyed the meeting. Attending was easy because, just like my studies at AU, I didn't have to leave home. Online school can feel isolating, so hearing some voices from across Canada helped me feel a bit more connected.

If you missed participating in this AGM, you can still read the [AUSU 2014 Annual Report](#) online. Any AUSU member can attend, by teleconference, any AUSU council meeting during the year. See the [AUSU website](#) for details, or contact [ausu@ausu.org](mailto:ausu@ausu.org).

## Mindful Bard

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

Wanda Waterman



**Film:** *Inside Llewyn Davis*

**Directors:** Joel and Ethan Coen

### Heavens to Betsy, This Film is Depressing

“ . . . because wherever I sat— on the deck of a ship or at a street café in Paris or Bangkok— I would be sitting under the same glass bell jar, stewing in my own sour air.”

- Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar*

Watching *Inside Llewyn Davis* is like walking through a bombed-out city on a winter's night in the company of your shadow self, who just can't seem to stop talking about what a big fat nothing you are.

I really didn't expect this. After having written about the [soundtrack](#), made available before the film, I'd assumed this would be either a delightfully comic showcase of American roots music like *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* or a dark comedy à la *Barton Fink*. Wrong on both counts. Although this has been billed in part as a comedy, the rare funny moments are at the

same time so sad they make you feel ashamed for laughing.

I'd also believed it might take me back to my own memories of the coffeehouse culture, but every speck of the heady joy of that era was sucked right out of the story. Imagine a film about the sixties with no paisley, no bellbottom blue jeans, no marijuana, no politics, no misguided optimism, no peace, and no love, and you've got yourself *Inside Llewyn Davis*. Not to mention that the ghastly spectre of military service is a significant backdrop— it keeps appearing like a black hole ready to swallow any man who can't live his dream.

That's what's so brilliant. The Coen brothers remove all the distracting conventional historical props to reveal the angst of one small pocket of urban America in the sixties, turning what could have been a docudrama into a mythic (folk) hero's tale.

This isn't to say that the film has no historic veracity (I highly recommend the background articles found on the film's [official website](#)); the story line picks up lots of authenticity points by including a number of real events from the life of Dave Van Ronk, one of my all-time favourite folkies.

Lead, Oscar Isaac, superbly recreates these events, which amount to a desperate struggle rewarded only by an endless string of bad luck. He gives achingly beautiful performances of traditional songs, performances rendered all the more poignant because nobody gets them; it's like he's playing to a herd of staring cattle. If you've ever poured out your heart to an audience only to be ignored or misunderstood, these scenes will break your heart.

The amazing thing is that he keeps on seeking gigs, like a Sisyphus cursed to keep climbing the stage only to bomb, again and again, for eternity.

Llewyn Davis is clearly depressed. He's an empty floating balloon with no connection to the past and little inclination to connect to the future. The urban landscape that he moves through doesn't even have enough of the milk of human kindness to keep a gnat emotionally healthy, and on the rare occasions when he does meet good decent people all he can do in his despair is to mock and insult them, like a dying man raging with jealousy toward the living.

Llewyn manifests in his person the effects of one of those decadent periods in which one culture must die away to make room for the new. In this case the clean-cut, wholesome, hopeful, and popular folk movement that grew to popularity in the late fifties— which included mostly duos, trios, and quartets belting out buoyant harmonies about the working class and wanderin' and holding the man to account— was no longer seen as relevant or sincere.

The newly emerging folk music pointed with every finger in the direction of authenticity, whether that meant seeking out real American roots musicians and adopting their style (Bob Dylan, Dave Van Ronk, Joan Baez) or being fearlessly sincere about one's personal experience (Joni Mitchel, Leonard Cohen, Neil Young).

Llewyn is now making that shift himself, but he doesn't know it yet. His first record, as part of a squeaky clean folk duo, was called *If I had Wings*. His most recent recording is called—you guessed it—*Inside Llewyn Davis*. He has unwittingly moved in the direction of deeper introspection, though he's a long way from making it pay off.

In one sense, this is a film about the experience of depression through the eyes of someone who refuses to be ruled by it. You'll ask yourself, again and again, "how much more pain can this guy take before he collapses?" In the end, we see him ready once again to climb that stage and bomb once more. Is he a hero? Albert Camus would say so.

*Inside Llewyn Davis* manifests four of the Mindful Bard's criteria for films well worth seeing:

It's about attainment of the true self.

It inspires an awareness of the sanctity of creation.

It displays an engagement with and compassionate response to suffering.

It makes me appreciate that life is a complex and rare phenomena, 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.

## In Conversation With Marc Vella, Part I

**Wanda Waterman**



"I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear. "

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

*Marc Vella is a French classical pianist and a composer who, for the last two decades, has traveled with a baby grand piano in a bus across more than forty countries, giving impromptu performances for locals and inviting local musicians to join him. His mission is to share love and to celebrate humanity as part of the International Decade for the Promotion of a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World, coordinated by UNESCO. (See the Voice review of the documentary film Piano in the Sands [here](#).) Recently he took the time to answer Wanda*

*Waterman's questions about what brought him to his remarkable journey.*

**Quels sont les facteurs qui, dans votre enfance et vos premières années, vous ont poussé vers la musique?**

Ma grand-mère était pianiste interprète classique. Régulièrement elle jouait et moi petit, vers 4 ans, j'essayais de refaire d'oreille ce qu'elle jouait.

***Vers le piano classique, en particulier?***

Oui mais pas vraiment, j'aimais aussi retrouver les airs de mes séries télé de l'époque : Zorro, Nounours, le manège enchanté...

***Dans Piano des Sables vous sembliez complètement à l'aise avec n'importe qui, au bout d'un moment.***

***Qu'est ce qui, dans votre caractère et votre histoire, rend cela possible ?***

Sans doute le fait que j'étais très seul. Il n'y avait pas d'amour à la maison et j'ai pris très tôt l'habitude d'aller le chercher chez mes voisins... Cette soif de l'autre, des autres fut salvatrice pour moi.

***Quels sont les facteurs qui, dans votre enfance, vous ont préparé à être un ami de toutes les nations ?***

La violence au quotidien, faite d'humiliations, de mépris, de rejets... Ce que je n'avais pas à la maison, je le trouvais ailleurs. Le racisme aussi. Mon beau-père était convaincu de faire parti de l'élite. C'était insupportable. Lorsque je suis parti de la maison à l'âge de 16 ans, je me suis très vite rendu compte que tout cela était faux. Je fus et je le suis toujours fasciné par la beauté de l'être humain malgré ses travers parfois. J'ai vu aussi que beaucoup de personnes étaient semblables à moi. Résolument, j'ai pris le parti d'éveiller déjà en moi-même ma lumière et d'éveiller celle des autres.

***Quelle a été l'expérience musicale la plus fascinante de votre vie (cela pourrait être à l'écoute, à l'exécution ou en composant) ?***

Il y en a eues plusieurs : L'écriture de partitions pour grand orchestre symphonique. Quand tu écris pour un cor d'harmonie par exemple et que dans le même temps tu entends tous les autres instruments. C'est génial. Une sorte de 3D de la musique à l'intérieur de toi-même. Le duo avec Adama Dramé (joueur de Djembé) qui aura duré 7 ans. Avec le final donné à l'Olympia à paris. Un Olympia comble et comblé.

*(Lire la conclusion la semaine prochaine.)*



*Dear Barb*

*Barbara Godin*

## Dear Barb:

**Dear Barb:**

*My girlfriend and I have been dating for six months. I'm having a problem with the way she dresses. She wears low cut tops and very tight clothes. I know this is the style but I think she's gone too far. I feel very uncomfortable with the attention she is drawing to herself when we are out together. She seems to love it. Do I have a right to say anything to her about this, or should I just keep my mouth shut?*

*Please advise, Chris*

Hey Chris:

Well I'm wondering if your girlfriend dressed this way when you met her and if that is what attracted you to her. If this is the case, I'm not sure it would be appropriate to ask her to change now, as you were aware of her dressing this way when you met her. Usually people dress in a revealing manner because they like the attention they get from the opposite sex. If she did not dress this way when you met her, then I can understand you being upset, as this is not the person you began dating. Perhaps if she had dressed this way, you would not have been attracted to her and asked her out. Either way, I think you should share your feelings with her, but I'm not sure that you can expect her to change. You may have to try to overlook this and accept it as part of who she is. If this is not an option for you, it may be time to move on, as this could become a bone of

contention in your relationship.  
Thanks for your question Chris.

**Dear Barb:**

*I am a single guy working full time and taking courses at AU. I'm having a hard time meeting women. I go out to the bars with my buddies, but I'm not comfortable meeting women there. It just doesn't feel right to me. I've thought about online dating, but I'm still a little apprehensive. It seems to me that people on these dating sites are desperate and I don't want to appear that way. How does a guy go about meeting a girl?*

**Don**

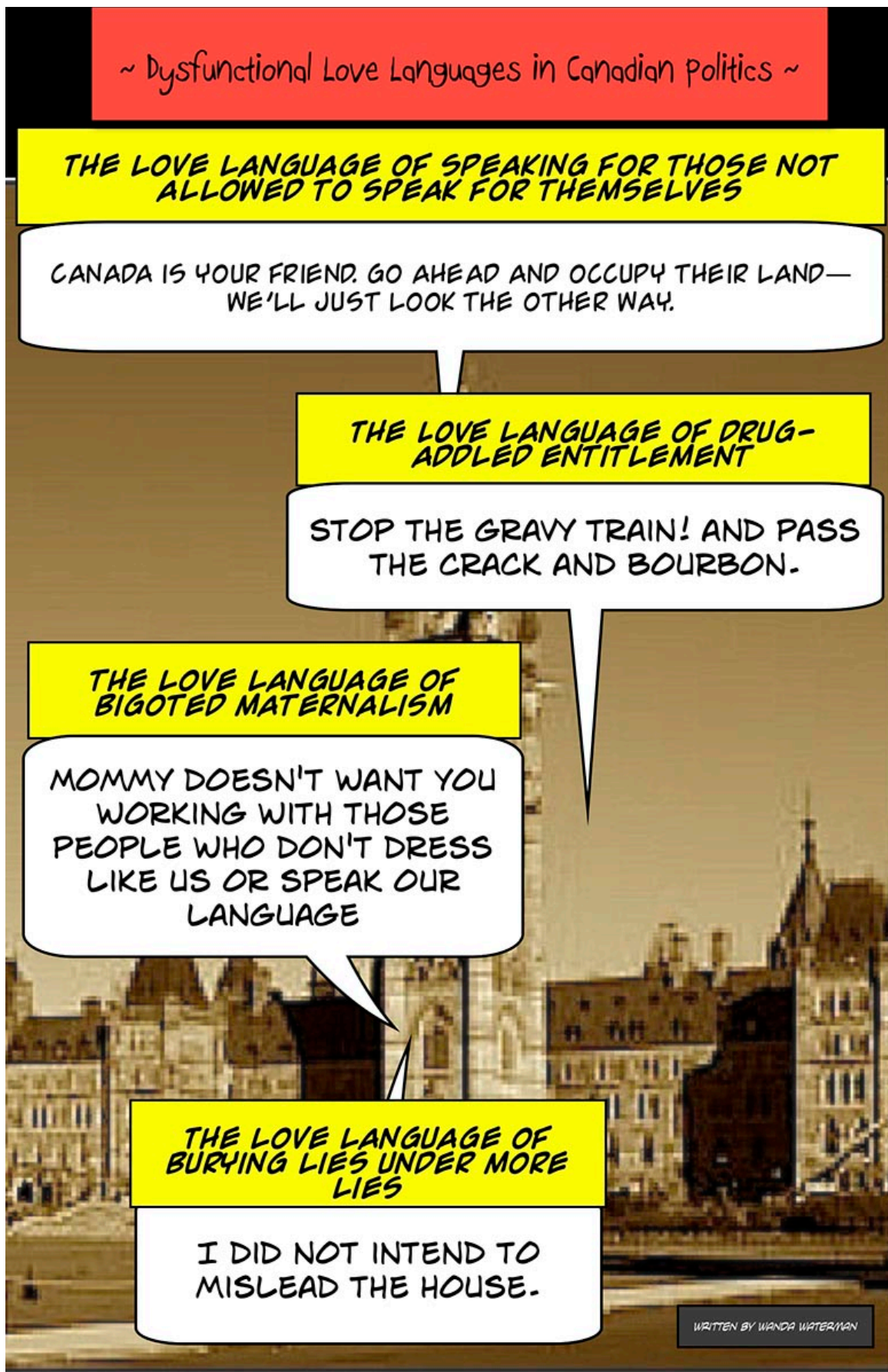
Hi Don:

Good question! I'm sure you are not the only guy who doesn't want to meet someone in a bar as it is probably not the best place. On the other hand, there are a lot of couples who have met in bars and are happily married. Aside from all the usual ways of meeting people, through friends, clubs, and of course just chance meetings, online dating seems to be a popular choice. Nevertheless, when online dating you have to be careful that you put your profile on a reputable site. When you do connect with someone, choose to meet in a coffee shop where you can talk and get to know each other. The atmosphere in a coffee shop is more favourable to getting to know someone than a bar is, and of course alcohol won't be a factor. Online dating sites are not seen as a desperate approach, rather it is just another option. Give it a try, what have you got to lose?

*Email your questions to [voice@voicemagazine.org](mailto:voice@voicemagazine.org). Some submissions may be edited for length or to protect confidentiality; your real name and location will never be printed. This column is for entertainment only. The author is not a professional counsellor and this column is not intended to take the place of professional advice.*

## Comic

## Wanda Waterman



## 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](mailto:ausu@ausu.org).

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# CLASSIFIEDS

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Classifieds are free for AU students! Contact [voice@voicemagazine.org](mailto:voice@voicemagazine.org) for more information.

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## THE VOICE

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