

# THE VOICE

## MAGAZINE

Vol 23 Issue 09 2015-02-27

## Life: In Contemplation of Death

Learning From Passing

## Minds we Meet

Interviewing Lisa B.

## Mindful Bard

Worth the Oscar?

*Plus:*

*Fight (for) the Power!*

*Time Travel and Regrets*

*and much more!*



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***The Voice  
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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

## Fight (for) the Power!



Recently, I found an excerpt from a book by AU President Peter MacKinnon in University Affairs.

In it, he suggest that the idea of universities being self-governing bodies can easily be undermined by faculty labour unions, as they seek to make changes for their members that push into the governance of the university, an area normally defined by the collegial management of the university through Senates (such as our General Faculties Council), which are supposed to be the final arbiters of the university's search for truth and excellence in teaching, and the Board of Governors, which are empowered to deal with the financial matters.

Part of his argument rests on the idea that trade unions have responsibilities to labour law, possibly outside organizations, and of course trade union culture, that have no part when it comes to what is best for the university and for its quest for truth and teaching excellence. That the very notion of collective bargaining has little to do with finding truth, and more to do with the division and exercise of power, decided by who bests uses what strengths they have.

The difficulty I have with this arrangement is that the imbalance of power within the institution is already massively in favour of the Board of Governors. When the Board of Governors makes a decision based on financial pressures that affects the ability of the institution to fulfill its mandate in researching and teaching, the Senate has little real power to affect that. Ideally, the Board of Governors would defer to the senate when it comes to making decisions that might affect the pedagogical and research abilities of the institution, such as the conversion from a tutor based direct-contact model to one of an intermediary centre, but what happens when it does not? Do the academics actually have any power to prevent changes to the very systems of teaching that they use? Aside from with-holding their services, which, when done individually, opens them up to disciplinary action, all they can really do is make noise, but the Board of Governors has no responsibility to listen to that noise, nor any accountability if they refuse to listen.

In that respect, collective bargaining on the part of the academics can serve a vital purpose in providing some balance of power between the two bodies. While I'm ready to agree with Dr. MacKinnon that the presence of trade union groups may not be the ideal way to achieve this power, under our current legislative environment, they are the only ones that have such an ability. A non-labour based union has no protection from government should it decide withhold services, and the leaders of any such broad-based movement could be easily singled out for disciplinary action, thus crippling any further movement of the organization. It's easy for one who exercises the power of the Board of Governors to argue that there shouldn't be any struggles for power in the institution, as they're the ones who already possess the power, so any struggle would simply be to weaken that.

Anyway, that's my rant on the subject. On a lighter note, we've got another issue full of interesting stuff, including an interview with a student who may be like many of us, having started and dropped a program due to external pressures before coming back to it. Also, the Mindful Bard this week looks at the Oscar winning movie, *Birdman*, plus reviews, interviews, news, and contemplations on everything from death to time travel.

As always, enjoy the read!

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

# MINDS WE MEET



*Lisa Barnett is an AU student from Lively, Ontario. A native of Sudbury, she spent 12 years in southern Ontario but is happy to be back in the north. Lisa's full-time job involves supporting five Family Health Teams in Northeastern Ontario with various quality improvement initiatives and data analysis. She is enrolled in AU's 4-year BA program, majoring in Psychology.*

*Lisa was recently interviewed by The Voice Magazine about school, family, and flexibility.*

## **Describe the path that led you to AU.**

I had originally started in AU's Bachelor of Health Administration program in 2007. I took one course and did not finish it, resulting in a fail. It just wasn't the right time. My son was two, and my husband was recovering from a serious work-related injury. It was just too much.

So, I was an inactive student at AU for years and didn't know if I would ever continue. Then, about 1 ½ years ago, I was selected for a Northern Leadership Program, even though I wasn't in a

leadership role. That got me thinking that I had it in me to go back to school. I gathered all the info I needed about my previous schooling and applied for transfer credits, and began studying at AU again in May 2014. I don't need a degree for my job, but I turned 40 this year and I felt, "I just have to do this."

## **What do you like to do when you're not studying?**

Right now I'm really involved with my son. He has a learning disability so I have to help him with his schoolwork. He's also involved in competitive swimming, basketball, and curling. In the summer, we take our dogs and go camping.

## **Who in your life had the greatest influence on your desire to learn?**

My inspiration came recently. I was working on a project at the hospital involving mental health and addiction. One of the psychologists on the project team mentioned that he made multiple attempts at getting his degree and was in his thirties when he finally did. That tipped the balance for me, because I had been thinking I was too old to pursue a degree. I figured I was already registered as student at AU and I just needed to do this.

**What famous person, past or present, would you like to have lunch with, and why?**

I would say Angelina Jolie. I don't follow her acting career but I admire her humanitarian work and the fact that she adopted her children from under-developed countries. I'd like to know more about those aspects of her life.

**Describe your experience with online learning so far. What do you like? Dislike?**

I like it a lot, although I haven't done much of it online because I've been sent actual books for my courses. The course message boards have been useful and I've been amazed at how quickly responses are posted. The best part of AU is the flexibility. In a regular university structure, classes are at set times, assignments are due on set dates, and the exam is set, too. I'm really busy with family and working and I like having the ability to purchase course extensions. AU gives students that "give" that busy people need.

**Was there ever a point when you wavered about your education?**

Making that initial decision seven years ago to go through for Health Admin—I did waver then. I thought then, "Am I going to do something with this?" In the end, I thought I should study something I'm really interested in.

**What's your most memorable AU course so far, and why?**

It was my first course, PSYC 290, *General Psychology*, because I did so well in it! For one thing, I hadn't written a paper in a decade. For another, the exam was worth 50% of the final mark. I had to do so some travel for work so I wrote the exam after getting back from over two days driving. I ended up doing really well, and I thought, "I've got it. I can still do this."

**Describe the proudest moment in your life.**

I think it's when my son, who's in grade 4 but follows the grade 2 curriculum in reading and math, says, "You're the greatest Mom!" It feels great to get that acknowledgement. I'm on the road about 25% of the time for work, but he knows I've got his back, that he can count on me.

**What have you given up to go to AU that you regret the most? Was it worth it?**

Nothing—and that's the main thing. I didn't have to move to go to AU, it fits my budget, it fits my schedule, and there's flexibility.

**If you were the new president of AU, what would be your first project?**

I think I would find a way to encourage more contact between students.

**If you were trapped on an island, what 3 things would you bring?**

A book, a good bottle of wine, and a camera.

**Describe one thing that distinguishes you from most other people.**

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I have a knack for just figuring things out. I may be stuck for a while—with a query when analyzing data, for example—then the solution just comes to me at the oddest moment.

**What is the most valuable lesson you have learned in life?**

Cherish every moment. You never know when it's going to change.

**What do you think about e-texts?**

I haven't had one yet with my courses, but I'm not too worried. In my iBook, I underline, highlight, and add notes. Because I travel with my job, having an e-text would be easier than lugging around textbooks.

**How do you find communications with your course tutors?**

On the whole it's been really good; there's been only one time when it was really slow getting a response.

**Where has life taken you so far?**

When I was a child, my family traveled a lot. My husband and I also continue to travel as often as we can. We typically bring our son with us as we believe it provides him with the opportunity to learn about the world by experiencing it. I've been to France, Switzerland, Germany, Luxembourg, Venezuela, Barbados, Dominican Republic, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Florida. Closer to home I've been out west to Vancouver, out east to PEI, and I've been to Montreal and Belleville. I've also had the opportunity to work in Chicago, San Francisco, Sacramento, Miami, Colorado Springs, and Washington State.

**What (non-AU) book are you reading now?**

I'm almost finished reading *The Sense of An Ending* by Julian Barnes. I recently read *All My Puny Sorrows* by Miriam Toews. And my next read is *The GoldFinch* by Donna Tartt.



*See that cool stuff there? That's a sample of what students who get interviewed for The Voice Magazine's Minds We Meet column get in the mail, just for talking with a fellow AU student for a while and letting us report the results!*

*Sound good to you? Sounds good to us too! So let us know if you'd like to be featured in The Voice Magazine by writing us at [voice@voicemagazine.org](mailto:voice@voicemagazine.org). We'll hook you up and you can help your fellow students get a feel for what amazing people are on this journey with them!*



## Life: In Contemplation of Death

Barbara Lehtiniemi



A friend died this morning. A kind-hearted woman with a positive outlook and the love of her family. Her only flaw was the insidious tumour in her brain that could not and would not be defeated. I'll miss her *joie de vivre* and her ready smile. I feel a deep sense of personal loss. I feel lost in a swirl of anger and sorrow and helplessness.

The death of someone from within one's circle of friends and acquaintances brings unwelcome emotions, but also introspection. It is perhaps a necessary stock-taking. Death is final but, in the meantime, we're still alive. What's the meaning of life? How do we feel about death? Why do we wait until it's too late?

I find it an irony of mourning that it revolves around the mourner, not the deceased. While we feel sorry for the person who died far too young, we also acknowledge their freedom: from pain, from suffering, from the struggles of life. Mostly, though, we feel sorry for those left behind who have lost a beloved person. We feel sorry for ourselves. It is often our own loss we mourn for, shed tears for.

Soon after hearing of my friend's death, my thoughts raged on the utter futility of life. How unfair it is that someone so gentle and loving should be taken while other less-worthy souls smudge the earth with their presence. How pointless life is when it can end at any moment, unfairly and unpredictably. How useless love and attachment are when they lead to the pain of loss. What is the answer? What is the point? Does anything we do make any difference?

Once the rage passed, my thoughts turn to contemplating mortality. Why her? It could have been anyone. It could have been me. What if it was me? How does it feel to face death? How does it feel to die? What happens after? What can I do to forestall death? Am I living right? Eating right? Exercising enough? Should I take up yoga? Give up coffee? Does anything I do matter? If I knew I had only four months to live, what would I do differently now? What pleasures have I been putting off "until later"? Why am I not doing them now?

Finally, my tired thoughts turn to that unhappy but necessary ritual, the funeral. Why is it, I wonder, that we tend to learn more about people after they're dead? We could know someone for years and only find out at their funeral that they once pulled someone from a burning building. In our relationships, we seem to be busy with the here and now and forget that the other person had a life before we came into it. Do we spend too little time on the surface instead of delving into the depths of other's souls? Do we spend too much time bringing the conversation around to ourselves? What are we doing when we're with others that we can't even notice or recall something as basic as their eye colour? If a two-hour funeral or memorial service can reveal details that we never knew about someone, what does that say about the quality of the time we spent together?

I have more questions than answers. But one thing I do know: the time for life is when we're living. We'll regret the things we didn't do more than the things we did. Life is short and often shorter than we think.



If we can make time to attend someone's funeral, we can make time to visit them when they need it. If we can send a sympathy card after death, we can send an encouraging note in life. The funeral is our final chance to connect with someone, but how useless it is to arrive there and think, "If only I'd done/said/learned something when I had the chance."

It is perhaps death that teaches us about life. So while I say farewell to a dear friend, I will learn the lessons her life—and death—are trying to teach me.

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



## In Conversation ..with the Highway, Part II

**Wanda Waterman**



"All the pages have been read,  
And all the words were clearly said.  
There's nothing left to be discussed ..."  
- from "Circles" by The Highway

*Daniel Tortoledo (vocals/bass), Ted MacInnes (drums/backing vocals), Adam Douglass (guitar/backing vocals), and Griffin McMahon (keys/backing vocals) form The Highway, a New York rock quartet that explores the best of rock's roots to inspire its own original psychedelic rock. They've recently released the single "All You Do" as a foretaste of their upcoming second album, Enter to Exit. "All You Do" is a long,*

*strange ride, containing the dark tale of an evil deed compelled by love. Recently all four band members took the time to answer Wanda Waterman's questions about their favourite instruments and music teachers.*

### What's your favourite instrument to play, and why?

**Ted:** I don't really have one. I like to play well-made instruments that sound good. As far as drums go, I put most of my emphasis on my cymbals. The drums I have are the same ones I've been playing since I was eight years old. I do have a new snare, and the original hardware was accidentally left behind—and presumably stolen— at Fat Baby in NYC, probably in 2007, so that's also been replaced, too.

I like classically made Turkish cymbals like Istanbul and Bosphorus, and also Zildjian. But those can sound bad too; every cymbal has its own character, so make, model, and year don't really make much difference.

**Daniel:** Probably the bass guitar I've found to have the most versatile sound is the Fender Precision; you can't go wrong with that one. I do have to say American-made guitars are lighter and that's definitely one thing to keep in mind as a bassist— the weight.

Griffin: I recently bought the Roland V-Combo VR-09 keyboard. It's super portable and easy to drag around NYC, and it has great organ, piano, and synth sounds. I used to use a Yamaha MO-8, which is a great keyboard, but a huge pain to carry around without a car in a city like New York! Getting the Roland was critical for easier travel to gigs and rehearsals.

Adam: If I were rich I'd have one—no, three or four—of everything. I think old Strats are the best. They're comfortable to play for a long time and lightweight so your neck doesn't hurt after playing one all day. They have a wide variety of tones. And as much as I hate to admit aesthetics as a factor, I've found that liking the way one's instrument looks will affect the desire to create with it.

**What was your most beneficial educational experience?**

Daniel: I had two teachers in my music education. One was a wonderful Russian pianist, teacher, and friend, Elena Roussanova, who had a heavy influence on my writing and the way I approach music. Also Danny Morris, who helped me understand the bass and the greatness behind its simplicity.

Ted: I had a great private teacher in high school who really helped me get a practical view of music.

For a while I'd been studying jazz and avoiding rock, because rock was easy and simple and jazz was, in my mind at the time, a "higher" art form. But as I started playing in bands I realized that I'd been pretty much brought up on rock, that rock was really a part of my cultural heritage, not something I was faking but rather something that came naturally to me and that I'd been exposed to from a very young age.

This private teacher of mine (though I was mostly studying jazz and Brazilian stuff with him, getting prepped to study music in college) pointed me in that direction. I remember him talking about how great Dave Grohl was, and I also had an Elliot Smith tape that I really liked, on which Elliot Smith plays drums, and he noted that although Elliot Smith may not be the greatest drummer, that his music has a vibe of its own and is really cool.

He also taught me the "less is more" approach, a way of drumming without lots of big fills, just laying down a solid foundation, emphasizing style, and basically doing what is best for the band and the song, rather than trying to prove what I'm capable of by doing some super-fast or technical things, which, more often than not, take away from the music itself.

Griffin: It's hard to pinpoint one person solely. For sure my organ teacher, Paul Jacobs at Juilliard, really changed my life as a musician and overall person, along with my high school chorus teacher, Pete Thomsen, and his wife, Abby Thomsen, my long-time piano mentor. My first rock concert was Elton John—he was a huge early influence on me as a teenager. I consider his early '70's recordings to be my first "lessons" in rock n' roll piano.

*(to be continued)*

*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.*



Graff and Cathy Birkenstein.

### Study Tips from a Semi-Anonymous Friend

*There is nothing more that The Study Dude wants for you than to feel comfortable inserting your own views and ideas in your research articles--something otherwise shunned in academic writing.*

*Well, in these articles, as The Study Dude, I'll try to give you the study tips you need to help make your learning easier. I'll also give you straight and honest opinions and personal anecdotes—even the embarrassing ones that you wouldn't ever dare read about from any other study tip guru.*

This week's focus, like that of [last week](#) is on a book titled *They Say I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing* by Gerald

### The Secret to Effective Transitions

When in graduate studies, one student criticized my work for its lack of transitions. Yet, when I asked her how she proposed to overcome such a limitation, she simply mentioned using transitions such as "therefore," "moreover" and the like at any and every opportunity.

However, when considering my work from that lens, I found it to be stifling. If I were to insert too many transitions, wouldn't it sound like a mishmash of conjunctions—one big overdone bowl of transition soup? I thought that there had to be a clearer explanation for how to insert transitions without going too far.

Alas, Graff and Birkenstein (2010) present the most lucid account of how to insert transitional-cues in your writing--without overdoing them:

- Use transitions such as "moreover", "however", "therefore" to show shifts or additions in thought. Where appropriate, starting a new paragraph with such a transition can be an effective strategy. Transitions add extra explanation and serve to strengthen your argument, not weaken it.
- Include words that point to the topic, such as "this", "that", "those", "their", "such" or any pronouns, such as "his", "her", and so forth. Make sure that these pointer words point to only one thing, and be clear what that one thing is.
- Repeat ideas, but spice it up with some variations or new insights. Phrases like "in other words" can really add meaning and depth to your writing by further expounding on some important concept.
- Repeat keywords, but use synonyms, antonyms, and similar meanings. This repetition holds the sentence together.

### Adding a Naysayer to Your Writing Will Add Richness and Depth

Whoever thought that inserting an opposing view would make one's writing livelier? Another advantage to inserting a naysayer in your writing is that it adds material—substance—to your paper, helping you reach that word limit while augmenting the merit of your own view. That is to say, if you are able to respond effectively—or give a concession—to the naysayer, you will have a livelier, more voluminous—and more convincing paper.

Not many of us enjoy having people dispute our views, but when we control what disputations get through and how we respond we have an incredibly influential power at hand. Graff and Birkenstein (2010) point out ways of inserting naysayers into our argument to add richness and depth:

- Insert at least one or two naysayers (opposing views) into your writing.
- As writing is a form of conversation, adding a naysayer advances that conversation and adds intrigue.
- By adding naysayers (objections) to your writing, you appear more generous in your point-of-view. Don't scoff naysayers point-of-view, but engage their disagreements as if you were the naysayer him or herself. Don't be hostile, either, as that creates contentions and sets you up for reciprocated criticism.
- Plus, having naysayers adds more material to your paper, enabling you to better reach that word count with an interesting write-up.
- You could say something like "many political activists would object on the grounds of ..." or "Feminists take issue with this perspective for these reasons..."
- Try to address the naysayer group or party by name, and don't stereotype. Show concessions to avoid stereotyping such as "although not all feminists would disagree, some circles might find the following point contentious..."
- One strategy is to "frame objections in the form of questions" (p. 84) or present them as direct commentary (in quotations) from the naysayer group itself: for instance, "'Unorthodox!' some scientists would argue".
- Only insert those objections that you can effectively overcome in your writing. You can always concede to part of the argument, but make sure your perspective does not go entirely by the wayside with the strength of the opposing view.
- One strategy is to agree with part of the naysayer, but disagree on other grounds.
- If the naysayer has a stronger position than you have, consider revising your argument.

### Writing Scientific Papers

Funnily enough, writing scientific papers is not a lot different from writing for the social sciences. In these papers, we can do things like find gaps, question the "so what?" of the argument, and agree or disagree (or both agree/disagree) with the researcher's account (Graff & Birkenstein, 2010). There are a lot of options at our disposal for engaging in scientific writing.

I personally have a fixation with the scientific method, and, during graduate studies, I delved into the philosophy of science just for the sheer pleasure of it. Encountering *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* by Karl Popper, I temporarily dismissed my exploration of the scientific method due to accumulating confusion with this particular text. To further add to my perplexity, prior to grad studies, when I was a math major, I looked at a professor's math research to see charts of foreign terminology and symbols that didn't add up to the human language. The scientific method--and scientific writing--seemed beyond the layperson's reach.

Although later in the Study Dude series, I'll delve into the scientific method in greater detail, Graff and Birkenstein (2010) help to demystify scientific writing through guiding the reader to engage his or her own voice in the ongoing dialogue:

- When writing scientific papers, be sure to acknowledge the controversies in the scientific field concerning your subject matter.
- Make hypothesis based on existing knowledge within the scientific field.



- Be sure to make your research replicable by describing in detail your "hypothesis, methods, and results that led to [your particular] conclusion" (p. 158).
- Provide ample numerical data to support your findings. For instance, include the mean and variability, the units of measurement, and the sample size as these measures are all excellent means of numerically explaining statistical data.
- Never use the word "prove" in the sciences. Instead use words like "supports", "confirms", "verifies", "refutes", or "contradicts".
- Start with other prominent researchers' views and divulge whether you agree, disagree, or both with the authors' views. You can agree and then add an explanation as to why you do.
- You can criticize researchers' experimental design, methodology, results/conclusion incompatibility, and/or lack of merit in sufficiently testing hypothesis.

In spite of all that, it is important to understand that when you insert your own views, you need to have corroborating evidence; otherwise, your personal opinion may be unsubstantial and unsupported. At least, that is what the literature examined in the next two week's editions of the Study Dude will confirm.

So, there's nothing to fear. The Study Dude is determined to make right for you all the wrongs I made in grad school—one A+ at a time.

#### References

Graff, Gerald, & Birkenstein, Cathy. (2010). *They Say; I Say: The moves that matter in academic writing*. New York, NY: Norton & Company.

### Click of the Wrist

### Grammar Bites

**Stumped on a grammar issue?** Googling's not always your best bet—sometimes the answer can be overwhelming, with terms and concepts that fuel still more searches (and a whole lot more frustration). But though predicate nominatives, subjunctive mood, and sentence diagramming are important concepts, basic grammar doesn't have to be confusing. In celebration of National Grammar Day (March 4), take a look at these easy-to-understand resources on grammar, spelling, and usage:

#### Quick and Dirty

For simple explanations of your most-feared grammatical issues—and a few intriguing bits of etymology—Grammar Girl offers charts, articles, and podcasts on topics ranging from split infinitives to *i.e.* vs. *e.g.*

#### Fast Facts

Thirty-eight grammar or usage topics in ten minutes? *mental\_floss* magazine's top-speed explanations might leave you breathless, but educated. This video is the perfect refresher for busy people.

#### The Funny Side

Grammar doesn't have to be a serious topic—at least not if you're The Oatmeal. The web cartoonist's illustrations of grammar and usage blunders will ensure you remember the difference between *who* and *whom*.



## Writer's Toolbox

### Making, Faking, Breaking

Christina M. Frey



National Grammar Day is around the corner. But before you dust off your *Elements of Style*, post your pet peeves (*there/their*, anyone?), and get your red Sharpie ready to apply to error-ridden grocery store signs, consider this: you may not be celebrating the right thing.

#### Grammatical Point

On March 4 you're sure to find an abundance of blog posts, tweets, and memes urging good grammar—and decrying the sad state of affairs when correct grammar becomes so unfamiliar that it looks more wrong than the real mistakes.

But a day celebrating grammar, the structural foundation of language, needs to be about more than just following the rules. In fact, it's the perfect time to revisit why grammatical rules are important, and why they're not the most important thing of all.

#### Making the Rules

Who makes the rules? We do—and I don't mean "we" as in a secret team of editors bent on world domination through grammatical manipulation. In fact, you and I and every other person who combines words to convey meaning are the rule makers, the ones who define how future generations will write, speak, or use whatever communications technology or ability the future holds.

Through trial and error we figure out what works, what doesn't, and what's the best possible way to make sure the reader or listener understands what we're telling them. Is the tone or style suited to our message? Is there a risk of confusion or distraction? Far from being a dusty set of laws, grammar rules and usage styles and conventions develop as naturally as the way our language is used each day.

#### Knowing the Rules

Make no mistake: knowing what the rules are is important if we want to avoid miscommunication on any level. Changing grammar and usage principles on a whim won't lead to clear writing no matter how much we want it to happen.

But knowing the rules goes far beyond just making sure your subjects and verbs agree. Equally important is knowing what's *not* a rule—the difference between rules and principles that make communication clear, and archaic notions that no longer make sense today (and perhaps never have). These lingering fake rules, like the idea that you shouldn't end a sentence with a preposition, waste writers' time, reduce readability, and may even lead to distorted meaning.

#### Breaking the Rules

Knowing the rules also gives you the freedom to break them deliberately where it'll enhance the meaning of what you're trying to say. No, "Sometimes." isn't a "proper" sentence, in the strict definition of the word, but this sentence fragment can be very effective in setting tone and mood in a more informal context.

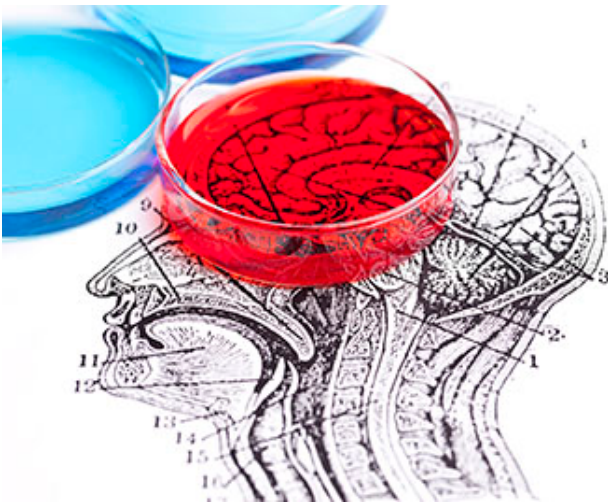
It's an awesome and terrifying responsibility to know that what we write today may change language forever. This March 4, refresh your own understanding of both the principles and the purpose of grammar—and get ready to create the language of the future.

*Christina M. Frey is a book editor, literary coach, and lover of great writing. For more tips and techniques for your toolbox, follow her on Twitter (@turntopage2) or visit her [blog](#).*



## Primal Numbers Digital Maze

**S.D. Livingston**



We've all been there: eyes glazed over, clicking on link after link, surfing the net long after we forgot what we were looking for. Why do we do it? Why can't we just turn off the screen and walk away? The good news is, scientists know exactly what's behind all that compulsive clicking. The bad news? Your brain's own circuits are sabotaging your efforts to stop.

The idea of tech addiction is nothing new. There are urban legends of gamers who are so addicted to playing that they'll go for days without moving—sometimes even dropping dead in front of their screens. At the less extreme end, there are the

millions of people who walk into traffic or walls with their eyes glued to a device. Or blink, eyes burning, at a tiny screen in their darkened bedroom because they simply can't seem to stop clicking.

Rest assured, it isn't your fault. In fact, the Internet seems tailor-made for feeding something known as a dopamine loop. Contrary to popular belief, dopamine isn't the brain chemical that makes you feel good. Those are opioids. Dopamine, on the other hand, is the neurotransmitter that motivates you to chase things down. As this *Science Daily* [article](#) explains, it "regulates motivation, causing individuals to initiate and persevere to obtain something either positive or negative."

Think of a rat in a maze, hitting a lever to get a piece of cheese. Or a person surfing the web, clicking, surfing, checking email, tweeting, posting—all in an endless loop, chasing the reward of a new text message or updated Facebook feed. Any little snippet of newness that will make those opioids hit us with a jolt of feel-good chemicals.

There is, of course, a cost to all that seeking. In a *Psychology Today* [article](#), Dr. Susan Weinschenk explains that getting caught in endless dopamine loops can be "exhausting." Our brains are constantly making decisions; evaluating information, skipping from one thing to the next. We're working hard, on the chase, but the more we get those tiny rewards the more our brains are driven to seek. It can easily become a cycle that wears us out but feels impossible to break.

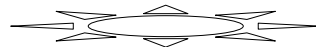
So what's the average online citizen supposed to do when they find themselves caught in that loop, mindlessly clicking long after they've stopped being interested in what's on the screen, while that tiny voice in their head says it's really tired of this game and just wants to go stare at a tree?

In a perfect world—or at least one in which you have a lot of control over your day—you could follow Dr. Weinschenk's advice to "turn off the cues." It's good advice. Shut down your Twitter feed. Close your email program. Slowly start breaking the habit you probably spend most of your day reinforcing.

Unfortunately, not everyone can do that. At least not if their work requires them to be tied to their email and smartphones all day. In fact, it's not hard to imagine a time when tech addiction becomes a recognized medical condition—and a legitimate cause for long-term disability leave.

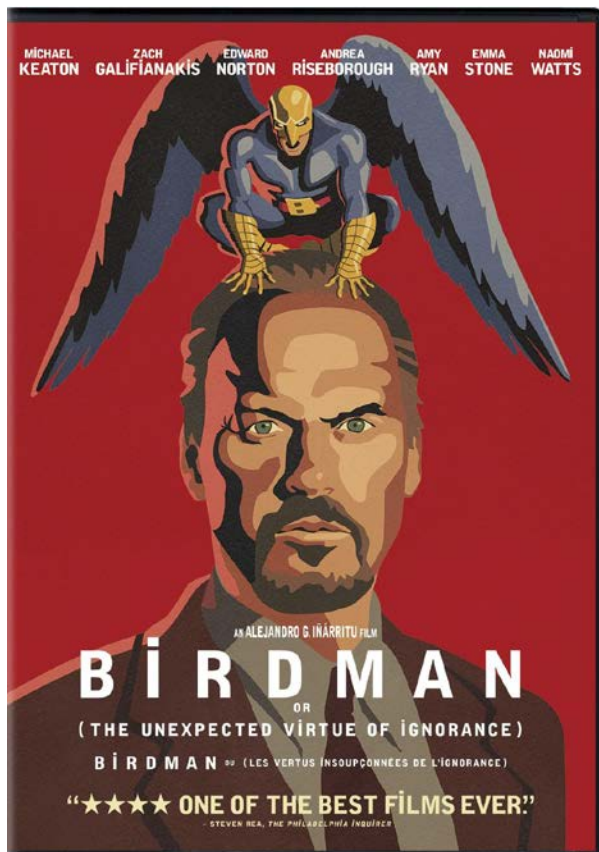
Either way, understand that there's some hard science behind that compulsion to follow link after link. Be aware that constant digital connection is helping your brain to form deep-seated, tiring habits. And whenever you can, make a deliberate effort to break that surfing, clicking dopamine loop. Because cat videos are only fun until you become the rat caught in a maze.

*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.*



## The Mindful Bard Birdman

Wanda Waterman



Your Inner Voice is  
A Mad Superhero

**Film:** *Birdman* (or "The Unexpected Virtue Of Ignorance")

**Director:** Alejandro González Iñárritu

"And did you get what you wanted from this life, even so?"

"I did."

"And what did you want?"

"To call myself beloved, to feel myself beloved on the earth."

- Raymond Carver in *Late Fragment*.

What you hear at the start of this film are first the voice of the hero's alter ego, Birdman, and then the *doo-DOO-doo* ring of a Skype call. The voice of Birdman is contemptuous and mocking, and the Skype call ring sounds just as invasive and grating as it does in real life.

Riggan Thomson, played by Michael Keaton, goes to his laptop and accepts the call. Among the assorted items sitting beside

his laptop is a small, shrivelled skull, an object you often see in European paintings toward the end of the Renaissance; it was how artists asked: "Is that all there is?"

Riggan is the actor who portrayed the superhero Birdman in a series of three Hollywood blockbusters. (Yes,



Birdman is a thinly disguised version of the Batman role Keaton played, and we can only guess at how much of Keaton's personal history influenced the story). When Riggan is alone, the Birdman in his head convinces him that he has superpowers like telekinesis and flying, delusions that buttress Riggan against his own profound self-loathing and hunger for love. However, as his daughter points out, his neurotic urge to attract admiration often sabotages his need for authentic connection. "It's what you always do," she snarls; "you confuse love for admiration."

The voices and temptations to delusion are especially intense now. He's risking all of his resources—personal, financial, and relational— to produce, direct, and act in his first stage play. The stress is almost more than he can bear.

Riggan's social context is just as absurd as his inner life. His daughter, Sam, in recovery from drug addiction, tells him that he doesn't exist because he doesn't read blogs, use Twitter, or even have a Facebook page. His second lead actor tells him he doesn't exist except as a pop culture superhero. The people who recognise him on the street adore him but don't even know his name, seeing him as only the actor who played Birdman. His struggle to establish an authentic identity often meets with the harshest of social punishments.

The play he's producing is Riggan's version of Raymond Carver's short story, "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love." Why is Riggan, after years of incredible Hollywood success, killing himself to produce this play? For one thing, he's realised that he's not Birdman, in spite of his fans stubbornly viewing him as nothing but. He's a real actor and doesn't want to go down without producing a legitimate work of thespian art.

The ambition to create real art after decades of pandering to the masses makes Riggan especially vulnerable to the temptation to enter his "hero" compartment, that part of his mind where he shuts out reason and moral obligations for the sake of his own egotistical interests. His alter ego, Birdman, works very hard to draw him into this compartment, because without Riggan's permission, Birdman can't exist. And so the voice of Birdman continues to mock, threaten, and insult Riggan whenever Riggan tries to be real; the more profound the humiliation Riggan feels, the greater the delusions of grandeur needed to quell them.

(At one point Birdman gives voice to the boast of grossly inflated egos everywhere: "*You are a god*:" at once a battle cry and a death wish.)

Riggan really is special and marvelous—not as Birdman or as any other character he's ever played—but *as himself*. He's heroic in his intention to turn away from the package of lies, the artifice, the moral blindness, and the self-destructive tendencies that come with pop culture celebrity. He's heroic in his decision to make real art as opposed to catering to the baser tendencies of baser minds. And he's heroic in his desire to restore authentic relationships in his life. Riggan is brave enough to ask life for a package of miracles.

The cinematographer employs a remarkable innovation: long, continuous camera shots (as opposed to the rapidfire angle and scene changes we're used to). The normal human way of seeing things is finally being honoured, that is, we're not being lead around by the nose by someone else's vision. It feels like we're there in the room, our minds wandering, checking out the furniture, listening to the dialogue with one ear and the subtext with another, and just letting the experience wash over us.

Actually, the longshot isn't entirely innovative. Hitchcock used the technique in his 1948 experimental film *Rope*. The effect of *Birdman* is very Hitchcockian, because with this technique, once you start filming, the dialogue can't be changed (Hitchcock was known for revising his scripts to perfection by himself and then refusing to

change a single word during takes). This gives scenes a gritty realism and at the same time a classical polish.

Another Hitchcockian element is the use of highly symbolic details (e.g. roses, skulls, a tattoo of a serpent eating its tale) which enhance and deepen the significance of the film but which (as Hitchcock complained) are lost on most viewers.

In the absence of scene cuts, the soundtrack provides clues to changes within the psychological process. We hear, for example, the brilliant drum scores of Antonio Sánchez in the theatre when real artistic work is being sweated out, but classical pieces (including, significantly, the romantic composers Rachmaninoff and Tchaikovsky) during times of fantasy, transcendence, and epiphany.

*Birdman* manifests eight of the Mindful Bard's criteria for films well worth watching.

- It's authentic, original, and delightful.
- It poses and admirably responds to questions that have a direct bearing on my view of existence.
- It stimulates my mind.
- It provides respite from a sick and cruel world, a respite enabling me to renew myself for a return to mindful artistic endeavor.
- It's about attainment of the true self.
- It displays an engagement with and compassionate response to suffering.
- It makes me want to be a better artist.
- It makes me appreciate that life is a complex and rare phenomenon, making living a unique opportunity.

*The Mindful Bard owes much to the tireless research assistance of Bill Waterman.*

## Student Sizzle AU's Hot Social Media Topics

Following what's hot around AU's social media sites.

### AUSU Student Forums

In the General Student Chat forum, user "AU Student" wonders if other students have ideas or concerns over recent media reports regarding AU's financial situation.

### AthaU Facebook Group

Bob posts links to news articles on the future of AU. Kim is looking for other students in the BPA in governance, law, and management degree program. Amanda wonders if other students keep and look back over old textbooks.

Other postings include T2202 tuition tax receipts, and courses ECON 385, ENGL 381, MATH 215 & 216, PHIL 333, RELS 204, and WGST 422.

### Twitter

@AthabascaU tweets a link to AU President Peter MacKinnon's response to recent media reports; read it here: <http://news.athabascau.ca/news/au-president-recent-rumours/>. In another tweet, @AthabascaU says: "For all those looking for their 2014 T2202A's, a printable copy will be available in MyAU by February 28th, 2015." And @AU\_Press tweets: "NEW BOOK! Haiti thru the eyes of one of its citizens. A gripping first-hand account by a young father. <http://goo.gl/wE1jIX>"



## Music Review

### Guarantee Me Love

Samantha Stevens



**Artist:** Eddie Cohn

**Album:** Guarantee Me Love

A growing trend in music has been for bands and musicians to release a single or two that gain popularity and guide listeners towards the remainder of their album. Unfortunately, most people are content with only listening to the popular singles and ignoring the full album. However, sometimes a musician creates an album that needs to be listened to from beginning to end to be fully appreciated. The latest album

from LA singer-songwriter Eddie Cohn is one such album. *Guarantee Me Love* needs to be listened from the very first note of the first track to the final fading tone of the last song to understand the enormity of talent and emotion that went into creating this album.

The music on *Guarantee Me Love* is a mix between classic soft rock and beautifully conducted instrumental with a dash of electronic added for flavour. The songs remind me of the latest music that has been released by Sting over the last few years. The sounds are soft and sensual, with intense emotion seeping through each and every note. The songs are very much love songs, but don't let that dissuade you from checking out the album if you aren't a fan of sentimental music. The composition of each song is clever, and the lyrics and singing are brilliantly matched with instruments and music that enhances the overall sound and theme of each song.

However, there are a few negative elements about *Guarantee Me Love* that I find detract from the overall attraction of the album. The album is relatively short with only nine tracks. As well, although the songs, when listened to back-to-back, create an intense emotional reaction, I found that they didn't really stand out and bring anything new into the genre of soft rock, and at times were even a little lacklustre. But there are two songs on this album that I absolutely love.

"Don't Disappear Yet" is one of those songs that almost left me in tears. The lyrics are very emotional and poetic, but it was the deeply rhythmic percussion and cello that seized my heart and took my breath away. I've always been a sucker for such a musical arrangement, and the added passionate singing made this song stick with me. It's one that I've found myself often replaying.

The title track, "Guarantee Me Love", is a similar song with more bass and slightly ethereal singing. Once again the cello accompaniment elevates this song above what I would usually expect from something like this, but it is the bass that makes this song a new favourite of mine. The lyrics are a touch repetitive, but with the heart-

melting wail of the cello the overall sound is passionate and a pleading cry of emotion not often captured so intensely in music.

Although only these two attracted my ear as they contain elements that I really enjoy, each song has something to offer. As I mentioned earlier, listen to the full album to discover which one you like best as each song is different. And since the album is about love and other equally intense emotions, and we each interpret and experience these emotions differently, Eddie's latest album may contain a song that will strike the inner cords of your heart and become your new favourite.

*Samantha Stevens is an aspiring writer who loves combining her love for literature with photography, painting, music, and all creative pursuits.*



## International News Desk

### At Home and Abroad

#### At Home: Tuition Hikes on the Table for Post-Secondary Students

With the recent downturn in Alberta's economic fortunes due to what many consider an over-reliance on a single commodity, Alberta is seeking new ways to attain a balanced provincial budget, so as to echo and amplify the business cycle rather than counter-act it. Premier Jim Prentice has repeatedly suggested that the primary way he is looking to balance the budget is by cutting what Alberta spends on public sector workers, and possibly by applying additional regressive taxation and fee systems to Albertans.

Post-secondary institutions are not exempted from these ideas, as the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education has stated in the *Globe and Mail* that no decisions have been made on broader changes to post-secondary funding, with adjusting tuition being specifically singled out as "one technique that institutions have to maintain their competitiveness," this is in stark contrast to issues of royalty hikes, carbon taxes, or increases to corporate taxation, upon which the broader decisions have been made—they won't happen.

#### Around the Globe: Singapore Curtailing Trade in International Education

The Law Society of Singapore has taken the step of removing eight law schools from the UK from its list of approved institutions, and so will no longer recognize students coming from those institutions for admission to the Singapore bar. The Law Society was up front in declaring in a report from the *University World News* that the move came 'due to law graduates outnumbering training contracts available and the change was "only logical"'. There are typically around 500 training contracts available and local universities usually graduate around 400 students each year. The schools affected include Exeter, Leeds, Leicester, Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield, Southampton, and the School of Oriental and African Studies (or SOAS) in the University of London.

There remains eleven British universities on the accepted list, and the two universities in Canada recognized by the Singapore Law Society will not be affected by this move, nor will the ten Australian, four American, or two in New Zealand.



## Time Travel and Regrets

Deanna Roney



I was recently watching the movie *Safety Not Guaranteed* which is about a man who placed an advertisement looking for a partner to travel back in time with. The advertisement told the would-be time travel partner that they must bring their own weapons, and their safety is not guaranteed. As the movie progresses, they discuss their reasons for wanting to go back in time; his "partner" is an intern from a magazine, writing a story on him for, at least at the beginning, entertainment value. As they sat together and discussed why they wanted to go back in time, it made me wonder if I would go back in time? Would I really want to change the past?

We all have a history. A chapter in our lives that we like to pretend does not exist. A chapter we are not proud of and would, in theory, like to change. Given the chance though, would we? I would like to think that I would not change a thing. I like to think that I can look back over the chapters which I prefer to ignore and accept them as the drama leading to a climax, and an eventual happy ending. My story is only beginning (I hope) and I have found happiness in life and, for the time being, my place in the world. I have found something which I truly enjoy doing, and I am

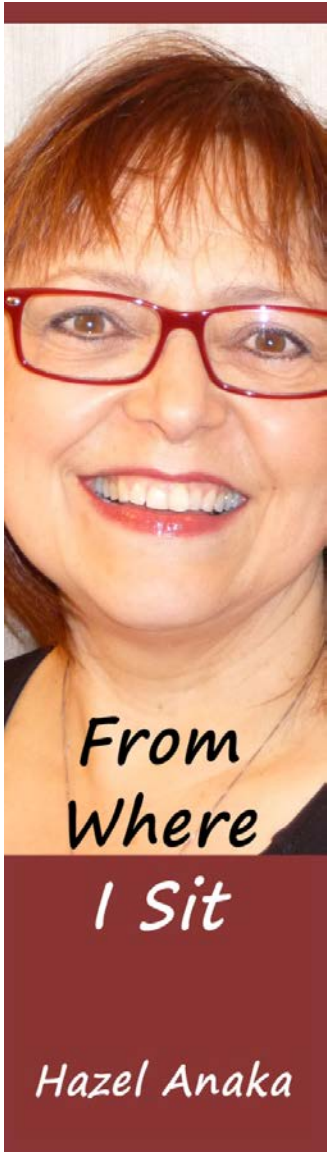
actively working toward making it a viable living. (Thank you Athabasca University!)

Without the chapters I prefer to ignore, I might not be where I am in life now. My path might have gone in another direction entirely. Maybe if I went back in time, with the man who stated "Safety not guaranteed", and changed the course of my life, I would not have the joy that I have now. Maybe by creating a life free of regrets we would not get the reward of true happiness. We would lead a safe life, take no risks, so have no regrets, and receive no rewards.

In the movie, the characters fight with their own demons from the past. They deal with their own regrets in their own unique way and grow as they do it. I think that is the most important part of regrets. You went into a situation not knowing what to expect, and did not handle it properly—the way, looking back, that you wish you had. Yet, without being in that situation how would you learn? How would you grow and become a better person?

So, if it was possible to time travel, to go back and erase the chapters I prefer to ignore, would I? Would I risk not knowing all I have learned? Would I risk the life I have now over a few chapters? No. While I am not proud of them, I am proud of who I am and where I am in life, and my regrets played their part in getting me here. It is much easier to remember what you have learnt and ignore the rest of the chapter. Take what you can and leave the rest. Besides, have the movies taught us nothing? Go back in time, step on a bug, and destroy mankind. Please, for the sake of humanity, just learn from your mistakes, forget the rest of the chapter and focus on making the rest of your story amazing.

*Deanna Roney is an AU student who loves adventure in life and literature.*



## Glad They're Gone

If we're really lucky we get a great launch into life by growing up in a loving family. Prior to that, we hope we scored in the gene pool game and inherited some strong healthy DNA. Between those nature-nurture influences hopefully we grow into self-actualized, well adjusted, happy, contributing members of society. And of course, everyone will have his or her own definition of how each of those components will manifest.

When the start into life is less auspicious or downright brutal, the outcome is less good. We can all rattle off the risk factors: teen or ill-equipped parents; poverty; broken home; health challenges; physical, mental, sexual abuse; lack of education; birth country; and more. So if you're born to a teen mother with AIDS in Africa your life will be unrecognizable to most of us. If you're born to an alcoholic or drug addicted parent, it will be an uphill battle. If you are born to a visible minority there will (still) be barriers to your success that some smug Caucasians won't understand.

I try to weigh all that when I interact with people who seem so different from me. People who don't share the same values, beliefs, attitude, or work ethic as I do. I try to understand.

My patience and understanding have been stretched to the limit with the deadbeat tenant we had to evict from our rental property. As we prepared for new tenants, we did a lot of work to and at the duplex. We had it painted from top to bottom, had the carpets cleaned, and hired a cleaning lady to do what they had neglected to do. We changed no less than a dozen burnt out bulbs. We replaced a furnace filter that was completely plugged and collapsed. We cleaned the lint trap on the dryer!

Because the eviction happened in early January the yard was blanketed in snow. A thaw revealed what the snow had hidden. We picked flyers and antifreeze jugs out of the front shrubs. We picked up an aerosol can from near the remains of a wasp nest. We picked up a few piles of dog (or was that elephant) poop. We were unable to pick up every single cigarette butt or scrap of paper or drink straw. We hauled a truckload of garbage out. Through it all we shook our heads in disbelief.

Being a slob is not the worst thing in the world but it is indicative of other things gone wrong in a life. I emptied the mailbox and marveled at the entities that were corresponding with this family. In addition to utility bills and credit card statements, there was mail from City of Edmonton ticket administration, Edmonton Police Service, and Alberta Justice. There was also mail for FIVE other people.

We are smarter as landlords because of this real world education. The scary part is that these former tenants are still 'walking among us' devaluing anything they touch, racking up bills, being a burden on government agencies. Whether it's nature or nurture I'm glad they're gone from where I sit.

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



Dear  
Barb

Barbara Godin

## To Learn or Not to Learn

**Dear Barb:**

*I am a single mother of three young sons. I am working at a dead end job and am considering taking courses at Athabasca and ultimately obtaining a degree. I don't know what I am interested in taking yet; I just know I have no future where I'm at. I was wondering if there are other moms at Athabasca who are in a similar situation and how long does it take for most of them to complete a course. Also how difficult is it to manage family life and school. I know you can take up to six months, but how long is the average someone in my situation takes to complete a course and how many courses do most moms take. So I guess I am hoping some of your readers can help me. I don't want my family life to suffer too much. Thanks Fiona*

Hi Fiona:

Good for you, it's always good to try to better yourself and I appreciate your concern for your family life. Obviously you realize it will be a delicate balance with working full time, plus managing family and household responsibilities. As you know, your boys will be grown and gone before you know it. There are a lot of resources on Athabasca's website, as you may have already checked out. Also Facebook is a good resource to connect with other students. Hopefully other moms will write in with some information that would be helpful for you. Thanks for writing Fiona.

**Dear Barb:**

*My brother passed away last year after a brief illness. I am fairly close to his two sons who are now adults. Before my brother married his wife, he had a brief relationship with a girl who was well known to the family. She became pregnant but they broke up. This girl continued to visit my grandmother and, when her son was born, she brought him to see my grandmother and told her this was my brother's son. She was a very nice girl and there was no reason to doubt this was my brother's son, as well my grandmother said that he looked just like my brother! I am not sure if she ever told my brother about his son. She eventually gave the child to her sister and husband to raise, because she didn't feel she could do it alone. This issue has faded into the background and no one in our family has ever talked about it again. Now that my brother is gone I feel I should tell his sons about their half-brother, as I'm assuming they don't know about this sibling. I would be interested in hearing your opinion. Thanks, Sue.*

Hey Sue:

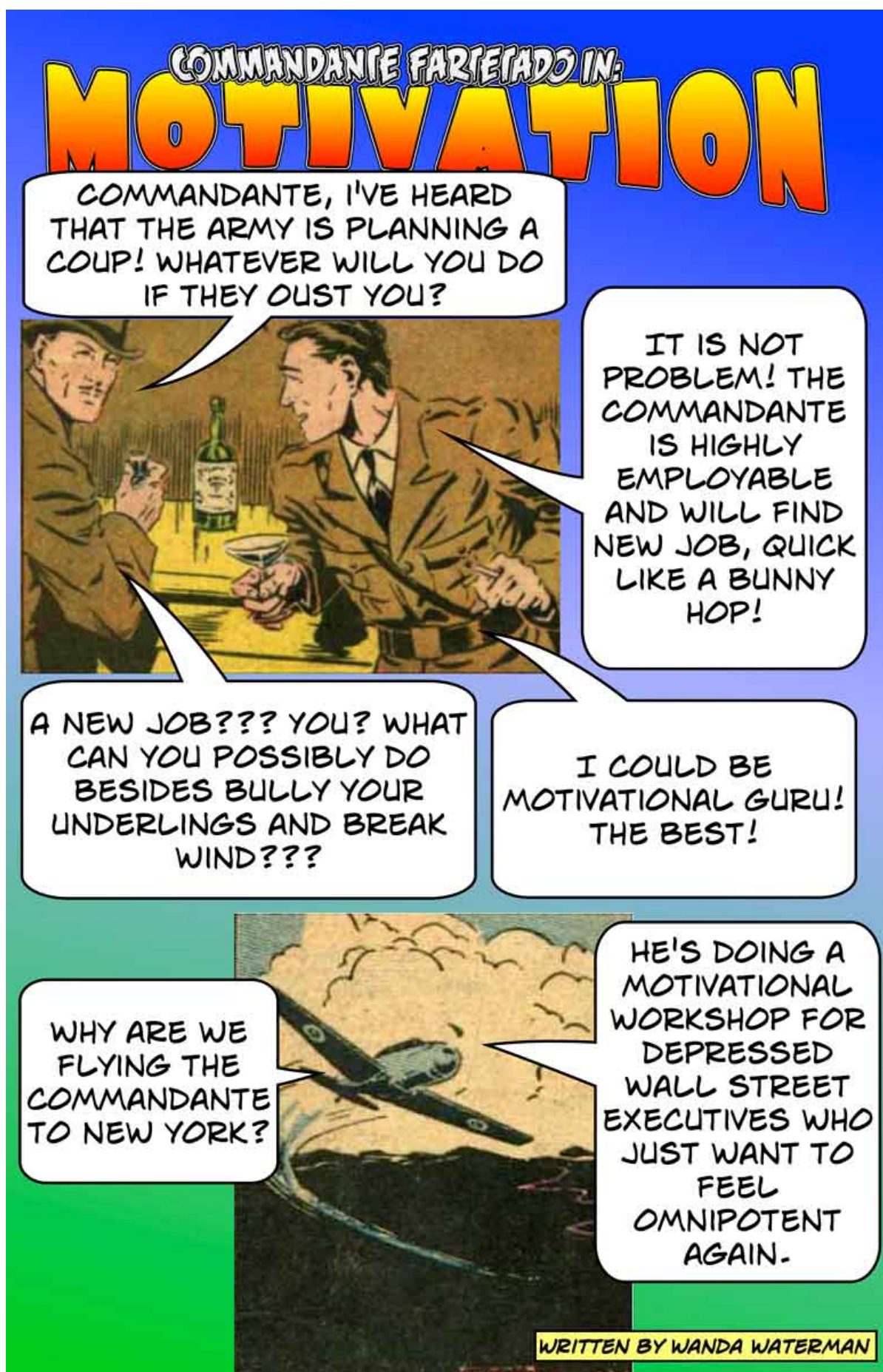
Interesting situation! You did the right thing by waiting until your brother had passed before you decided to do anything. Your nephews may already know about their half sibling. This is a difficult situation, but I agree that these boys should know about a brother and possibly other relatives they may have. I would suggest telling the boys together and perhaps with no one else present so they would be able to digest this information alone and then they can decide what they want to do and with whom they want to disclose this information. Thanks for sharing Sue.

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**  
ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY  
STUDENTS' UNION

This space is provided free to AUSU: The Voice does not create this content. Contact [ausu@ausu.org](mailto:ausu@ausu.org) with questions or comments about this page.

### Featured AUSU Member Service: Advocacy

A key role of AUSU is advocacy, both at the individual and institutional level.

Strength is in numbers, and the goal of any students' union is to provide a unified voice for the student community to accomplish things we could not do alone. All AU undergraduates pay SU fees, so AUSU represents all undergrads.

If you require advocacy or mediation on any issue, or even some support and information, you should not hesitate to contact AUSU. We provide advocacy for both individuals and for the membership as a whole.

For more information on how AUSU can help you, please visit AUSU's website at:

<http://www.ausu.org/services/advocacy.php>

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### Great AU Finds Online

**Discounted Software for Students** – AU provides access to a discounted software hub for students. The store offers low rates on Microsoft Office 365 University, Adobe Creative Cloud and many more. To find out more visit:

<http://itss.athabascau.ca/students/docs/software.html>

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### AUSU Featured Groups & Clubs

Group Name: **Athabasca University (@AthabascaU)**

Where: **Twitter**

Members: 7431 followers

About: Social media tweets from AU. Others can use hashtags to post on this site.

Activity: Almost 3000 tweets since February 2009.

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### IMPORTANT DATES

- February 27: Last business day to extend courses ending March 31
- March 10: Last day to register for courses starting April 1
- March 12: AUSU council meeting
- March 31: Last day to extend courses ending April 30



### This Week at lynda.com

*lynda.com experts have curated playlists to get you started. With hundreds of lists on a variety of subjects, there is something for everyone. **Visit the playlist center for more information and enter the playlist title.** This week's featured list:*

### Build Leadership Skills

Being a student at AU creates some difficulties in being able to hone leadership skills, yet every employer values them. Fortunately, [lynda.com](http://lynda.com) has training on a wide range of career and business skills. The Build Leadership Skills is ideal for new grads, or anyone seeking employment while they study. This stream of courses will teach you:

- How to be a leader people love to follow.
- How to uncover your hidden strengths and talents.
- How to inspire your team.

Have a look at this playlist and start using the skills in your everyday interactions outside of school!

Courses: 7

Duration: 8h 52m

Skill Level: Appropriate for all

***Have you signed up for lynda? It's free for AUSU members. To learn more, check out [ausu.org/services/lynda.php](http://ausu.org/services/lynda.php)***

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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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