

THE VOICE

MAGAZINE

Vol 24 Issue 18 2016-05-06

Meeting the Minds

Dr. Angie Abdou, Part II

A Memorable Day

Surviving the Crash

Unexpected Lessons

The Gifts of Distance Education

Plus:

Behind the Scenes: AU Press

Mom Night

and much more!



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



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comments to voice@voicemagazine.org, and please
indicate if we may publish your letter.**

EDITORIAL

Through the Flames

Karl Low



I've often said that one of the advantages of AU is that, as we're dispersed, there's no single event, like a school bombing or a rash of disease that will affect all of us. The flip side of that, however, is that whenever something major happens, especially in Canada, the odds are that it will affect at least some of your fellow students.

The fire in Fort McMurray is no different. AU estimates there are around 175 students who live (lived?) in Fort McMurray, and some 500 courses being taken by the people there. If you're one of those from Fort McMurray and haven't already seen the news, Athabasca University is taking steps to make things easier for you. Whether all you need is simply to rebook your exam or some extra time for your course, AU is waiving the fees normally required to do so, and if your course materials are part of what you lost, AU will replace them at no charge.

But if that's not enough, they're going one step further. If you're from Fort McMurray, AU is offering a full refund on your course should you choose to withdraw from it until you get your feet back under you. As they say on the [website](#), "We'll be here when you're ready to return." As I write this, the fires are still going, with over 100,000

hectares now burnt, and the last reports were that stopping the fire is now almost entirely in the hands of the weather. If the fires have affected you, even if not directly, you can also get some support from AUSU's Student Lifeline service. Check out the AUSU update column at the back of the magazine (or in the "news and events" section if you're reading this on the website.) And no matter where you're from, stay safe.

Now, to get your minds off of the fire, this week we bring you the second half of our feature interview with Dr. Angie Abdou. If you want to learn how to be a creative writer, Dr. Abdou tells you what you need to make a go of it. We also have a look behind the scenes at AU Press, with an interview with the Acting Director, Megan Hall. Find out just what's involved in running the first Open University Press, where you can get everything they publish for free.

Then there's "A Memorable Day" by Barb Godin. When I first read it, I thought she was sending me a work of fiction. I'm sure she wishes it was, but sadly, the newspaper clipping she sent me later confirmed that it's a true story, one that you'll need to read to believe—and perhaps not even then.

And we can't forget that this weekend is Mother's Day! I was feeling quite proud that I remembered it this year, and have already picked up a gift. Then I read Barb Lehtiniemi's article, "Mom Night" and knew I'd have to do better next year. But I know many *Voice* readers are also mom's, and for you, we bring you Carla Knipe's look at how a mom is more than just your kids or spouse, it's how you evolve as well, how the lives of those closest to us change us. Then there's our regular selection of reviews, advice, and entertainment, not to mention a look at some of the things you learn at AU that aren't taught in any of the courses—even if you weren't aware they were being taught. Enjoy the read!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Karl", written in a cursive style.

MEETING THE MINDS

INTERVIEWS with AU's EDUCATORS



Dr. Angie Abdou is an assistant professor in the English department, specializing in creative writing. Dr. Abdou's own creative writing has won awards and media recognition.

What pedagogical standpoint is most reflective of your way of teaching?

Dr. Abdou: Again, that comes back to the pedagogy of me seeing myself as a mentor and a partner. I often talk about a student manuscript as if we are working on it together (and I do think of it as a partnership). Students come to me with a body of work. They want to know how to take it to the next level. We are working on that project together.

So, I don't stand up and lecture, saying, I have this knowledge and now I will tell it to you and you write it down and you memorize it and repeat it on a test—that doesn't work in creative writing. Instead, I say: You show me what you have, and I'm going to help you. We are going to work together to get it to the next stage.

What is your view on social media in the online learning environment?

Dr. Abdou: I'm very active on social media because in my role as a writer, I try to be a public figure, to be out there and easily found. I know that some of my students follow me on twitter or on Facebook. I follow them back. It's another nice way to connect in the online environments—equivalent to running into them in the hallways or at a local coffee shop.

Do you use the Landing in your teaching practices?

Dr. Abdou: I have in some courses.

Did you like it?

Dr. Abdou: I did. I taught a graduate course on academic writing. We used the Landing. The students all did blogs: four or five blogs in the course of the semester, and they could make a blog open or not, whatever they wanted. It was a productive way for them to work through some thoughts in a less formal manner than an essay. Also, the students made those thoughts public and available to other students to engage with. That created a sense of community and engagement. I liked it.

If you had one piece of advice for online learners, what would it be?

Dr. Abdou: Online learners need to be self-motivated. Students have to come to an online course ready to work and ready to be disciplined. It's very easy to not be. Those are the main skills required: self-discipline and work ethic.

If you could wave a magic wand and improve one thing about online education, what would it be?

Dr. Abdou: The thing that I would improve—the thing that I miss in the face-to-face environment—is that energy that is created when everybody is in one room and working through the same ideas. I think that's already improving in online education, whether it's the Landing or online discussions groups or Skype meetings. There are so many different ways to connect with people online, and it's getting much easier and better, so that that part is improving, naturally.

What is your view on interdisciplinary studies?

Creative writing is inherently interdisciplinary, right? Students can bring whatever they know to creative writing. The more they know about anything, the creative writing is going to get better. I'm very excited also to be teaching in the MAIS program: the Master of Arts in Integrated Studies. Right now, I'm teaching MAIS 617, a Creative Nonfiction course.

The different backgrounds that students bring to that course is fascinating. In my other positions at other universities, I worked primarily with English majors, so here we have a really strong mix of social scientists, scientists, arts people, humanities people, and the variety makes the discussions livelier and more informed. We can rely on different students to bring different expertise to the conversation.

How do you keep abreast of best teaching practices?

Dr. Abdou: Conferences. I go regularly to conferences. I connect with colleagues around the country, and we're always sharing ideas. I'm also on several Facebook pages, ones for teaching creative nonfiction or teaching fiction. Those are always stimulating. This country is so filled with wonderful writers who also teach that it's not hard to find those conversations and learn from them.

What are some of the challenges and highlights to publishing academic literature?

Dr. Abdou: Because I'm a creative writing instructor, I publish creative work more than I do academic work. However, I have a few academic projects on the go. Right now, for example, I'm working on an anthology of academic essays about sports literature. Sports literature is one of my main areas of interest. It is being taught more often in universities. But, there aren't a lot of resources: people can't find articles on these books. So, I'm doing a collection with academic articles on the main sports literature texts. I find that rewarding because I engage in the material in a different way than I do with creative writing. Academic writing exercises a different part of the brain than creative writing does. I like that variety.

Is the sports writing nonfiction?

Dr. Abdou: Both nonfiction and fiction. I'm more interested in fiction about sport.

What was your favourite course to teach? Why this particular course?

Dr. Abdou: I really like teaching my creative nonfiction course because students share their own stories. That's always interesting. Sharing stories is one way to connect with students even though we're working at a distance. I enjoy that. I like the advanced fiction courses a lot as well because students who make it that far are very serious about their novels. There is the likelihood of those manuscripts one day making it into print, and that's a dream come true for those students, so I like to help them along the way to that dream.

If you could confer one piece of wisdom on an upcoming student in your discipline, what would it be?

Dr. Abdou: My advice is to write only because you love to write. Don't write with some idea that there is going to be a pot of gold at the end. Write what you need to write, what you want to write, what you love to write.

What does it take to become a publishable writer?

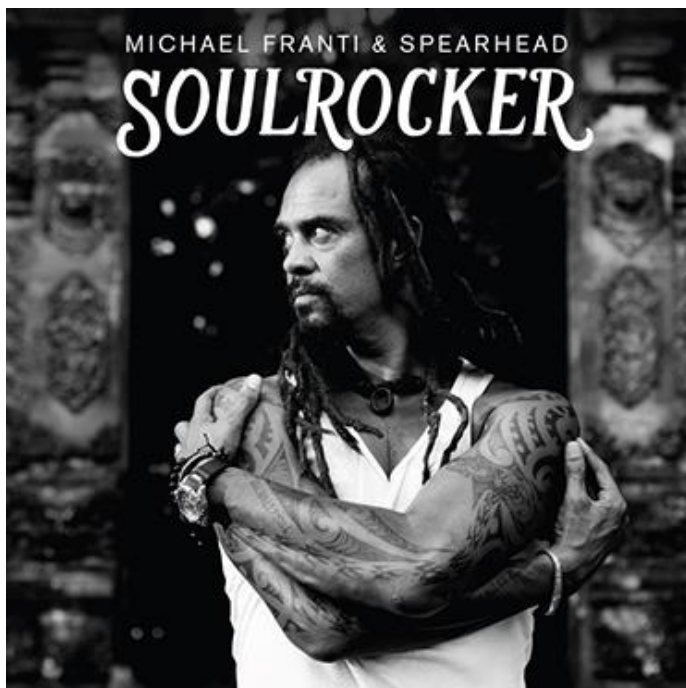
Dr. Abdou: Patience and perseverance. Time. I have students I work with who are publishing books on which I worked with them seven years ago. Two students this year got publishing contracts for books they've been working on for at least seven years. Aspiring writers need a lot of stick-to-it-iveness.

What kind of writing skills do you need?

Dr. Abdou: Perfect ones. The publishing industry is very competitive.

What are perfect writing skills?

Dr. Abdou: Clarity and precision. I like Orwell's comment that you can't express yourself clearly unless you have clarity of thought. Often ideas themselves are kind of muddy or kind of vague, which makes it impossible to get clarity on the page.

**Music Review****Michael Franti & Spearhead****Samantha Stevens****Musician:** Michael Franti and Spearhead**Album:** *SOULROCKER*

Ready for some of the most politically charged and optimistic music that I've ever heard? I wasn't sure what to expect when I encountered Michael Franti's upcoming album *SOULROCKER*, with his heavy emphasis on political turmoil and well known activism. But I was pleasantly surprised to be met with upbeat rhythms, thoughtful lyrics, beautiful melodies, and hopeful messages of peace.

Beginning his music career in 1986 with The Beatnigs in California, Michael's music quickly caught the attention of audiences. However, it was his next band, Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy, founded in 1991, that propelled him into the limelight. Their first album, *Hypocrisy Is the Greatest Luxury*, caught the attention of U2, and they

were made U2's opening act during the 1992-1993 Zoo TV Tour. In 1994, Michael formed Spearhead, and *SOULROCKER* is their ninth album.

Apart from being busy creating fantastic music, Michael is also heavily involved in political, social, and environmental activism. In 2001, he was awarded the Domestic Human Rights Award by Global Exchange for his humanitarian work. His 2006 documentary *I Know I'm Not Alone* features footage from his travels in Iraq, Palestine, and Israel where he focused primarily on the human cost of war.

Although Michael's music is heavily influenced by his political leanings and work as an activist, the music doesn't exclude the listener and at no time did it feel like he was lecturing me. In fact, I found that the use of the upbeat

reggae, hip hop, rock, and dance music drew me in, and I was very receptive to the messages that he was trying to convey. From the politically charged and sobering "Good To Be Alive Today" to the quirky and uplifting "My Favourite Wine Is Tequila," Michael is continuously aware of his audience. It is obvious that he doesn't want to dissuade and exclude anyone. His music can be listened to purely for the enjoyment of the tones and melodies.

Although most of the songs feature hip hop, reggae, and funk influences, the song "I Got Love For Ya" has a beautiful, down-to-earth, folk feel to it. The track focuses primarily on the beautifully played guitar, which complements Michael's vocals perfectly. Noting the distances that separate us from loved ones, the themes in this song enhance the folk feeling. Yet the steady reggae beat, which is similar to that featured in the other tracks, means that it somehow fits in perfectly with the other tracks on the album.

My favourite song on this album is "Summertime Is In Our Hands." The African-influenced rhythm and sound lend an element of fun, and I always find myself up and dancing to this track. Focusing on the hope for brighter days, Michael's message of gratitude, peace, and love through music is the soul of this song.

Set to release June 3rd, *SOULROCKER* is a joyful journey for the soul and mind. I highly recommend checking it out, even if it's just to experience some of the fantastic and uplifting beats.

Samantha currently uses her skills as a writer to promote independent musicians and raise awareness and support for many global, environmental, and humanitarian issues. Check out her website and blog at: <http://sstevenswriter.wix.com/writer>



A Memorable Day

Barb Godin



When writer Barb Godin was a teenager, she was in a horrific auto accident. Here's her story.

I lifted my head; the silence was deafening, interrupted only by the sound of Mary moaning from somewhere behind me. Everything was dark and cold, and all I could smell was gasoline. I pulled myself out through the windshield of the car and went to the driver's side. Rick was lying still and I could see a blanket on his head. I pulled the blanket off, but he didn't move. I started to cry; I was frightened—was having a hard time standing. I screamed for my sister, then blacked out.

The next sounds I heard were sirens growing louder and louder. There was a lot of commotion and I heard one of the attendants say "It's too late for this one." I felt my body tighten, oh no, not Mary! Someone lifted me onto a stretcher and I asked about my sister.

"Was she in the back seat?"

"Yes."

"We're getting her out now." I felt relieved. As the ambulance was driving to Leamington General Hospital, I asked the attendant sitting with me how everyone else was, and that's when he told me that the driver didn't make it, but that the other fellow in the back was okay. I could feel my breath catch in my throat and the tears stream out of my eyes. The tightness in my chest was so painful that I tried to grab myself, but I wasn't able to move my arms.

Jan was lying on the stretcher beside me in the emergency department. The blood was soaking through the wrapping on her arm. I knew she could hear what I was hearing - the disturbing moaning from my sister. Tears were running out of her eyes, "did they tell you about Rick?" I nodded. It was all surreal. Was this a dream? It couldn't be real. My mind searched to make some sense of what was happening. I had gotten on the bus that morning to go to school, just like any other morning; how did I end up here?

I couldn't believe Rick was dead, this was our first date!

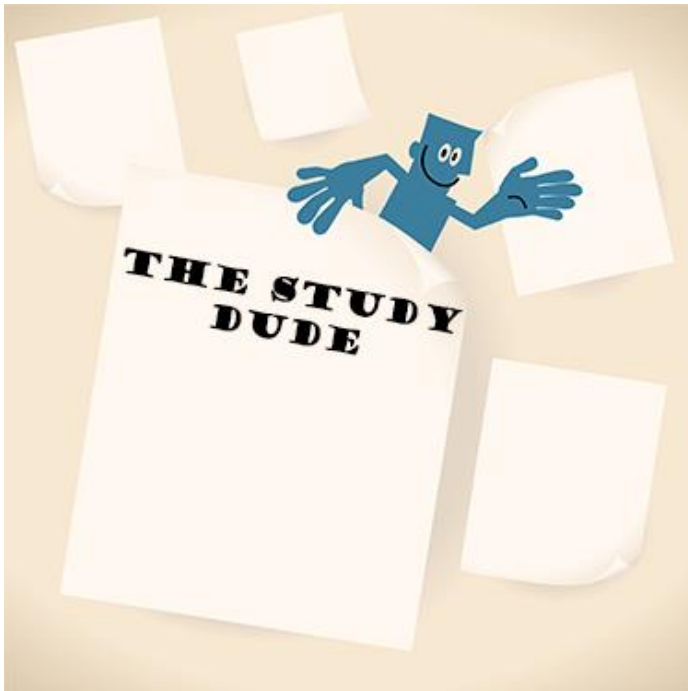
Jan was wheeled away to another room, and then I saw Gary being pushed by in a wheelchair. My leg began to feel strange, like it was being squeezed and my head ached. Dried blood was on my hands. I saw a gash on my thumb, but I wasn't sure where all the blood was coming from. That's all I remember until the next day.

A nurse gently woke me up. I didn't say anything; I was waiting for her to tell me what had really happened. She reaffirmed the words I had heard the night before. Rick was dead; my sister was critically injured and in a coma. My head began to hurt, I felt sick to my stomach and dizzy, so the nurse gave me something for the pain and I went to another surreal place until mom and my older sister arrived. They took me to see Mary. She was still moaning, but not as loudly. Her head was bandaged and when she moved I could see the dried blood that had come through onto the pillow. Her eyes were open a bit and looked almost black. The doctor said she was in a coma. Again I could hardly breathe as the tears welled in my eyes. Later that day someone brought in a copy of *The Windsor Star*. On the front page was the caption "What's Left of Death Car" and below was a picture of Rick's mangled car. As I lay in the hospital bed, my mind struggled to remember the events before the accident. I remembered Rick drinking beer and throwing the empty bottles out the window. We were all laughing, as he was swerving the car through the winding roads of Point Pelee National Park. We were young and invincible, or so we thought. It was a time when drinking and driving were not talked about. Someone challenged Rick to go faster and that's the last thing I remember, until waking up in the car.

The next morning when the doctor came in on his rounds he said something to me that would affect the rest of my life. "Well Barbara, God must have had his arms around you protecting you, since the accident happened all around you." At the time they were just words, but as my life went on, I began to believe that maybe there was a reason why I was put on this earth and living this life.

Myself, Jan, and Gary, were released from the hospital a week later but the emotional and physical recovery has been a long process. My sister suffered many broken bones and remained in a coma for weeks. She still continues to suffer the effects of a traumatic brain injury. It's sad how one single event can have such a devastating and lasting impact on so many lives.

Barbara Godin is a graduate of AU and writes the "Dear Barb" column. She lives in London, Ontario with her husband, two dogs, and one cat.



Study Tips from a Semi-Anonymous Friend

Do You Have More Thumbs Than AU Friends?

There is nothing more that The Study Dude wants for you than to find a friend at AU—one who can validate your thesis.

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 Study Dude further explores Creswell's book *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed*

Methods Approaches. If you need to study qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods strategies, I urge you to read Creswell's book. Although he's a highbrow, prolific author, he writes simply.

Good-to-go? Validating Qualitative Research

When you need to validate your work, get a friend to look it over. Yes, find someone you know at a graduate level—even someone who knows little about your research.

Unfortunately, when I was in graduate studies I had no friends. Let me clarify: I had great friends outside of graduate studies, but no-one inside who would take the time to read my thesis.

You might find yourself in a similar situation. At online universities, finding friendships feels like finding a full-sized spacecraft in your front yard: it doesn't seem likely to happen. Yet, working on *The Voice Magazine* forges friendships. For instance, for some of The Voice Writers, interviews with professors or students creates connections. And even the AU students' union gets traction with making connections. For the rest of the students, however, finding friends to validate your research proves difficult.

And some students don't want school friends—that's why they study at AU. Introverts have their place on this planet, too.

So what do you do?

Creswell lists a number of different ways you can *validate* your research—with or without an academic friend:

- Use the triangulation approach to validate your data. See if more than one data source agrees with your themes. Perhaps you use interviews and focus groups combined. If these two data sources lead to similar themes, then your data is likely valid.
- Use the member checking approach to validate your data. Show your *participants* the themes that emerged from the data. See if the participants agree with the themes. If they do, then your data is likely valid.

- Use thick description to validate your data. In other words, describe things in detail. Describe the setting in detail, for instance, if you are doing an observation at a site.
- Present contradictory findings to validate your data. Believe it or not, showing what doesn't fit with your findings is a form of validation. Go figure.
- Spend lots of time at the site to validate your observation findings.
- Get a peer to look over your findings and validate your data. Let the peer suggest ways to tweak your findings so that they fit with his or her view of the world.
- Get an external auditor to validate your data. An external auditor will be someone with little knowledge of your research. Where do you find an external auditor? Creswell doesn't say.

Mix Up Your Methods

According to Creswell, mixed methods research always tangles the qualitative with the quantitative.

Through these Study Dude articles, I hope to strengthen my knowledge of qualitative and quantitative research—and one day do a mixed methods strategy. I dream nightly of doing mixed methods research.

You see, I want to teach and research at a university. However, the department head at my old university happens to be my former supervisor. She lurks in her office, awaiting my application so that she can shove it in her shredder and toss it in the trash.

Her disapproval of me knocked me out of the teaching gig. Plus, my frequent bouts of anxiety made teaching almost undoable. But, I've overcome the anxiety. Also, I've discovered that I have the qualifications to teach at a college level. So, if I keep trying, I may find myself teaching—and, as a side effect, some day realize my dream of getting a PhD.

Whether I'm kidding myself or not, Creswell tells no jokes when he lays out a roadmap for mixed methods research:

- Six different ways of integrating qualitative and quantitative data exist: (1) sequential explanatory style, (2) sequential exploratory style, (3) sequential transformative design, (4) concurrent triangulation design, (5) concurrent embedded design, and (6) concurrent transformative design.
- Sequential explanatory style is when you start with quantitative research and follow with qualitative research. The emphasis lies on the quantitative. You have the option of using a theory. When unexpected findings arise from the quantitative research, a qualitative follow-up can shed light.
- Sequential exploratory style occurs when you start with qualitative research and follow with quantitative research. The emphasis lies on the qualitative. You have the option of using a theory. Your main goal is to explore a phenomenon, come up with a sort of theory, and then test that theory with a quantitative method. Sequential exploratory style is often used to build an instrument (like a survey), especially when you can't find an instrument you need in the literature.
- Sequential transformative strategy uses a theoretical lens like feminism, queer theory, disability advocacy, and so forth. Introduce the theory in your thesis and end with a call-to-action. Emphasis can be on either the qualitative or the quantitative-but one is conducted before the other (hence, the word "sequential"). Be wary, though: not much has been written about sequential transformative strategies, so you won't have a ton of guidance.

- Concurrent triangulation strategy occurs when you gather qualitative and quantitative data—at the same time. Emphasis is given to both, but researchers often give more weight to one than the other in practice. You can merge the data or compare the data. When you write up your thesis findings, you can place the quantitative results supported by qualitative quotes (say from interviews). If you find disagreement between your quantitative and qualitative findings, do more research on it to discover why.
- Concurrent embedded strategy occurs when you gather qualitative and quantitative data—at the same time. You give emphasis to either the qualitative or the quantitative. If you give, say, the qualitative, lesser emphasis, then you would address separate questions with the qualitative and embed them into the quantitative study. For instance, you could do a survey on employees and interviews on upper level management.
- Concurrent transformative strategy occurs when use a critical theory, feminist theory, queer theory, and so forth (which is where the "transformative" comes from: change). You can use either the concurrent triangulation or concurrent embedded strategies discussed above—just with a critical theory.
- The concurrent strategies discussed above all take less time than the sequential strategies.

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.

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Mom Night A Link of Love

Barbara Lehtiniemi



For years, my Mom and I had a weekly tradition called "Mom Night." Well, I called it Mom Night, I'm not sure what she called it—perhaps "Barb Night."

It did begin as Barb Night. I was balancing full time work and part-time studies along with the demands of a house and family. To preserve my sanity, I decreed that I must have one evening per week to myself. Just a few hours of self-indulgent "me" time, in which there were no obligations, no phone calls, no demands on my time.

On Tuesday evenings, after a supper of definitely-not-homemade pizza, my husband and son would wisely disappear. Armed with a bowl of munchies and a glass of wine, I would plunk myself in front of the TV for a few hours of escapism. TVO, an Ontario publicly-funded station, was at that time airing a string of British shows—mainly period dramas—which I find make for a great escape.

Those weekly hours of downtime reenergized me. Those obligation-free evenings also gave me something to look forward to all week and I jealously guarded them. Nobody was going to come between me and Barb Night.

Nobody, that is, except my Mom. My tranquil nights of solitary splendour seemed shattered when my mother phoned with a favour to ask. A friend had loaned her a DVD, but Mom did not at that time have a DVD player. Could she watch it at my place?

Barb Nights were invaded. Not just for one week, but the many weeks needed to watch all eleven episodes of *Brideshead Revisited*. Fortunately, it was a British period drama, which we both enjoyed.

It didn't take long for Barb Night to morph permanently into Mom Night. The essentials were the same: a British production, an indulgent snack, now provided by Mom, and wine. To that we could now add companionship, conversation, and catching up.

Although Mom lived nearby—perhaps five minutes away—we hadn't seen each other regularly. This was mostly my fault. Busy with my own family in addition to working and schooling, I hadn't carved out time for much else.

Now, with weekly visits on our movie nights, we had the opportunity to be a bigger part of each other's lives. Each week, we shared the triumphs and challenges of day-to-day life. I updated Mom on the news of my little branch of the family and Mom filled me in on family news from the rest of the clan (in those days before social media, Mom reigned as the clearing-house queen of family goings-on.)

Our movie nights continued for years. After we exhausted the supply of British period dramas, we began working through the public library's collection of classic movies and chick-flicks. The quality of the movie was no longer paramount—it was the visit that mattered.

When my father became ill and couldn't be left alone for a while, it looked like we'd have to give up our weekly movie nights. Mom bought a DVD player and we tried having our nights at my parents' place but it wasn't the same. As soon as Dad's health improved enough that he could be left alone, we returned to our traditional practice of watching movies at my place.

Six years ago, our movie nights came to a halt. My fault again—I moved to another city. It was difficult to give up that weekly closeness with my Mom—especially when my Dad died only a few months later.

The distance prompted a new tradition of connection: Mom Letters. Since I'm too far away for Mom to visit, I keep her involved in my life by writing letters to her. Every week, I pop an 8-page letter in the mail, keeping her updated on the victories and challenges in my life. And every week, she writes back to share her life and that of family members in my former community. We write about how our gardens grow, what the weather is doing, and, of course, what's happening on Downton Abbey.

Weekly Mom Nights have transitioned into weekly Mom Letters. But it's not about the paper we exchange, just as it was never about the television screen we watched. Mom Letters are—just as Mom Nights were—about the connection we make. They're about the relationship we nurture and the value we hold in each other's lives. They're about the link of love between me and my mother.

Happy Mother's Day, Mom!

Barbara Lehtiniemi is a writer, photographer, and AU student. She lives on a windswept rural road in Eastern Ontario. Follow Barbara on twitter [@ThereGoesBarb](https://twitter.com/ThereGoesBarb)

Unexpected Lessons

Deanna Roney



As I adjust to life with no school-work deadlines, I have been able to reflect on some of the non-traditional lessons I learned while attending Athabasca University. What I learned from the courses is indispensable, but those lessons were the ones I was going to school for. I have found that there are many other lessons that seem to have come as a perk to distance education.

As I shift from school to creative writing, I find myself thankful for the experience of self-motivated, self-created deadlines, and the self-discipline to see them through. It took some time to get into the groove of the courses at AU. Once I did, though, I was able to structure each one and understand what scheduling works and what doesn't. I developed schedules that were unrealistic, and, when I did not meet them, I was exceptionally disappointed. Through this experience I discovered how important it is to create realistic schedules. I

might aim for a goal possibly beyond reach but, by making a schedule that is plausible, the goal becomes easier to obtain.

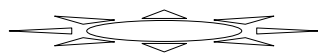
This lesson has been key to the transition for myself. I am able to look at what my end goal is and break it down into chunks, then break those chunks down even further and structure a schedule to help meet each chunk. As those add up, I find myself much further along than I ever thought I would be at certain points. With AU's flexibility comes the inherent lesson of how to manage your time wisely. There is only one deadline with AU but there are many things which need to be accomplished that have no set deadline. By learning to pace yourself and set personal deadlines that are no less important than any other deadline, you learn what it takes to be self-sufficient. You learn the skill of self-motivation and not allowing yourself to become distracted, to only have the image of the end goal in mind, even with no path to it, no reasonable way to reach the goal. AU helps to build our skills in mapping our own way after we are completed our program.

While self-pacing and self-discipline are major bonus factors to the AU experience, and ones that I have found personally invaluable, another one is research. This may seem like an obvious one, but I don't mean research in the sense of papers. I mean that the skills that we develop when researching for those papers is transferable so far beyond those confines. There are certain things we learn to look for when researching an academic paper. Things which point to a valid source, and red flags which we turn away from. This becomes a sixth sense in a way, while there are concrete things to look for, sources, authority, and professionalism, these things become seen without having to look for them. I have used this while researching the pros and cons of the publishing world. I have used these skills to dig up some dirt on fake literary agents and faux-publishing houses. I have used this skill to find legitimate agencies and how these agencies would fit in with what I am doing. The skills learned from researching a multitude of research papers makes this process much easier. I am confident in what I am reading and comprehending. I am confident in my ability to see a true professional and a fake website that exists to steal money from hopeful writers.

The lessons we learn at AU go far beyond the classroom. The time management skill is one that is learned throughout all universities, but, as distance education students, there is an extra pressure to be able to structure

yourself—to set deadlines for yourself and realistic goals. The lessons of researching are not limited to AU, but they are invaluable skills to have and to keep honed. I am always grateful for my time with AU, for the wonderful tutors and professors who guided me. I'm grateful for the flexible structure of AU courses that allowed for a crash-course in self-pacing, which, in the end, is more beneficial (especially for me) than a pre-structured course. Having these lessons from AU has made me more confident in my research and how I spend my time, structure my days, and manage my responsibilities and my dreams.

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



Interview with the Director Behind the Scenes of AU Press

Scott Jacobsen



Fellow undergraduate students might or might not know about the university press for AU called AU Press. It is an important resource for the representation of the academic and scholarly aspects of the university. Recently, Scott Jacobsen interviewed the acting director and marketing and production coordinator, Ms. Megan Hall.

What are the tasks and responsibilities of your position?

Ms. Hall: The role of acting director is one that I took over in October 2015, but I have been the marketing and production coordinator at the Press since 2012. The tasks and responsibilities of the marketing and production coordinator include the last two phases of the publication process, the design, layout, and printing of a book and the promoting of a book once it is published. The duties are varied. I write the descriptive copy for each book which appears on our website and elsewhere on the web, I coordinate with cover designers and interior designers to create the right look and feel for our publications, I collaborate with authors to determine the specific audience for the book and how to reach them, and I organize the appearance of both the Press and our authors at book launches and conferences.

In the role of acting director, I work alongside Pamela Holway, senior editor, and Connor Houlihan, associate editor, to shape the Press' list of publications. I also spend a good deal of time applying for grants and arranging for publication funding for our titles in addition to advocating for the open access movement in Canada and managing the budget for the Press.

What are the selection criteria for the inclusion of materials for AU Press?

Ms. Hall: All AU Press books, journals, and website publications must be peer-reviewed in order to receive our imprint—so that forms the basis of our selection criteria. When an author or journal enquires about publishing with AU Press we first collect some information about the project and evaluate whether it fits our mandate and our mission. We have cultivated a strong list of publications in the areas of online education, labour studies, indigenous studies, and the environment, but we also consider manuscripts outside these subject areas when we feel that the work makes an important contribution to scholarship.

How is AU Press funded?

Ms. Hall: Although the operational funding we receive from provincial and federal granting agencies is key to running a complete publishing program what is far more important and significant is the financial support provided by AU. Acquiring, shaping, curating, certifying, editing, promoting, and disseminating scholarship requires investment and although we make the culmination of all of these efforts—the book, the journal, the website—free, the costs of producing it are in no way reduced by an open-access mandate. Our publishing activities are subsidized by AU and we could not distribute the publications in the way we do without this support.

You also mentioned grants. What is the grant-writing and submission process for AU Press?

Ms. Hall: We apply for grants from both provincial and federal funding agencies. We receive operating grants from the Alberta Media Fund and the Department of Canadian Heritage's Canada Book Fund and we receive specific title-funding from a number of different sources including the Awards to Scholarly Publications Program offered through the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences. Applying for grants includes describing our publication program, our evaluation process, and our open-access mandate as well as laying out our publication plans for the forthcoming year.

In 2014, for open access week, you wrote, "inasmuch as the need for knowledge is fundamental to human culture, that knowledge should be shared rather than restricted to those who can pay for it" (Holway & Hall, 2014). Nearly two years have passed since you wrote these words, would you say that this still reflects AU Press's mission and mandate?

Ms. Hall: We are still very much committed to the mission upon which the Press was founded—in fact, I might argue, that an economic downturn is just the time to continue the conversation about how the future might be shaped by the sharing of knowledge. In a recent AU Press publication, *Alberta Oil and the Decline of Democracy in Canada*, the authors discuss the potential for the erosion of democracy in single-resource economies while the authors of *Scaling Up* describe the potential that the social economy has to create a more sustainable way of life. These two books cover some of the most pressing challenges of our time and it's important that policy makers, citizens, and educators know what the leading edge discussions are on these issues. The information and knowledge contained in our publications are valuable to the advancement of scholarship and to the betterment of our society and we believe that by making them freely downloadable from our website we are reducing one of the significant barriers to valuable work of this kind.

Why was AU Press founded as an open access press, and what challenges do you face because of your chosen publication model?

Ms. Hall: The founding of AU Press as an open-access publisher grew out of Athabasca University's mandate—its commitment to excellence, openness, flexibility, and accessibility. In 2007, at the time of our founding, there were very few open-access presses in North America, in fact we were the first scholarly monograph publishing house, but since then the open-access movement has grown and we have three university presses in Canada that are regularly publishing open-access monographs. Experimenting with an open-access publishing model does bring with it particular challenges which include reduced revenue. Our solution is to watch our budget closely, to use next-to-free marketing techniques and platforms, to seek out funding for each title, and engage in partnerships with other presses and organizations when possible. Our commitment, first and foremost, is to scholarship and quality and we hope that AU Press helps to promote the open access movement by proving that open and free material can and should uphold all the hallmarks of good scholarship.

AU Press also runs a blog, the Open Book Blog. How does that fit in with what you do?

Ms. Hall: Yes, we've started a blog. The idea was to create a space where we could feature the work of our authors in an accessible style. There has been a notable decline in the coverage of books in print media so our blog is an opportunity for the general public as well as the AU community to find out more about who we are and what we publish.

What future initiatives are in-progress for AU Press?

Ms. Hall: We have a new catalogue coming out in a month announcing the titles planned for next season—we can't wait to let people know about the forthcoming books we're excited about! We will also be building on already established partnerships with the University of South Africa Press and the Canadian Committee on Labour History. In addition, we'll be displaying our books at the Congress for Social Sciences and Humanities being held in Calgary this year along with the University of Alberta Press and the University of Calgary Press. Students, staff, and faculty will also have a chance to see our books on display at Convocation in June in Athabasca, a wonderful chance for us to meet the people of AU in person.

Thank you for your time, Ms. Hall.

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Retrieved from <http://www.ideas-idees.ca/blog/au-press-first-open-access-university-press-north-america>.

A native British Columbian, Scott Douglas Jacobsen is an AU undergrad and AUSU Councillor. He researches with various organizations and runs In-Sight: Independent Interview-Based Journal, and In-Sight Publishing.

Student Sizzle AU's Hot Social Media Topics

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

AthaU Facebook Group

Several group members express concern and support for AU students and other residents of Fort McMurray, AB. Darren wonders if there's an advantage to enrolling in a program over going it course-by-course. Larissa seeks advice on 3rd-year PSYC courses.

Other posts include PLAR, motivation, hard-copy texts, COPPUL library card, and courses ENGL 373, PHIL 231, and PSYC 470.

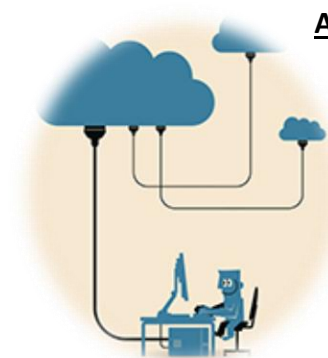
Twitter

@AthabascaU tweets: "Attn #ymm AU students- safety 1st, school later! We'll be in touch shortly regarding waiving fees, rearranging exams." See news.athabascau.ca for more info.

@AthabascaUSU (AUSU) tweets: "AUSU launched a new "AU Quick Links" page to help our members find AU services & resources! <http://bit.ly/1r2DFn1>."

Youtube

CBC News Edmonton: Fort McMurray wildfire special, May 3, 2016.



In Conversation ..with SKNAIL

Wanda Waterman



SKNAIL is the pseudonym of visionary Swiss composer-producer Blaise Caillet, known for startlingly original innovations in jazz, including electronic experimentation, found sounds, and stirring, poetic lyrics from engaging lead singer Nya. Their first album, Glitch Jazz, was released in 2013 and their second album, Snail Charmers, in 2015. Recently Caillet took the time to answer our questions about his band, his background, and his novel approach to music production.

What elements in your childhood and early years pointed you toward music?

I took piano lessons as a child because my parents wanted me to learn an instrument, but because I felt it as an obligation I didn't take much pleasure in it. Later, at the age of 17, I fell in love with the guitar and started teaching myself to play.

The guitar allowed me to discover and explore different musical genres. I was at first drawn to rock and folk, but my attention quickly turned to jazz; the rich sonorities and harmonies came to me like a revelation. As I started to love and play jazz I started to take "serious" professional guitar courses at the Ecole de Jazz et de Musique Actuelle (EJMA) – the jazz school in my town (Lausanne, Switzerland).

What was your most beneficial educational experience?

The years I spent with my guitar teacher at EJMA, Jean-Pierre Pasquier, a great classical and jazz guitarist, and a great teacher. He had a lot of influence on me as a musician and as a human being, especially with his philosophy on how to conceive music. He even let me replace him to accompany a singer he didn't have enough time to play with. It was a great start in the musician's life!

Another man who had a lot of influence on me was Popol Lavanchy, a great jazz double bass player I've often played with.

As a composer, my most beneficial educational experience is all the artists I've played with and different styles of music I've heard over the years.

What was the most mesmerizing musical experience of your life?

The first time I realized I was able to compose music! First with my guitar, during the early years, and then with my computer, when I started to record other musicians and arrange my compositions.

What kind of artistic journey brought you to the creation of SKNAIL?

I noticed that the artists who had the most influence on me were the artists who played in a very personal way,

who tried to open new doors and who weren't afraid to play unconventional music.

I love discovering new sounds, new music or new mixes of different kinds of music, and new artistic concepts. This is what's really exciting in art in general and in music especially: to make things move, to amaze and to shock, not to repeatedly reproduce the same format that reassures people and is designed just to make money.

The purpose of my artistic journey is not to play music that other people have done better before me. I have something new and original to say, and I'm brave enough to say it!

How was *Snail Charmers* recorded?

In the same way as for the first album, *Glitch Jazz*. I have two methods of producing: First I create the "electro" base, and then I layer the musicians' recordings on top of this base.

My second method is the opposite: I give the musician complete freedom to improvise alone without a musical background, after which I compose the track on the improvisation! In both cases I record the musicians one by one. As I go along, I compose, change, and produce the track in response to the inspirations and improvisations of the musicians.

Nya sounds exactly like an American rapper, and these lyrics sound like they were written by Gil Scott-Heron during a mellow period. How did that emerge within a Swiss jazz band?

Nya was born in Switzerland, but he spent several years of his childhood and teenage years in the US. Music and poetry know no borders, and he grew up listening to a lot of dub poetry and spoken word artists like Linton Kwesi Johnson, Mutabaruka, Benjamin Zephaniah, as well as Laurie Anderson, Frank Zappa, and Tom Waits.

However, unlike most of the poets cited above, Nya's lyrics aren't rooted in one particular community of time and space frame but rather tend to be as open and universal as possible.

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

Guitar, because this is the instrument I learned to play. But there isn't any guitar in the SKNAIL projects and I don't play any instrument in them; I prefer to listen to other musicians playing for me, on my compositions. I definitely like the role of producer.

Besides, all the musicians that play for me are great jazz and classical professional and have a higher musical level than me as a guitarist.

How did the band members meet?

This is funny, but the band members met only once: the days we shot the two live studio session videos (you can check them on <http://www.sknaill.com> or on my YouTube channel). It was the first time they met each other aside from having already met in the musical and professional arena).

It happened like that because when I started to realize this project in 2011 I always recorded one musician after another, and "built" the tracks between each recording session. I know this is a strange way to work, but very suitable for me because I have a small studio and very good but very little equipment.

Why is the new album called *Snail Charmers*?

For the latest album *Snail Charmers*, I met an American guy on Facebook named Efrain Becerra who was living in Phoenix, Arizona. When I saw his amazing futuristic and design artwork I contacted him to ask him if he could design the new SKNAIL CD cover and artwork.

The artistic concept was this: *What would a 3147 AD jazz club or jazz musician be like?* When he designed the snail with a digital shell listening to the music on a "spider phone" I immediately thought about Nya's recorded song "Snail Charmers." The "charmings" are the robot-jazz musicians playing futuristic jazz music for the snail, and the snail listens to this music from a loudspeaker in the shape of spider! This is our 3147 AD jazz club!

The video for the title track is beautiful and deeply surreal. Can you explain the ideas behind it?

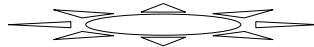
I asked another guy I met on Facebook to realize a 3D video animation for the first track. His name is Uğur Engin Deniz and he comes from Izmir in Turkey. I was very impressed by his work and his "glitchy" artistic approach. It was his idea to animate the very sharp and glitchy rhythm of the music with the 3D animation, as well as adding a Buddha with a snail leaving behind it, and a sphere and a trumpet deforming in rhythm with the music.

A funny thing about the production of the artwork with Efrain and the video with Engin: I've never met them, nor spoken with them, nor seen them in person. Everything was discussed and created by e-mail, WhatsApp or Facebook PM.

What's your next project?

I'm now preparing the third SKNAIL album, with the same musicians, and adding two new musicians and a brand new design and artwork. But the rest will have to remain a surprise!

Wanda also writes the blog [*The Mindful Bard: The Care and Feeding of the Creative Self*](#).



The Evolution of a (Reluctant) Geek Mom

Carla Knipe



Once upon a time, being called a "nerd" or "geek" was the epitome of an insult. The image of thick glasses and pocket protectors held fast in pop culture for many years. Admitting to being a fan of shows like *Star Trek* or playing *Dungeons and Dragons* opened oneself up to ridicule and shunning. But something happened along the way, turning the geek label into something cool and mainstream. From the T-shirts that proclaim one's pride at being a mathlete, dork, gamer, or Trekkie (or is it Trekker?) to the proliferation of what was once considered "alternative" pop culture that ranges anywhere from Tolkien to *The Avengers*, suddenly, appearing smart is the new way to be cool. The nerds, it seems, have finally got their revenge.

So, what happened in order to change this perception? A big aspect has been the rise of comic conventions, or comic-cons. What grew from a small niche of avid comic book collectors in the 1960s, who met to trade and sell their prized possessions, has grown into a global phenomenon. The biggest commercial comic-con franchise is Comic-Con International, which began in San Diego and now boasts events in major cities across the globe. There are also other smaller, regional franchises, but the format of comic conventions is

more or less the same. They are multi-day events with a primary focus on comic books and comic book culture, but have expanded to include a wide spectrum of science fiction and fantasy, including Japanese manga, cult movies such as *Back to the Future* and *Ghostbusters*, and television shows like *The Walking Dead* and *Game of Thrones*. Attendees can meet creators, experts, actors, and each other. Cosplay (short for costume play—dressing up as a fictional character) is a large part of the fun for fans, but not compulsory. Other activities include photo ops, autograph signings, lots of opportunities to purchase merchandise from vendors, panel discussions and workshops.

The cynics might view the popularity of these conventions as using the geek culture as just a way for entertainment companies to make money, but that is dismissing the impact that a movement, once relegated to the periphery, has had on mainstream popular culture. No one seems to know how or why "alternative culture" has taken off to this extent. Perhaps it gradually grew out of the popularity of Star Wars or the recent reboots of the Marvel superhero films. Television shows like *The IT Crowd* and *Big Bang Theory* have certainly helped to cement this change in mindset. Even the academic discipline of critical theory is starting to recognize and analyze its effects in the postmodern era. But whatever the reason, the socially awkward high-schoolers have grown up, got jobs, and moved from their parents' basements. So-called *alpha nerds* such as Bill Gates have proven that the geeks can certainly become the movers and shakers of the world. The once-awkward teenagers now, as adults, have the spending power to indulge themselves on what they enjoyed when they were young.

My personal experience with geek culture is relatively recent. Oh sure, as a kid I saw the three original Star Wars films, and during my 20s I watched *Star Trek: The Next Generation* with a group of university friends in their basement suite, but science fiction as a whole never really interested me. I've also not been one to be obsessed with any sort of pop culture. That began to change when I met the guy who is now my husband. He is a Brit who grew up with *Doctor Who* and has always considered himself a dyed-in-the-wool Whovian. My first impressions of him noticed that his shelves contained lots of Terry Pratchett books and he had a talent for reciting all the snappy catchphrases from *Red Dwarf* to me. His love of computers went all the way back to the Sinclair Spectrum and the Amstrad, and, when I met him, he was studying computer science in university. He enjoyed a pop culture world that I wasn't familiar with, but wasn't a deal-breaker by any means. I wasn't about to call off our wedding because I thought he liked daleks more than me. But I figured I'd better learn and understand a little about his passions if I was going to be spending a lot of time with him.

It turns out that, after making an effort to understand this world, I really didn't mind it. I learned to like *Red Dwarf* and I read *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and the Discworld novels. When *Doctor Who* returned to television in 2005, I was pregnant and watched the regeneration of the ninth doctor while in the hospital's maternity ward. I had to admit to myself that the geek culture wasn't half bad.

Now I consider myself a reluctant "Geek Mom". I am the parent of a boy who is very much like his dad. They adore watching *Doctor Who* together and they enjoy discussing the show's plot lines and characters. My son plays *Minecraft* and engages in toy lightsaber battles with his friends. He absorbs anything *Star Wars* and can read comic books for hours (nowadays the term "graphic novels" is used more frequently than "comic books", probably as a way to justify that reading comics is more socially acceptable if they are called something a bit more grown up). My foray into the world of geekdom is definitely deepening.

This past weekend, my family attended the Calgary Expo, Calgary's comic and entertainment convention. The Calgary Expo has gone from just a small gathering of fans to the second-largest fan convention in Canada, taking most of the Calgary Stampede grounds. In fact, the Calgary Expo is the most-attended annual event after the

Calgary Stampede. According to the *Calgary Herald*, Expo officials pegged this year's attendance at 103,500, which was just 500 shy of 2015's record-breaking, 10th anniversary event.

Our goal for our Saturday out was to just take in the atmosphere and find out what it was all about. We didn't cosplay, although we all wore Doctor Who t-shirts. After all, we were all newbies at this. We didn't really know what to expect.

The experience was, on the whole, pretty overwhelming. We spent most of the day wandering around the vendor halls and people-watching. We admired the work—and money—that the cosplayers put into their costumes. We didn't take in any of the panel discussions, but we enjoyed watching the outdoor Quidditch demonstration. (Yes, the game of Quidditch has been lifted from the fictional world of Harry Potter and become an actual, organized game, complete with teams and tournaments.) We tried our hand at some of the classic arcade games in the gaming area. We didn't wait in line for either the celebrity guests' autographs (the lines were long and you had to pay) or the photo ops with a celebrity (the lines were even longer, and we didn't feel the cost of 60 to 100-plus dollars was worth it). By mid-afternoon, we were getting tired and cranky from pushing our way through the crowds, so we cut our day short sooner than we thought.

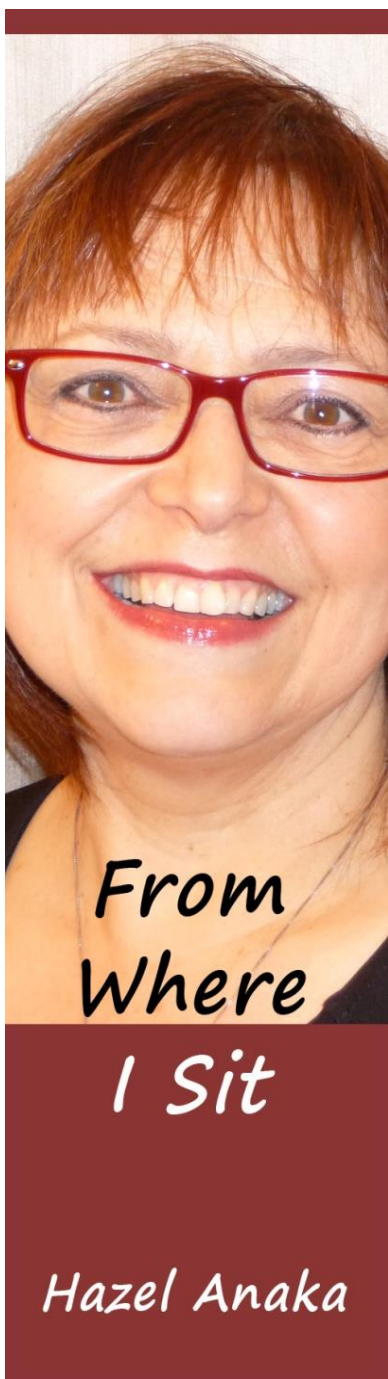
Our overall impression of our first comic convention was that the experience is kind of like Disneyland without the rides. There is lots of sensory overload and it seems like it is all too easy to part with a big wad of cash on stuff you later wonder why you thought it was a good idea purchase in the first place. However, more importantly, I started to get a real insight and appreciation for the whole geek culture. I assumed that this event would attract a certain, stereotypical sort of person but I was proved wrong. There were people there from every culture, age group and demographic out enjoying the day. Some people's costumes were professionally made, some were just cobbled together out of items found around the house, and just as many were not dressed up at all. Despite the crowds, the vendors manning the tables were chatty, people were very polite if they bumped and jostled each other in the crowded arena, and the cosplayers were relishing the attention when they were asked for their photographs to be taken.

This, I believe, is why the geek culture has been accepted so readily and eagerly into the mainstream. It's not about who can be the most devoted fan of a particular genre or cultural product. It's about admitting to ourselves—and giving ourselves permission—to let the realm of fantasy and the domain of superheroes come to the forefront of our selves, even if it's just for a short time. It's a departure from the mundane aspects of everyday life, where we can allow ourselves to dream and our inner child come out to play.

Perhaps the whole geek culture will be just another pop culture fad and the popularity of comic conventions will eventually wane. However, I'm willing to bet that this won't be the case. I'm judging from the fact that *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* are still as popular as ever, and *Doctor Who* has celebrated its 50th anniversary. I think now that people have allowed themselves to let their "normal" guards down just a little to experience a bit of the extraordinary, it will be impossible to go back to the life society knew before comic cons.

As for me, my husband will always like *Doctor Who*, and I think my son will always have a soft spot for *Star Wars*. I have become secretly proud of being labeled a Geek Mom, but I am not sure how far I will live up to that label. I wish I had more time to explore this side of myself, such as allowing my son to teach me to play *Minecraft*. But I must say discovering this aspect of my personality has been a pleasant surprise. I'm already looking forward to the Calgary Expo next year.

Carla is a Calgary writer whose guilty pleasure is reading magazines. She has a stack beside her bed that she will get around to tackling...eventually.



Can't Wait to Start

We're now four months into 2016. If, like me, you began the year with a pristine new planner, how's it looking now? Are there entries for every day? Is it serving your life and your purpose? Is it a glorified daily to-do list? Is it a record of your life for posterity?

Planners are available in all styles and price points. For recording the bare bones of my wedding bookings I use a month-at-a-glance dollar store version. Investment: \$1.25. In the past for my main planner I've used the leather-bound zippered binder style with refill pages. It's an expensive professional look with pockets and space for business cards, clippings, more. However, it's not very practical when at year-end you've got 365 loose pages to deal with.

Gradually I moved to a coil bound, large format book, by Brownline, because there was plenty of room and the book lies flat. It was in the thirty-five-dollar range. This year I hesitated buying anything because I never last all year making entries. I waited so long, though, that my preferred planner was sold out at Staples. Finally, I plunked down more than forty dollars for the hardcover Brownline executive quotidian one like Roy has used for years.

And so far, other than for the two weeks we were away, I've made entries. Other than those pages done with coloured pens or stickers as a visible reward for exercising, it's ho-hum—utilitarian, but oh-so boring.

However.

In late December I clipped an Edmonton Journal article about the planner obsessed. There are many Pinterest boards (#plannernerd, #plannerlove, #plannerobsessed, #plannerjunkies) dedicated to the subject. One woman has turned her interest into a business. Erin Condren believes there's a market for "a colourful approach to not only scheduling every day but truly celebrating every day."

I am thrilled with the possibilities for combining my need for an artistic outlet with the necessity of managing a busy schedule. I already have an arsenal of tools: coloured pencils and felt pens, a collection of stickers, a leopard-print roll of washi tape, rubber stamps, several books of quotations, and a creative eye.

Pinterest examples show dozens of options. Inspirational quotes like 'You've Got This!' or 'Just Start' or 'Get it Done!' or 'You're Running Out of Time' are peppered across many planner pages. Planners, printable stickers, or margin strips are available for sale. Of course I see the crossover between scrapbooking, adult colouring books, and journaling. There's also a crafting aspect to it. Paper clips embellished with colourful ribbons are fun and practical for marking special pages.

In one example someone is using her journal as a sketchbook by drawing glasses to track her water intake. Someone else is recording her measurements in a fancy table during a weight loss journey. Another identifies "Habits to Break".

So, my lovelies, if ever there was a reason and a way to make scheduling fun and creative, it has arrived. Grab some supplies and take some time to play. I can't wait to start, 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

The Scary Cost

Dear Barb:

For quite a while I have been watching the American political election and I can't believe the popularity of Donald Trump. I think he is a bully who is inciting hatred and racism! Why are the American people attracted to him? On social media I have seen the comparisons between Donald Trump and Adolf Hitler! This is a scary situation that will undoubtedly affect Canada as well. Is this the direction the world is headed? Scared in Timmins Ontario.

Hey there Scared:

You are not alone in your fears. It seems Donald Trump has tapped into an anger and dissatisfaction within the American people. They believe he is the answer to making their world better; similar to what Hitler did with the German people. In reality I don't believe Donald Trump is the answer. As you can see in the debates, he does not have a grasp of the American political system and if, for some strange reason he became the President of the United States, he will be exposed for what he is. Hopefully he does not get that far before the American people come to their senses. Let's remember Donald Trump is a reality TV star and possibly this is just another part for him to play. There are still quite a few months left in this campaign, so let's just see how it all plays out. Thanks for your question.

Dear Barb:

As wedding season is approaching I see a lot of my friends and their parents struggling with the high costs of weddings these days. It is ridiculous! The brides are so consumed with having everything perfect that it ends up being a nightmare for everyone involved. My friend's daughter spent \$1,500 on her wedding dress alone. She still has to get the shoes, veil, undergarments and jewelry! In fact, my friend's parents had to take out a loan to pay for their daughter's wedding. I am not planning to marry in the near future, but when I do, I will be putting more effort into my marriage than my wedding. Why are weddings so out of control! Karla

Hi Karla:

I have been observing the same things as you are. The average cost of a wedding in Canada today is almost \$32,000! The cost of being a bridesmaid can run as high as \$1,700, even being a guest could be \$600 if it includes an overnight stay. It is important to celebrate your wedding day with family and friends, but really, \$32,000 is a nice down payment on a house! I don't know why weddings are so out of control, possibly the influx of reality wedding shows is creating a trend on the type of wedding you "must" have, including a show devoted strictly to choosing the right wedding dress. There are many ways to have a beautiful wedding without the outrageous expenses. Google has many websites catering to the less expensive wedding. Here are a couple worth checking out: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/business/wedding-costs-can-be-trimmed-with-a-few-simple-tricks-1.2718135>
<https://www.theknot.com/content/wedding-budget-ways-to-save-money>

Thanks for your great letter Karla.

Email your questions to 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.

THE SECRET DROLLERY OF SERIOUS LIT

"The master's body!" the butler roared into the telephone. "I'm sorry madam but we cannot furnish it. It's too hot to touch this noon!"

From: *The Great Gatsby*
by F. Scott Fitzgerald

The master's body!
I'm sorry madam
but we cannot furnish it.
It's too hot to touch
this noon!



BY WANDA WATERMAN



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

Student Lifeline - Parenting

Whether you're a new parent, a single parent, or part of a couple raising a blended household of lively teenagers, you can likely use some support and tips from time to time. **Student LifeLine** can help with all your parenting concerns, and offer information and resources so your family can thrive.

Contact **Student LifeLine** any time, 24/7, to connect with a caring, experienced consultant for advice and tips you can put into practice today.

Log in to www.lifeworks.com to find expert resources:

- Listen to a **NEW** podcast, **Holding a Family Meeting**. A leading expert talks about the value of family meetings for children, parents, and extended family, and shares tips on how to hold one.
- Access a 32-page e-book for new and expectant parents, [Becoming a Parent](#), or visit our Life Changes pages, [New Baby or Starting a Family](#) and [Stages of Parenthood](#), for a wealth of articles and resources.
- Read articles, such as: [Staying Strong as a Couple After Having a Baby](#), [Building Your Child's Self-Esteem](#), [Helping Children Grow Into Healthy Adults](#), [Raising a Child as a Single Parent](#), [How to Unspoil Your Child](#), or [Building a Good Relationship With Your Teenager](#).

Being a parent can be both a challenge and adventure. Preparation, knowledge, and confidence can help you be successful in the role.

1-800-567-2255 (TTY: 1-877-371-9978)

www.lifeworks.com

Username: AUSU **Password:** Wellness

Find out more about the Student Lifeline Health & Wellness program on the AUSU website [here](#).

IMPORTANT DATES

- **May 6:** Deadline to complete coursework for Convo'16
- **May 10:** AUSU Council Meeting (4:30pm MDT)
- **May 10:** Deadline to register in a course starting Jun 1
- **May 13:** June degree requirements deadline
- **May 31:** June course extension deadline
- **June 9-11:** 2016 Convocation
- **June 10:** Deadline to register in a course starting July 1

Student LifeLine

WHAT CAN IT DO FOR YOU?

"Where can I access free resources on becoming a parent?"

LifeWorks.com

User ID AUSU

Password wellness

Help is at your fingertips, 24/7

Available on the App Store

ANDROID APP ON Google play

Get it on BlackBerry World

AUSU ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' UNION

AUSU Council Meeting

AUSU's May council meeting is on **May 10 at 4:30pm MDT**. Meetings are held by teleconference, and all members are welcome to attend!

The meeting agenda is posted on our website [here](#). If you would like the entire meeting package, just drop a line to admin@ausu.org.



AUSU
ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY
STUDENTS' UNION

Council Meeting



CLASSIFIEDS

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

THE VOICE

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