

THE VOICE

MAGAZINE

Vol 25 Issue 03 2017-01-20

Minds We Meet

Interviewing Students Like You

Meeting the Minds

The Writer in Residence

Eight Mind-Enhancing Apps

Guiding you through 2017

Plus:

*Good News Reflections
Council Connection.
and much more!*



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***The Voice
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



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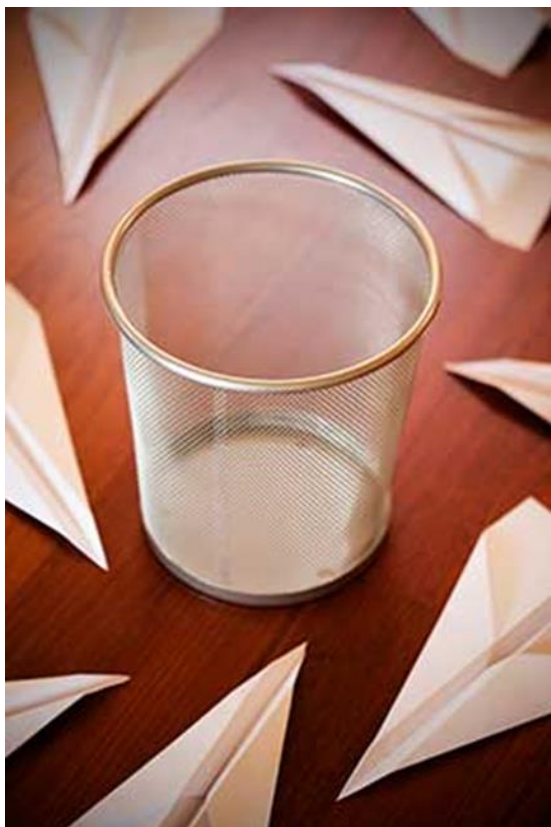
Hey! Did you know the Voice Magazine has a [Facebook](#) page?

No kidding! We also do the [twitter](#) thing once in a while if you're into that.

EDITORIAL

The Third Party's the Charm

Karl Low



In case you missed the news, the government recently announced the people who would be conducting the long promised third-party review into the future of Athabasca University. If you're a fairly new student to Athabasca, this may sound particularly concerning, but, sadly, this is nothing new, and really just a continuation of struggles that *The Voice Magazine* has been reporting on for some time now, including our [look at the original report by the Presidential Task Force on Sustainability](#) from back in June of 2015, as well as a more recent [look at the response from AU in their mixed message of a comprehensive institutional plan](#). So you can see that this has been going on for a while.

Still, if this is your first encounter with the news, it sounds terribly worrying, but long story short, any current students needn't be unduly worried. If you want the full story, you can check out [my own take](#) on the whole affair from back in July of last year.

More interesting to me about this announcement is exactly who's going to be conducting the independent third party review. There were some worries that such a review would be carried out by someone with a pure business-case perspective, a fear that, had the former PC's remained in power, would have been absolutely justified based on past actions. However, Dr. Ken Coates is a Canada

Research Chair in Regional Innovation and a professor at the University of Saskatchewan. Given that AU's previous interim President, Peter MacKinnon also hailed from the University of Saskatchewan, it's reasonable to think that there was some input from AU in the selection.

Dr. Coates, if you look at the books he has for sale on Amazon, has written several books on educational systems. From brief reviews of his books, it seems he holds the point of view that university has become to be regarded as too much of a necessity by the public, which has lead not only to many people becoming over-educated (and over indebted) for the careers they eventually work in, but also to universities becoming less valuable as they are forced to change their goals from pure education to that of institutions that are expected to prepare graduates for careers. How these views will affect his report on Athabasca University, with its stated goal of being an Open University, remains to be seen. At the same time, Dr. Coates primary research interest seems to be on issues concerning the far north and the Arctic, something which Athabasca University is uniquely suited to assist with, as the distance learning model is one of the few that can address the widespread population of that region.

But there's more to university than what a third party might say about it. We've also got students, we've got writers in residence (who aren't afraid to share their opinions), and *The Voice Magazine* has interviews with both this week as a double feature.

Then we have a lot of advice this week on ways to deal with the upcoming year, whether that's making you better able to handle it, better able to handle when you can't handle it, or simply remembering how good it was, you'll find all of that and more in this week's *The Voice Magazine*.

Enjoy the Read!

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

MINDS WE MEET



Veronique "Ronnie" St. Germain-Wiwchar wanted to earn a psychology degree. So is working toward a Bachelor of Arts with a Major in Psychology. She found AU through a doctor, when she was going through a difficult time. She wanted something to work towards, so decided on becoming a psychologist or psychiatrist to help people.

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

Usually, I am hanging out with my friends. It depends. I usually tend to stay pretty busy or go and travel.

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

Freud would be interesting, to see how he started – like how he got his mind towards psychology and figuring out the things he did. He's probably the biggest, but not the weirdest. Skinner was probably the weirdest.

What would the meal be with Freud?

I think something they haven't probably had. Something that has some around, recently. It would be cool to see their opinions on how much things have changed.

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

Probably, my dad. He didn't think I'd actually be able to do it. So now it's like "Ha! I'm doing it!"

Describe your experience with online learning. What do you like or dislike?

I like that you can do it at anytime. That you can start at anytime, and that it is more catered to you as you get time. The hard part would be no people.

Have you had a time when you wavered about your education?

It took me about a year, year-and-a-half, to get onto it. It took me awhile to find out where I wanted to live.

What was your most memorable AU course?

Probably Psychology 289: Psychology as a Natural Science. It is the one everyone wants to take when they want to start psychology. You have to go through quite a bit of memorizing to understand, and what you understand you can go in 5 or 6 different directions.

What is most valuable thing in life to you?

It sounds funny, but my cat. I moved into my own place, so they're my support system. Is it a crazy person? No! It is sort of like family.

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

Probably relationship with my sister because she is doing school as well. It is through a different college online. She has until 2022 to finish her course.

What's the single best thing AU could do to improve your student experience?

I think having these study groups where they can meet up if they want to.

What is the most important lesson in life?

Not to give up, things might get hard and difficult, but it is possible to get through them.

What's something people don't know about you?

That I'm not actually as strong as I look.

E-texts or textbooks? Any particular reason(s)?

Textbooks because I prefer books, actual books.

How do you find the tutors?

It sometimes takes time for them to get back to you.

Where has life taken you so far? (travels for pleasure, work, etc.)

I have been over to France and to Europe, and I spent a lot of time in BC. I've got a family out there. We went down to the United States. We drove out to California.

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

Currently, it is Jodi Picoult, *Small Great Things*.

Women of Interest

Bette Nesmith Graham was born on March 23, 1924, in Dallas, Texas and passed away May 12, 1980, in Richardson, Texas. She was known for inventing Liquid Paper—a lifesaver for secretaries and typists worldwide. Graham spent years working in her kitchen perfecting her formula. Eventually she mixed up a few bottles and brought them to work. The product was so successful that her boss could not detect where the corrections had been made. As a result Graham's coworkers requested their own bottles. Initially the product was named Mistake Out. As demand increased Graham moved the operation to a shed in her backyard and renamed the product Liquid Paper. She received a patent in 1958. Business thrived following a large order from General Electric and then she moved the operation into a 35,000 square foot building located in Dallas Texas. In 1976 the company's net earnings had reached \$1.5 million. Graham used some of her wealth to set up two foundations to assist women in need. As a side note Bette Nesmith Graham was the mother of Michael Nesmith, producer and guitarist of the famous singing group "The Monkees." In 1979 Nesmith-Graham sold her company to Gillette Corporation for 47.5 million dollars. She died six months later.

Additional information about this ingenious woman can be found at the following websites:

<http://www.women-inventors.com/Bette-Nesmith-Graham.asp>

<http://www.ideafinder.com/history/inventions/liqpaper.htm>

<http://lemelson.mit.edu/resources/bette-nesmith-graham>

MEETING THE MINDS

INTERVIEWS with AU's EDUCATORS



Photo by John Sinal

John Vaillant, author of The Golden Spruce, The Tiger, and The Jaguar's Children, is AU's 2016-2017 Writer in Residence. During his term as Writer in Residence, Vaillant will spend time providing feedback to AU students about their writing while also working on his next book about last year's devastating fires in Fort McMurray.

The Voice Magazine freelance writer and AU student, Barbara Lehtiniemi, recently contacted Mr. Vaillant by phone at his home in Vancouver BC. Here is part one of that interview.

What made you decide to be a writer?

I think it's like a lot of the arts: how much choice do you have? It's always been in me to articulate what I see, what I feel, what I observe and understand, and writing is my preferred medium. Both in school and within my family, the written word was held in high regard. There were several writers in my family—although of a different kind—and I always had lots of opportunity to craft my own words. Communication as an art form was front and centre when I was growing up.

At university I continued writing. After I graduated I thought a good decision—the logical decision—would be to go on for an MFA. But I felt like I'd been in school long enough. At 22, I felt I needed to experience life. I wanted to get out and live for awhile. I didn't write for 15 years.

So writing wasn't your first career?

No, I had lots of different jobs. I was quite unsettled for a long while. I worked in Alaska with the commercial fisheries, worked with juvenile delinquents, was into music for awhile, worked as a janitor, worked at a school for the learning disabled, and worked as a consultant to large corporations on race and gender issues.

During those years, writing was always in my mind. I was always looking for stories in everything I saw or did.

At what moment in your writing career did you feel you'd "made it" as a writer?

Well, there's something inherently tenuous about the whole enterprise. My first article published in a magazine was incredibly exciting, even though I was 35 years old and others were a lot further along in their careers. There's something very exciting about seeing your first byline—seeing your name in print. But then I'm wondering, can I do it again? One thing leads to another; you just look further down the road, or for the next higher mountain.

When I had my first story in *The New Yorker* in 1990, then I felt like I'd made it. But I'd only been writing for two years. I didn't really feel like I'd been tested. My second article with *The New Yorker* ended up turning into the story for my first book, *The Golden Spruce*. Still I'm thinking, can I do it? Does anyone really want to read a whole book about this? There's a tremendous amount of uncertainty. Writing a book was another summit, another mountain.

Even when the book was well received, I'm asking myself, what do you do next? So there are moments of "making it" but no time really to bask in the glow. I need fallow periods—quiet time—to let the well fill up again. But writing, for me, is a continual act of conceiving, researching, and executing.

Describe any writing rituals you have.

Coffee is a wonderful part of it! The best times for me are in the morning. I find the best approach is to have as little to do with the internet as possible. It's tempting to want to check e-mail and all that, but in order to create, it's best to have the mind uncluttered. For me, the distance between bed, coffee, and writing should be as short as possible. Any compulsion to go on Twitter, Facebook, whatever, has the effect of pulling me out of the creative process.

During your time as AU's Writer-in-Residence, you'll spend part of your time working on a non-fiction book about the Fort McMurray fire of last year. What attracted you to that topic?

Just the intensity of the fire, the magnitude of it. Alberta is really the land of fire. The size of fires there have been incredible. And there's the energy: on one hand you've got the boreal forest and the energy of the fire, and on the other hand, there's all that oil and the energy it represents. Then there's the people with this ferocious work ethic. The story of the Fort McMurray fire—those who experienced the fire, fought it, survived it—struck me as a powerful way to look at human nature and ambition really being put to the test.

What's the most surprising thing you've found out in the course of researching the Fort McMurray wild-fires so far?

What I found surprising when researching the Fort McMurray fire is how intense fires are in Alberta—they get so big, so high, so hot, so fast—and what the fire did to Fort McMurray. For example, steel light poles bent in the heat, and steel won't melt below 1,500 C. The intensity of that fire was just incredible.

I've also been looking into the early history of oil exploration. What strikes me is how quickly oil—and I'm talking crude oil here—went from a mysterious substance that people would rub on their joints to cure rheumatism to something actively traded and speculated on. We think of the 19th century as so much slower-paced. Yet, oil was discovered and exploited all in a matter of months. It's similar to the explosive growth seen in some internet IPO rollouts. These boom periods repeat themselves, and we saw a similar acceleration in Fort McMurray in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Part two of The Voice Magazine's interview with John Vaillant follows next week, in the January 27 issue.

AU-thentic Events

Upcoming AU Related Events

AU Library Orientation

Tuesday, January 24, 6:00 to 7:00pm MST

Online, Adobe Connect

Hosted by AU Library & Scholarly Resources

library.athabascau.ca/orientations

Login to webinar at:

<https://athabascau.adobeconnect.com/library/>

Good News

Barbara Lehtiniemi

Reflections of the Past Year May be Larger than they Appear



Did you take the #goodthings2016 challenge? In my article [A Year Full of Goodness](#) in *The Voice Magazine* last January, I wrote about my intent to keep a "jar of goodness" for the year. For a full year, I decided to jot a little note about one good thing that happened each day and add it to the jar.

It's easy to forget about all the good things that occur over the course of a year. Some things loom large and are never forgotten. But little day-to-day good things are soon forgotten and the past year seems less rich than it was. Unexpected gifts, free lunches, draw prizes—they're enjoyed for a day or so

then swallowed up in the haze of time. Ditto for compliments, achievements, and bursts of fun. Forward-looking and focused, we think the past year—like an object in the rear-view mirror—appears smaller than it was.

I started my jar of goodness January 1, 2016. My plan was to add one note each day with something good that had happened. I didn't manage to add a note every day, and there were long periods in which I neglected the jar altogether. Yet by the end of 2016 I had collected over 100 notes.

At the end of 2016, I enjoyed reflecting on the year's highlights all over again when I opened the jar and unfurled all the notes. I was surprised to discover how many times I had won draw prizes last year, for example, or received thoughtful gifts or compliments. I certainly had not remembered how often I received unexpected cheques in the mail, a trend I hope continues for 2017. Reading the notes from my jar allowed me to relive the small moments of triumph and savour a year's worth of achievements again.

All that goodness from one year. Or rather, less than one third of a year because I missed adding notes to the jar on more than 200 days. That means a significant portion of my good things from 2016 are likely forgotten forever.

For 2017 I plan to do better at capturing and preserving the good things. I've already started my 2017 jar of goodness and my aim is the same: to add a note each day describing one good thing that happened.

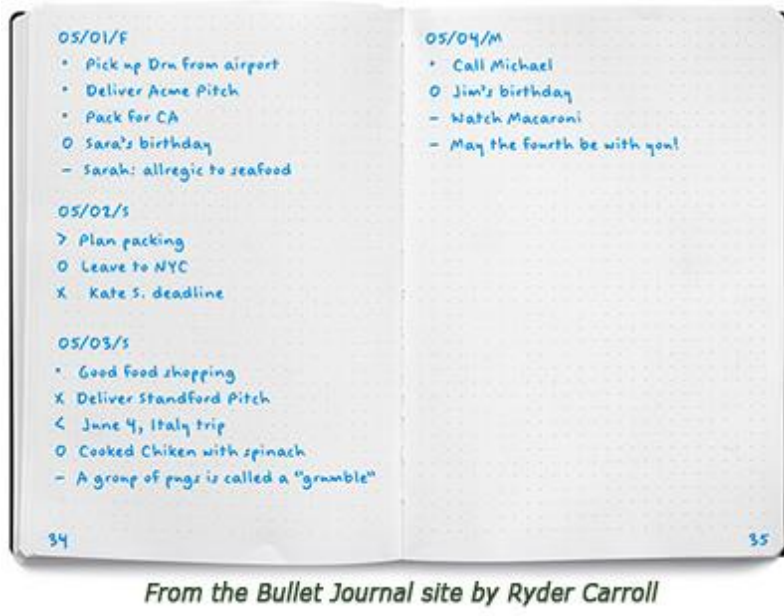
Will you accept the challenge for 2017? It's not too late to begin. Right now, before you forget, find a jar, vase, or canister. Put it somewhere you'll see every day. Place a small notepad or a stack of small squares of paper and a pen next to your jar. Record one good thing each day and by the end of 2017 you'll have hundreds of #goodthings2017 to review. And 2017 will, in reflection, appear every bit as good as it was.

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

Getting Organized

Bullet Journal Style

Deanna Roney



I have tried to use planners and calendars in the past and have had success with them. Calendars are good for having an overview of your months, appointments, deadlines, etc. My issue with using a day planner was I would be too ambitious. I would schedule my entire month a day at a time. It would work for the first few days, maybe even weeks, but eventually I would go rogue and throw off the rest of the month. Maybe something came up and it got prioritized over what had been originally scheduled. Maybe I was burnt out on a topic and needed to refresh with something else, or inspiration hit and I wrote three articles in a day while ignoring the other tasks. Regardless of what caused me to go off track, I inevitably would, and when I did my day

planner would be full of crossed out tasks, new tasks written over top, and it became an illegible disaster.

I tried to go without a planner of any kind but found myself floundering a bit and things were getting forgotten. I tried to write a 'to-do list' on a post-it note at the start of the day, but again, things would get missed and I was feeling incredibly unorganized. Despite having excel spreadsheets, reminders in my phone, and post-its stuck to my desk it wasn't helping. I decided I needed to re-implement the day planner. But I needed to do it in a way that I would be able to stay organized, where I wouldn't get ahead of myself, and would be able to stick with it. As I started to pay attention to what others were using I found reference again and again to a "bullet journal". Curious, I looked up the [website](http://www.bulletedjournal.com), BulletJournal.com, where there is a video with a step by step how to set up your own bullet journal. It really is an ingenious idea and can be implemented in any blank notebook.

It starts with an index, future logs, month overview, month task list, and then the daily tasks. The theory of the bullet journal is that it gives you freedom to migrate tasks and reorganize if priorities change. To start, the Index is just that, indexing page numbers and what is on them so you can easily find things in the future. The next page spread you set up as "future logs" you then divide this page into three blocks, here I added an extra smaller block at the end for quarterly goals. Next, is the month overview –where you write down the number of days and beside that what the day is, easy reference if you need to look something up. Then the task list, everything you hope to get done in the specific month. As you schedule your days, I usually only go 3-4 days in advance, noting on the month overview if there is something happening on a specific day, I use bullet points for tasks that need to be done, an open circle for events to attend, and a dash for notes. I use a check mark for tasks completed, and > for tasks to bump to the next day or >> if I am bumping it two days. If the task is no longer important, I cross it off and forget about it altogether. If the task still needs to be done, but can move to another month, <, and then write that task into corresponding month in future logs.

I took a bit of time to set up the bullet journal, and I have personalized it a bit along the way. But it has proved to be incredibly useful for me. I can easily see what needs to be done, I can move tasks to another month if their priority has dropped and not lose (or forget about) anything. Each day is hand written, which means I

have lots of space for days that are packed with tasks and yet I don't feel tempted to try and plan too far ahead, because I don't know how much space certain days are going to take.

This method has kept me organized without over-organizing. I can see the tasks I need to complete and schedule into my weeks without scheduling every day of the month. This method allows me to work with freedom, I no longer go "rogue" because my scheduling allows me freedom to breathe and reprioritize without turning my planner into an illegible disaster.

Deanna is an AU graduate who loves adventure in life and literature. Follow her path on the writing journey at <https://deannaroney.wordpress.com/>

Scholarship of the Week

Digging up scholarship treasure for AU students.

Scholarship name: Mayor Andrée P. Boucher Memorial Scholarship

Sponsored by: Federation of Canadian Municipalities

Deadline: January 31, 2017

Potential payout: \$4500

Eligibility restriction: Open to female students only, who are enrolled in a Canadian college or university. See full [eligibility criteria](#).

What's required: A cover letter describing your involvement in campus or community activities related to women's issues; a research paper of at least 1000 words related to women in politics; and two written references.

Tips: Check out the [Women in Local Government](#) page for inspiration.

Where to get info: www.fcm.ca/home/awards/mayor-andrée-p-boucher-memorial-scholarship.htm



The Creative Spark

Don't Dismiss. Love!

Marie Well



Did you ever write a dull essay? I wrote dry essays—memorizing a PhD math proof on the first day of calculus seemed more thrilling.

But what if you loved writing essays? Passionately? Loved reading them over and over like love letters from your lifelong crush? Well, you can find the love—like an actor. The best actors find the love in even their arch enemies. Yes, the best actors soul-search for love in even the darkest of scenes.

By finding the love in your essays, your readers feel your passions, thrills, dreams. Instant engagement. And by inking that love on your paper, your grades soar. Better yet, essay-writing will feel like skydiving into a giant chocolate fondue framed with fresh berries.

Michael Shurtleff in his book *Audition* spells out secrets of acting—including falling in love (in bold below). I help

you love your studies.

If late for an audition, tell the director a prior audition tied you up. Similarly, if late with a paper or an online class, tell the prof a prior school obligation tied you up. (Actors tell lies well.)

If a director tells you to change your act, don't start from scratch—simply add. Did your prof tell you to rewrite the final draft of your thesis from scratch? (A true story!) Don't scrap your entire thesis, sobbing while gobbling Oreos. Simply add the prof's suggestions to what you've already got.

Find deep love within yourself for all the scene's characters—even your enemies. Love the people you cite, whether opponent's views or proponent's views. And never dismiss an author's idea as silly. Instead, dismiss the idea as silly—with a deep desire to dine with the author in candlelight for more insight.

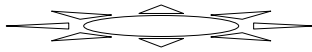
Start the scene with deep love, and let that love deepen. On page one, love the characters you profile in your papers. On page one, also love the people you cite. And make a tidal wave of obsession that springs up in your first sentence. Tsunami that conclusion!

In each scene, ask "what dream am I fighting to realize?" Many authors feel passionate about their topics. Find that passion and breathe it in your writing. And what are your dreams? Tie your lifelong dreams into your topic. Fight for your dreams through your themes and arguments. Be creative.

Be both loving and furious in tense scenes. For instance, swear while softening your voice. If you're callous toward an author's view, do so with admiration. If you think Socrates was nuts, think of him as a troubled genius.

Use opposites: I can't live without you; I can't live with you. Here lies ambivalence. If you can write two opposing views in the same point, do so. For instance, write that Socrates idealized his own unheroic death. (But support your view.) Opposites create intrigue.

So, do you love writing essays? If not, wear a mask and seek the love. A paradox? I call it a Creative Spark!



The Fit Student

Monkey Mind at Work and School

Marie Well



Did you ever fight a terrifying setback?

I did. I reached the end of my work-life because of daily seven-hour panic attacks. After my work contract ended, I continued having those seven-hour panic attacks every three days.

I trembled. I feared misplacing my wallet. I spaced out when someone spoke to me. And this happened for years. Like having your brain bubble in flames. Only worse.

But I kept my hope. I read book-after-book on anxiety until I discovered a solution: self-talk, otherwise known as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). Psychologists tend to agree: CBT is the most effective form of anxiety management.

For me meditation didn't work. Neither did muscle relaxation, medication, or psychiatric consultations. Just self-talk. Self-talk stopped me from experiencing panic and anxiety for over-a-year-and-counting. I've re-entered the regular workforce—four days

prior to writing this article. Yikes!

Congratulations, right? Well, now I need to ensure I don't spiral back into workplace anxiety. And I think I found the solution: a book—*CBT at Work for Dummies* by Gill Garratt. Yes, self-talk.

It helped me, and so, in the Fit Student, I'm going to give tricks for applying CBT to your student life. Below, Gill Garratt's CBT advice shines in bold. My student life parallels follow:

Everyone experiences negative feelings associated with work. Similarly, students experience negative feelings associated with student life, from conflicts with instructors to struggles with exams. How do you shut off negative emotions? Use CBT to control anger, depression, anxiety, panic, frustration, and low self-esteem. CBT helps you achieve a calm mind.

Fight irrational thoughts at work to stop fear and negativity from consuming you. If you feel anxiety overwhelm you prior to an exam, stop and consider. Tell yourself you don't want to feel anxious. Credit yourself for exam preparation you did do. Then reassure yourself: even if your grade sucks, you may not like it, but you have the ability to deal with it. That's CBT!

Only you are responsible for your emotional well-being, according to CBT. Don't blame Mom and Dad for your anger or anxiety with your school performance. You hold the key to your emotional well-being. So, if your emotions cause you hardship, fix them. CBT can help you do so.

You are never helpless. You always have choices—even if they all suck. If you feel you have no choice but to drop out of school, reconsider. You always have choices. If you feel stuck in a course you despise, know that you have choices: continue, withdraw, pay for extensions, and so on.

Take note of your emotional triggers with the ABC Model; in the ABC model, A stands for activating event, B for belief or thinking, and C for emotional consequence. To illustrate, if you believe that people should express appreciation for your high grades (belief), and a professor criticizes your essay (activating event) you may feel angry or anxious (emotional consequence). CBT teaches you to rationalize your negative emotions so they don't consume you. After all, life isn't fair. Accept this.

Don't ignore the negative emotions. Address them before they consume you. If you feel stressed or embarrassed or angry or guilty—any negative emotion—don't ignore your feelings. Rationalize them. Say to yourself, *I don't want to feel embarrassed. I got a C-, and I feel ashamed and unhappy. But I can always ask my prof for advice on how to improve my grade or request an extra project for bonus marks. Even if I am stuck with this grade, I know I have the ability to cope.*

So, we've just touched on the basics of CBT. I will reveal more of CBT's framework in the next several articles.

Why? Because CBT can help you stay calm during even hurricane season. And like learning a language, CBT gets easier with practice. So, stay calm—study with CBT self-talk.

Student Sizzle AU's Hot Social Media Topics

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

AthaU Facebook Group

Sarah wonders what happens if she forgets to check the "evaluate transfer credit" box on her enrolment form. Meanwhile, Heidi wants to know how much it costs to have transfer credits evaluated. Amanda is impressed with the speedy service from the AU library.

Other posts include breadth requirements, word count ranges, study time, and courses ADMN 233, CMIS 351, and ENGL 305.

Twitter

@AthabascaU tweets: "Please note that #AthaU students will be unable to book exams from Jan 20-24 via online booking system. More Info <http://ow.ly/zz2g307Z9xo>."

@AthabascaUSU (AUSU) tweets: "Get an AU student ID card <http://bit.ly/1K8F8ub> & use the 'Ultimate Guide to Student Discounts Across Canada!' <http://bit.ly/2jNJJk1>."

Youtube

Missed the big event January 11? Watch [Athabasca University's Installation of Dr. Neil Fassina](#).





Council Connection

January 10, 2017 Council Meeting

Bonita Arbeau

The first Council meeting of 2017 began with the announcement that Councillor Dixie Tolliver had submitted her resignation from AUSU Council earlier that day. It was also noted that (for the second consecutive month) Councillor Andrew Gray would not be attending the meeting. As Council continues to have a high turnover and considering the expense and effort involved with a by-election, it may be time for AUSU to look for a creative solution to this problem. A larger Council or a reserve from runners-up of previous elections are two ideas that immediately come to my mind, but it will be interesting to see if and how Council addresses this issue in the new bylaws that they are drafting.

December was quiet month at AUSU, so the January 10 meeting was a brief and routine review of AUSU business. While it lacked the drama of some meetings past, a few significant policy changes were made.

First, after voting to approve the meeting agenda and the December 13 meeting minutes, Council ratified an e-mail motion from December 22 that approved changes to AUSU Policies 2.14 and 2.15, defining "working expectations for general holidays and other scheduled AU closures" for the AUSU Executive and Council. VPFA Kim Newsome elaborated that these changes align the working requirements of the AUSU Executive, Council and staff; that is, no one will be required to work on any holidays or when AU is closed in December.

The updated policy, 2.14 *Executive Accountability and Compensation*, says that Executives will not be required to work any of the twelve federal and Alberta holidays or any weekday that AU is closed during the December holidays. AUSU policy did not previously address the working expectations of the Executive during holidays or AU closures. Executives will now receive paid leave for about an extra 15 days each year, depending on how long AU is closed. When asked for a comment on this increase after the meeting, AUSU President Shawna Wasylyshyn said that the Executive had reviewed AUSU records and found that "common practice had involved Executives not recording hours during the December break." Shawna further stated that "Council determined this was a reasonable practice, considering that AUSU's and AU's offices were closed [during this time], and updated policy accordingly." As this motion was passed by e-mail, we don't know whether any councillors questioned this increase in paid leave or suggested that the Executive's allotted vacation time be reduced to offset these new days off. We do know, however, that the motion was passed unanimously.

From then on, the bulk of the meeting was dedicated to AUSU's human resource policies, reorganizing and condensing the policies to make them more user-friendly and consistent. In total, five AUSU policies were revised, three policies were rescinded, and all changes were approved unanimously. While most of the changes did not result in any real policy differences, there were a few items of note:

- The length of time that a former councillor must wait before applying for any paid employment with AUSU was increased from three months to two years.
- AUSU staff will now undergo quarterly performance reviews to track their progress toward goals and to identify any issues early on.
- The specific time period of ten days within which any employee performance concerns should be discussed with the employee was replaced with "as soon as possible."
- Post-learning reports received from staff after AUSU-paid training will be included in the next council meeting package.

While reviewing these policies, Council also debated whether the AUSU Executive should be directly involved in conducting staff evaluations. It was proposed that at least one Executive Councillor should conduct all staff performance reviews alongside the Executive Director. Councillor Brandon Simmons disagreed with this point and stated that, in his view, the Executive Director should be given autonomy to manage staff how they see fit and to be held accountable for that role by Council. Executive Director Sarah Cornett commented that her approach for performance reviews is to include the input of Council and Executives and to seek out feedback from anyone who may have worked closely with the staff member. In the end, everyone agreed that the responsibility for these reviews should lie with the executive director, but that the process may include consultation with the Executive or individual councillors.

AUSU Executives, staff, and committee chairs then presented their regular reports. No AUSU committees met in December, but the Executive did attend their usual number of AU meetings and they briefly summarized their advocacy efforts. In addition, President Shawna Wasylyshyn remarked in her report on the success of the latest AUSU Meet and Greet in Edmonton, Alberta, which 15 students attended, and noted that she asked the Member Engagement and Communications Committee to create a "consistent framework" for these events across the country. VPEX Julian Teterenko reported the exciting news that ProctorU, the pilot exam service that AU launched in June 2016, will be continuing as a permanent service, welcome news for the many students who have come to love this convenience.

The next Council meeting will be held by teleconference on Thursday, February 16 at 5:30 pm MST. All members are welcome, and if you would like to attend or read the meeting reports, just send an e-mail to admin@ausu.org!



Eight Mind-Enhancing Apps **Guiding You Safely Through the Circus of 2017**

Wanda Waterman



I don't have to tell you that your mind is walking a tightrope. If you're a distance learner you already have various factions competing for your time and attention, and your brain is like an exhausted high-wire artist obliged to carry that pole through its balancing act again and again. You're under tremendous pressure to discipline yourself and to protect your study time from interruptions long enough to ace the latest course. Such pressure can actually sabotage your educational goals.

Your neurons are threatened from another quarter by the internet. Despite that without

the internet distance learning wouldn't exist as we know it, the web presents a forest of distractions that have taken root in your brain as inner voices that say, "Wonder if my old flame is online?" or "Hey, I think I may have a lifechanging email waiting," or "if there's another terrorist attack somewhere in the world I need to know about it right away," or "that article about how to be less anxious might really help me be less anxious."

Your intellect, numb from memorising statistics, must then dumb itself down for social media avatars. Before you know it you don't have an educated opinion about anything anymore, and at this moment in history the need for educated opinions is burning. True, most of your autodidacticism ought to be coming from *outside* the web, but since you're here anyway, why not make good use of the resources, few as they may be, that the internet can offer your ailing thought life?

If you play your cards right, using apps shouldn't take any more time from your already stretched schedule; they should just help you make better use of the time you have. You can easily battle those internalised demons of inanity, or resist them at least, armed with the following tools for your Android phone. And most of them are free.

1. CBC Radio

Stay both current and thoughtful by listening to the CBC while washing the fine china. This app provides you with CBC's most popular radio shows; you can pick your favourites, add them to the "My Radio" list, and make the most of dishwashing time.

The only drawback of this app is the inordinate number of clicks you have to make to get to where you want to be, as well as the surprising frequency of cuts to the feed (*hey, CBC, fix this, wouldja?*). Thoughtful analyses of current events, scientific discoveries, humour, spiritual fodder, new ideas, great music, and storytelling abound. As an elderly woman back home used to say, "Listen to the CBC— it'll make ya smart!"

2. Scribd

For finding books, this one's a winner because of great selection and ease of use, so much so that the monthly cost of \$12.27 can be counted as a solid investment in your mental prowess. Scribd lets you read both new and old books, bestsellers and classics, audio and print. Whenever I hear mention of a book or author that sounds interesting, Scribd is the first place I look.

Scribd lets you create your own little collections based on whatever theme you choose, makes recommendations for you, and lets you highlight and make notes. You can use it on any device and download books to read when you're offline. You can also upload your own work— even sell it if you've a mind to.

3. Free Books

What impresses me most about this app is that it was here that I found by Jens Peter Jacobsen's *Niels Lyhne*, an important Danish novel I hadn't been able to find in English anywhere else (*you heard me, Scribd*). It's strange that the book is so hard to find because Rilke praises it in his *Letters to a Young Poet*, one of the most-read books for thoughtful folks like us. Go figure.

Trust me on this: You need to have a canon of classic literature handy when life gets confusing and Free Books is the best online repository of the best old tomes. Go look up *The Devils* by Dostoevsky for a probing up-close view of the conditions that lead to the Russian revolution, or look up some of Mark Twain's lesser-known novels for some insights into what makes America—don't snicker—what it is today.

FreeBooks doesn't have the bells and whistles of Scribd, but it's free, there's no limit on how many books you can read, and you can read it on anything. They have a large number of audio titles as well, and most of the voices are quite bearable.

4. Earbits

This wonderful little music app has introduced me to many great new acts (if you're looking for old stuff, Youtube still holds the keys to that kingdom) which is kind of what it's about, I think. You choose from a smorgasbord of moods, activities, genres and subgenres, and the app chooses music to stream for you. The interface is aesthetically pleasing and the selection is vast. Earbits has taken its lumps financially, but it survived, and it's still free. Thank goodness for that.

5. StoryCorps

Some of the most moving, meaningful anecdotes you'll ever hear come from ordinary folks talking about their life experiences. StoryCorps accomplished something profound when it provided human beings the means of collecting and sharing stories, whether their own or those of their dear ones.

There's the girl who interviews her mentally challenged mother, the family that talks about the impact of their father's brilliant but sometimes disturbing practical jokes, or the soldier who befriended the Iraqi translator and then helped him and his family come to the United States. These are stories that foster compassionate understanding and create positive change. Let's fill our online time with more stuff like this and humanise the internet, shall we?

6. Sundance Now

I once had a philosophy professor who told us that if we were struggling to figure out a philosophical problem, or how to write about one, we should go and see a movie. This way the mind, distracted from overthinking, could rejuvenate itself, as it were. He added that sometimes when we do this the mind goes to work in secret while the film is playing and solves the problem for us. In my experience the mind just takes a break; but after watching a film we sometimes find ourselves better equipped to solve the problem. Either way, watching films, especially smart films, can, in theory, help you be a smarter student.

Sundance Now proffers a delightful selection of indie films, and they're always adding great new stuff. For just a few dollars a month you can watch brilliant quirky gems from the past and present—documentaries, drama, comedy, and more. It's a great way to unwind when you just can't go on thinking any longer.

7. Blinkist

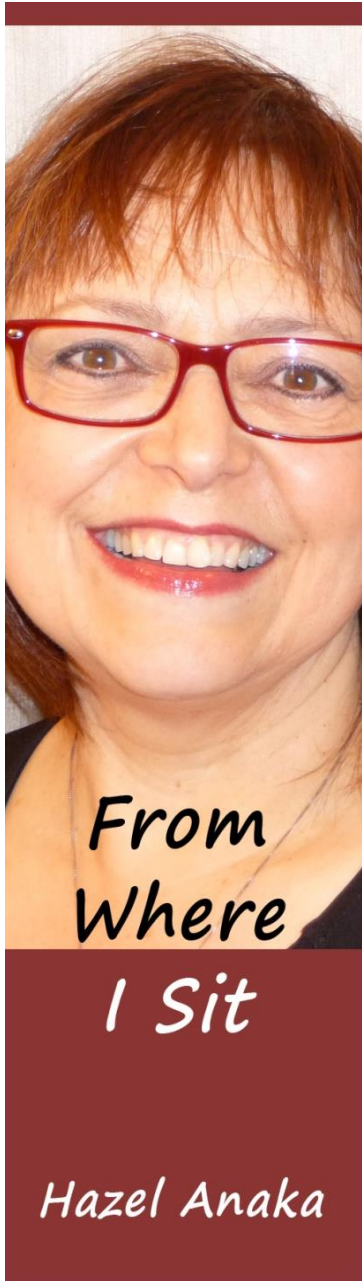
Need to learn something in a hurry but your studies won't allow you time to read a whole book? Try this sweet little app, also just a few loonies per month, and you can listen to a whole (condensed) nonfiction book while you're changing the drapes, cleaning the parrot cage, or polishing the silver. You'll feel like Data when he plugs himself in and virtually absorbs the knowledge of earth's history in the twinkling of an eye.

8. Buddhify

Sometimes you just need to stop thinking. That can be hard to do when your nose is in the screen and books all day. Still, taking a little time to meditate now and then can loosen the stranglehold of daily obligations, including your studies, enabling you to return to your courses with renewed vigour. When the pressures of keeping up while balancing other parts of your life proves too much, meditation is a great way of turning it all off for a while and getting some perspective on what really matters.

Buddhify is cheap but effective, walking you through managing stress, anxiety, anger, etc., or just helping you get a good night's sleep.

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



Nuggets of Time

The house is once again silent and I am happy. I couldn't have said that an hour ago, well, at least not the silent part. Since about noon, Saturday, we've been babysitting our two-year-old grandson, Kade. Seven-year-old Grady was participating in a two-day hockey tournament in beautiful downtown St. Paul.

With our son, Greg spending weeks at a time in Denver ensuring the success of a new business, parenting two young boys has gotten more complicated for Carrie. This was the least we could do to ensure this mother-son trip and hockey team bonding experience was as worry-free as it could be.

Kade was dropped off later than planned because he'd spent most of the night puking. Though he didn't have any overt symptoms of, well, anything, he wasn't himself either. He fell asleep at 5:30 on Saturday and didn't wake up until about fourteen hours later. When he woke he was lethargic and quiet. He was pathetic. After a preventive dose of Tylenol, he slept for another couple hours. In mid-afternoon he slept again.

When he wasn't sleeping he did run and laugh and play. He did demand our vigilance to keep him out of harm's way: falls, scalding, electrocution, poisoning, starvation, and dehydration to name some.

Let's be clear, we love both boys and want to be part of their lives, both for our benefit and theirs. However, it is a relief when they leave. I gather the toys strewn hither and yon. I store away the extra bedding until next time. Then I relish the silence and return to our kid-free routine.

This week was unique. Normally, when Roy has a conference to attend, I tag along. Most of the time I can just as easily work in a hotel room as from home. Sometimes, I schedule meetings or personal appointments. This week I chose to stay home. I am nursing a chest wall injury from prolonged vigorous coughing. I'm told this pain rivals that of broken ribs and I believe it. It was also miserably cold.

Roy was no sooner out of the driveway when, without any forethought or prep, I decided to do an impromptu at-home retreat. I wasn't off to an auspicious start though, watching the Trump press conference and some post-event analysis. I mourned the lost hours and days I'd spent watching the campaign, election, and subsequent gong show. I was so repulsed and disgusted I turned the TV off.

In the next thirty-one hours of silence, I read and journaled. I dug out my watercolours and painted. I listened and heard my own thoughts. I meditated. I ate and slept when I wanted to. It was soul restoring. It was a gift of time and kindness.

I know not everyone gets opportunities like this to pounce on. We all have obligations. Some of us have noisy grandsons who need us. Yet, we owe it to ourselves to exploit found nuggets of time every chance we get. It makes it easier to rise to our noisy obligations, 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

Hair of the Dog

Dear Barb;

My problem has to do with a dog sitter that I hired to look after my two poodles. My husband and I initially considered putting them in a kennel, but after touring a few, we decided our dogs would not do well. We felt it would be too traumatic for them to adjust at their age, especially with the noise and commotion in a kennel. Then we thought we had found the perfect answer. DogVacay.com is a service where people care for dogs in their homes. We set up a meet and greet with a couple of people and chose one. We brought our dogs for a trial visit for a half a day just to see how things would go. One of our dogs did great, the other one shook the whole time and wouldn't eat or drink. We tried a few more times and even an overnight and Ginger would not eat or drink the entire time. Needless to say we had to find another situation.

A friend of mine then recommended someone that they knew. This is a very good friend whom I have known for years, so I contacted the person recommended. She came over to meet the dogs on three occasions and seemed very capable. Both dogs appeared comfortable with her. So we thought we would attempt an overnight visit. But, to begin with, she was 40 minutes late arriving, but I thought, "Well, no big deal." That evening I got three or four silly emails from her, but thought she just wanted to keep me up to date. When we arrived home the next day the house was dark and she was getting up from lying on the sofa and said she was resting. When I got close to her I

could smell alcohol. Then I asked her how the bed downstairs was and she said she had a couple of glasses of wine and fell asleep on the sofa. I said oh did you bring some wine, she said no I drank yours. I was shocked, but didn't say anything. My husband said she should have known by the look on my face I was not happy. I had an unopened box of wine in my fridge that she opened and generously helped herself to. Everyone I tell this to gets a good laugh out of it. I would never hire her again; I think what she did was totally uncouth! What is your opinion?

Thanks, Wendy.

Hi Wendy:

Quite an unfortunate series of events! Yes, I do think that was impolite to open someone's wine and help yourself to it. I would have expected her to apologize once she saw your reaction, but since she didn't, she obviously didn't see anything wrong with what she did. You could talk to her about it and see what kind of response you get. If you are convinced she is sorry and won't do it again, you could try another overnight and see how it goes. On the other hand, she may feel you should provide her with alcohol. Then I think you already know what you need to do. Thanks, Wendy for sharing your interesting story.

Follow Barb on twitter @BarbGodin

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.

Later in the holochamber . . .

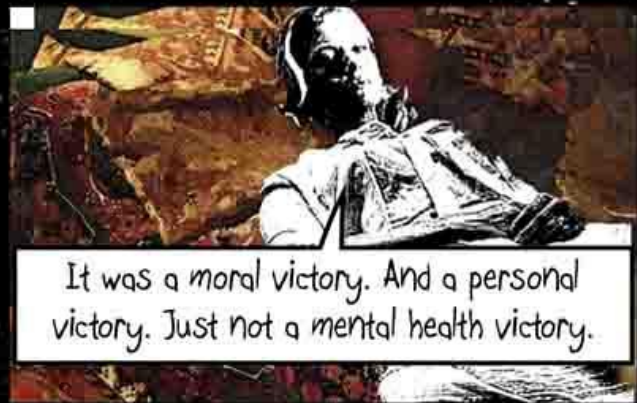


Did you feel better after Serena left?

Why not?



I'm still lost. Empty. Living in dread.
Waking up with the horrors.



It was a moral victory. And a personal victory. Just not a mental health victory.



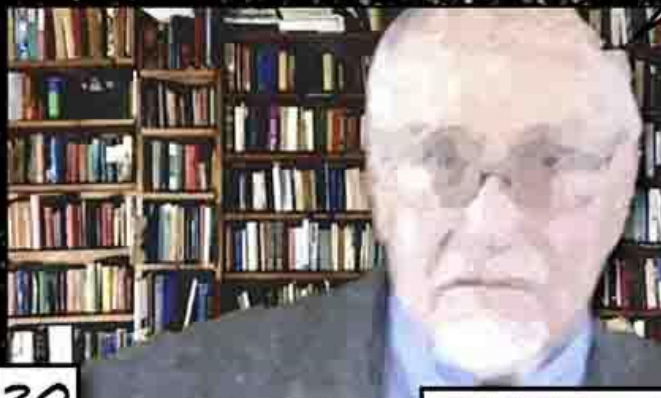
Mixed marriages ain't all they're cracked up to be.



Sometimes I don't get him and he doesn't get me.
And so when I see that Serena gets him—



Do you feel threatened by Serena?



I wanted to be friends with her but she's more interested in being "friends" with Alan. He doesn't seem to mind much.

Feels like I'm back living with my parents.

I swear, Doc, if it weren't for you the spook would take control.



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IMPORTANT DATES

- Jan 31: [Deadline to apply for course extension for March](#)
- Feb 10: [Deadline to register in a course starting Mar 1](#)
- Feb 15: [February degree requirements deadline](#)
- Feb 16: [AUSU Council Meeting](#)
- Feb 28: [Deadline to apply for course extension for April](#)
- Mar 10: [Deadline to register in a course starting Apr 1](#)
- Mar 15: [April degree requirements deadline](#)

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Student LifeLine

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