



THE VOICE

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Minds We Meet

Interviewing Students Like You

Buying A New Car in Ontario

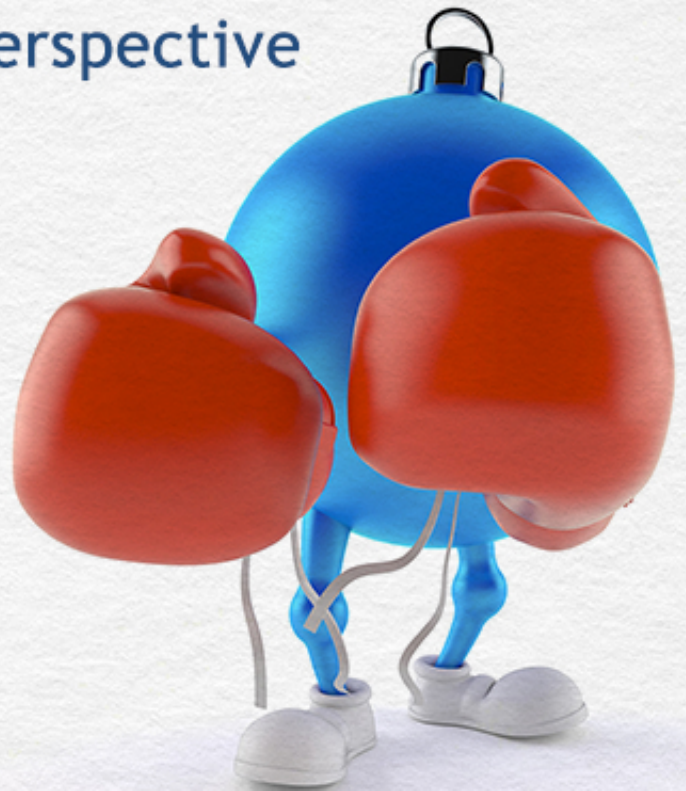
The Aftermath.

The Problem with Peace and Love

Christmas from a Marxian Perspective

Plus:

*Four Ways to Fight Materialism
Getting Fit in the New Year
and muchmore!*



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

Enjoy the Holidays!

Karl Low



Like AUSU, *The Voice Magazine* shuts down around the holiday season, and the way that this year plays out, that means that there'll be no magazine coming out next week, or the week after that. In other words, this is the last magazine of the year. Already.

We'll be back on January 6th, and to distract you from what is likely to be an ad nauseum replaying of what happened two years previous, we'll be bringing out our Best of the Voice issue, something we like to do each year in part to celebrate some of the best pieces of writing we saw in the previous year, and in part to make sure student writers aren't having to try to come up with ideas the morning after the annual New Years gatherings, and all that they entail.

But the largest part of the Best of the Voice is you. Hearing what students like you found entertaining, enlightening, engaging, encouraging, or even enraging is part of what makes the Best of issue so much fun. So think back over the last year, or however long you've been reading *The Voice* for. Is there any article that sticks out? Any recipe that you tried and enjoyed, any review that intrigued you

to picking up some new music or a new book or show? If there is, let me know at karl@voicemagazine.org. And if you can't remember the title or issue, just give me a description, and I'll see if I can dig it out, and we can share it once again with the next set of AU students who stumble upon our little magazine here.

Of course, as an added bonus, we usually have some extra swag around the end of the year to give out, so letting me know what your pick for The Best of the Voice is will get you entered into a draw for a selection of goodies we like to send out. Call it a late holiday gift.

Meanwhile, this week, some of our writers have definitely gotten into the spirit of the season, AU style. The materialistic nature of modern Christmas is in their crosshairs with a couple of articles taking a closer look at what it means and maybe, just maybe, how to avoid it.

But our feature article is our latest student interview with a carpenter who wouldn't mind being able to affect the world with his words (which is oddly appropriate given the season). Find out what he's studying at AU and where he's heading.

Plus, we have the conclusion to our look at how writer Alek Golijanin had to deal with an auto dealership to avoid getting charged for options that he didn't want in the first place, along with some advice for how you might do the same.

And, of course, we have scholarships and the social buzz, because even though the Voice may stop, the world doesn't. For this week our holiday closure list takes over the events column (because let's face it, you probably already have enough events piled up right now) and then we've got reviews, advice, encouragement, a comic, the latest from AUSU, and more!

Enjoy the read!

And Happy Holidays!

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

MINDS WE MEET



The Voice Magazine recently had a chance to chat with Delaney Curry (he/him), a Bachelor of General Studies student living in Calgary, Alberta. Delaney stated, “In the spirit of reconciliation, I would like to acknowledge that we live, work and play on the traditional territories of the Blackfoot Confederacy (Siksika, Kainai, Piikani), the Tsuut’ina, the Îyâxe Nakoda Nations, the Métis Nation (Region 3), and all people who make their homes in the Treaty 7 region of Southern Alberta.”

Although born in and currently residing in Calgary, Delaney “was raised all over Western and Northern Canada.” He explained, “Growing up, I had a bit of a nomadic lifestyle, which is both a blessing and a curse. I have seen corners of Canada many people won’t, but constantly moving was very hard on my education as a child. As a consequence, I struggled with school and abandoned my hopes of going to university. I took up a trade as a carpenter and enjoyed it for some time. However, my desire to go to university kept weighing on me. Finally, in 2019, I decided to put my tools down for a few years to pursue a degree, and here I am!”

Like many AU students, Delaney tried a few different options before finding the perfect program. “I started with the BSc Architecture program because I was working as a journeyman carpenter before coming to AU. I thought my skills as a carpenter would magically transfer to architecture. However, I really struggled with math, and the road to architecture began to feel too long, so I switched to the [BSc Computer and Information Systems] (CIS) degree; there, I still struggled. What I discovered about myself during this struggle is that I hated learning science in an academic setting, but really enjoyed writing about science. I tried some business courses, and the same thing happened. About a year into my BSc degree, I decided to switch to Bachelor of General Studies so that I could cherry-pick courses that would ultimately help me become a better writer. When I graduate, I hope to earn a living as a writer in some way.”

The Voice Magazine asked Delaney for his personal study tips, and he had some great ones for students. “I find starting and finishing one unit at a time works best for me. Juggling multiple courses can easily frazzle me because I’m a full-time student. I discovered that I do best if I focus on one unit at a time. If I start a unit in a course, I don’t look at the other courses until that unit is done. Then I move on to the next course and repeat the process.”

He also had some advice for new students, namely to “keep an eye on those learning objectives.” He continued, “They are a guide for what to review before exams. Whenever I am overwhelmed by the volume of material in a course, I always go back to the notes I took for the learning

objectives. Reviewing your completed assignments, learning objectives, and terms will help you pass any exam.”

When not studying, Delaney manages to find some spare time for hobbies. He stated, “Growing up, I found a lot of comfort in playing guitar and writing songs. Since starting university, I haven’t done much with my music; my online music just sits there aging like an old car, but I still write poetry. Writing poetry is very similar to writing lyrics for songs, so it comes naturally to me. I enjoy applying what I learned in ENGL 212 [Poetry and Plays] and finding new rhythms and ways of manipulating words to express ideas. I’m obviously really looking forward to ENGL 380 [Writing Poetry]!”

He credits his father as having had the greatest influence on his desire to learn, reminiscing, “I remember when I was a kid, his house was always filled with books. History books, science books, aviation books, the classics, encyclopedias, and music scores. Any curiosity I had could be answered with a book.” He mentioned that he enjoyed reading Michael Crichton’s books, including *Jurassic Park*, *Congo*, and *Sphere*, and then watching the films, during his childhood. “I always found it so interesting that what I saw in my mind could be so different from what the filmmaker saw. This taught me that no two experiences are the same. But even more interesting was when I visualized the same thing as the filmmaker,” he explained.

Delaney has also travelled, relating a memorable vacation, his “honeymoon in St. Lucia with wife and co-student Lara Curry.” He explained, “One afternoon we went on an impromptu hike to an old fort on the top of a small mountain. We didn’t realize the commitment involved and forgot to bring water with us. After three hours of walking under a scalding Caribbean sun, we reached the top, only to be greeted by a dead cactus. The view was magnificent, but I only remember being thirsty and thinking, ‘Even the desert plant died from this heat.’”

His experience with online learning so far has been quite positive. “I love not having to commute anywhere. Also, I am very introverted and like not having to deal with campus chaos. Probably the only thing I don’t like is the completely isolated nature of online learning. I enjoy public solitude. In other words, I like being around people without being distracted by them. The pandemic somewhat ruined my plans for studying in coffee shops and libraries. Studying at home all day can feel pretty lonely,” he stated.

Delaney’s most memorable AU course so far has been ENGL 308: Indigenous Literature in Canada “for a couple of reasons.” He explained, “It was my first senior English course. I was very nervous about stepping into a senior English course because I lacked confidence in my own abilities. So, this course was pivotal in my education, proving to myself that I could handle senior level. The second reason is I absolutely loved the material—all of it! In fact, my new favourite book came out of the course: *Monkey Beach* by Eden Robinson. It reminds me a lot of my time spent living on Salt Spring Island. Also, “The One About Coyote Going West” by Thomas King, is now my favourite short story. Coyote sure is a trickster!”

As for communication with his AU course tutors? “It can be a hit or a miss. I have had a few that never replied to my questions and took over two weeks to mark an assignment. Others are on the ball, replying the same day and marking the assignment the same week. Overall, AU’s tutors are very helpful and quick to reply. As a General Studies student, I have taken courses from several different departments, and out of all of them, I find the English tutors to be the most responsive.”

When asked what his first project would be if he were to become the new president of AU, Delaney would focus on eliminating exam fees. “I like the convenience of ProctorU, but I don’t

think we should have to pay for the exams. Because the testing centers are now closed, there is no alternative. My first project would be to eliminate the fees for online invigilation without upping the course fees; it should already be included,” he explained.

As for a famous person, past or present, he would like to have lunch with, and why? Delaney chose former US President Barack Obama. “Anyone who knows me knows I’m obsessed with science fiction, space, astronomy, and the idea of extraterrestrials visiting earth. Obama has actually alluded to the latter a few times. Even if it’s just for a cup of coffee, I want to sit with him in person and ask: ‘Are aliens visiting earth? Blink once for yes, twice for no.’”

Delaney also let *The Voice Magazine* know his most valuable lesson learned in life. “Do not waste time trying to impress people or going against the flow. It’s cliché, but follow your dreams because chasing anyone else’s dream will end in disappointment. You stand to gain more in life by using your natural gifts and chasing your passions.”

And his proudest moment in life? Delaney has “a few.” He stated, “When I was younger, I served in the army reserve and got the chance to parade on the Queens Honour Guard in 2005. Parading for a packed Saddledome was both exhilarating and horrifying, but I didn’t miss a step and made it on the news. My daughter also brings me pride and joy every day of my life; that pretty much goes without saying. I also predict that graduating in 2023 will be one of the proudest moments of my life.” Best of luck Delaney!

At times, in an online learning environment, it can feel like you are all alone, but across the nation and around the globe, students just like you are also pursuing their Athabasca University (AU) studies! Each week, *The Voice Magazine* will be bringing you some of these stories. If you would like to be featured next, do not hesitate to get in touch!

Natalia Iwanek (she/they) is currently completing her Bachelor of Arts in English with a minor in Political Science at Athabasca University.

Scholarship of the Week

Digging up scholarship treasure for AU students.

Scholarship name: Mensa Canada Scholarship Programme

Sponsored by: Mensa Canada

Deadline: January 31, 2023

Potential payout: \$1000 to \$2500

Eligibility restriction: Applicants must be Canadian citizens or landed immigrants, be at least 18 years of age as of January 31, 2023, and be enrolled in a full-time program at an accredited Canadian post-secondary institution during the 2022-2023 academic year. Applicants do not have to be members of Mensa.

What's required: An online application form with contact and academic info, along with a maximum 250-word essay describing your career goals.

Tips: Read the How to Apply section of the Rules page carefully for info on essay content.

Where to get info: mensa.ca/scholarships/



Buying a Brand New Car in Ontario? Aftermath Never Pay an 'Additional Equipments' Fees Again!

Alek Golijanin



Last time in *The Voice Magazine* I wrote about a car sales dealership that was trying to oversell me on things I didn't want. My experience with that Nissan dealership was terrible and it resulted in me filing a complaint with the Ontario Motor Vehicle Industry Council (OMVIC). My decision to file a complaint was reminiscent of a saying I was known for in elementary school, "I'm telling on you!" As an adolescent, I never really enjoyed telling on people but I did it because fighting was not allowed. Now, as an adult, I still have that same mindset, except that instead of telling teachers, I am telling arms-length agencies responsible for oversight. So, here is how my interaction with OMVIC played out.

What I Told to OMVIC

Being frustrated trying to deal with the dealership, I had to write to OMVIC:

I went into the dealership to place an order on a brand-new Nissan Kicks SV for their advertised price. The sales agent confirmed the price for a brand-new Nissan Kicks was the same in-store as it was online. However, the sales agent came out with an unofficial bill stating that I would be required to pay for window etching, nitrogen, and locking wheel nuts, if I wanted to be able to buy the car. I informed him that I had a copy of an official bill [PDF] and that these "Additional Equipments" were unsolicited goods and unsolicited services, and that I was only going to pay the costs that were bundled into the advertisement price, and non-optional charges needed to read as being non-optional and not as "Additional Equipments". I explained that if I was buying a Nissan Kicks SV that was on the lot and that had already been etched/etc, that would be okay, but since I was ordering a car from Nissan's factory, I wanted to forgo the Globali program and their "Additional Equipments". Upon hearing this, the sales agent started to question me about what I did for work, and when I told him it did not matter, he started lecturing us about why it did. He then became very disrespectful and condescending when I returned back to the topic of price, telling us that it was "over" and that he did not know why we were going back to the price.

I ended up emailing the general manager of the dealership and he told me that they would not be accepting the "terms" I was placing on them and that I could buy that vehicle elsewhere after I told them I specifically wanted to buy the vehicle from their Nissan dealership. The general manager refused to provide me with a clear answer as to whether they were refusing to sell me a Nissan Kicks SV that was still in a factory somewhere if I refused to agree to pay for the unsolicited goods and unsolicited services in their "Additional Equipments" category, that only get added when they are delivered from the factory. The VP of the automotive group was CC'd in my email exchange with the general manager, and I also had a phone conversation with

| AFTERMARKETS | | SALE PRICE | |
|-----------------------|--------------|--------------------------------|--------------|
| DELIVERY FRONTEND REG | \$ 25,998.00 | Prepaid and Air-Tac | \$ 33,998.00 |
| WHEEL LOCKS | \$ 0.00 | Total Finance Aftermarket: | \$ 1,995.00 |
| WIP TUNING | \$ 0.00 | Service Agreement | \$ 2,997.00 |
| | | Maintenance Agreement | \$ 0.00 |
| | | Map | \$ 0.00 |
| | | Total Sales Price: | \$ 38,718.00 |
| | | Total Trade Allowance: | \$ 0.00 |
| | | Net Difference: | \$ 38,718.00 |
| | | GST (5%): | \$ 1,935.90 |
| | | Total Trade Payoff: | \$ 3,732.30 |
| | | Non-Trade Fees: | \$ 0.00 |
| | | All Insurance: | \$ 40.00 |
| | | Other Charges: | \$ 0.00 |
| | | Total: | \$ 46.30 |
| | | Cash Down Payment and Deposit: | \$ 32,548.60 |
| | | Total Rebates: | \$ 0.00 |
| | | Amount Financed: | \$ 22,548.60 |

The unofficial bill with additions I never requested

the VP. During my phone conversation with the VP, I was told that all their vehicles were contracted to be etched by a third-party, for the Globali program, and that there was no way around it. The VP also said that even if they could waive the fee, then they would have to go and do the same for every sale from past to present. The VP said that if I wanted to buy a Nissan Kicks SV from any of their dealerships, that these "Additional Equipments" were the cost of doing business with them, or I could buy a car elsewhere. However, when I asked the VP to have these costs listed as non-optional charges on our bill of sale, he said that was not possible.

How did OMVIC respond?

Here is the thing about OMVIC's complaints process, the normal waiting period to hear back from them is usually between 24 and 48 hours. However, it took OMVIC a full week to get back to me about my complaint. Typically, longer wait times tend to be a good sign because most people that hear back from OMVIC between 24 and 48 hours tend to learn that their complaint was screened out. What OMVIC told me is that my complaint had been noted under that specific dealership's profile and that they would not be able to provide me with updates on any further reviews that may take place.

Although the contents of their email made sense, I still wanted some clarification on a few key questions. First, I wanted to know whether OMVIC could clarify whether a consumer would have to agree to take unsolicited goods and unsolicited services on a factory order so that they could buy a car? It seemed to me that these charges were being forced upon me to buy a brand-new car, and that seemed to run counter to the *Consumer Protection Act, 2002*. OMVIC's response was that a dealer needs to be transparent about what is required for a sale and as long as they have itemized these costs clearly on the vehicle purchase agreement, it was okay, and it was up to the consumer's discretions to determine if they wanted to follow through with the purchase or walk away from it. Their response elicited my secondary follow up questions, why were these fees showing up as "Additional Equipments" on the bill of sale if they were mandatory and why did the VP of that automotive group advise me that they were unable to list their fees as "mandatory fees"? What was OMVIC's position on the practice of printing unofficial bills that were obfuscating "Additional Equipments" fees and giving them the appearance that they were mandatory when they were additional costs that were optional? Think about it, there is no other industry which involves big-ticket purchases that will provide consumers with non-standardized "quotes" where the categories and language is completely different from the final bill of sale.

When OMVIC responded to my questions, their response was that they were unable to advise that the *Motor Vehicle Dealers Act* prohibited a dealer from making products or services mandatory with purchase and that I was provided a quote, and not an "unofficial bill of sale." The charges appeared

AU-thentic Events Upcoming AU Related Closures

Athabasca University

Closed Sat, Dec 24 to Mon, Jan 2, inclusive

Reopens Tues, Jan 3, 8:30 am MST

Full phone service resumes Thur, Jan 5, 9:00 am MST

More info at:

news.athabascau.ca/announcements/athabasca-university-holiday-closure-2022/

AU Library

Last day to order materials: Fri, Dec 16

Closed Sat, Dec 24 to Mon, Jan 2 inclusive

Reopens Tues, Jan 3, 8:30 am MST

More info at:

twitter.com/aulibarchives/status/1602672444971646976

AUSU

Closed Sat, Dec 17 to Mon, Jan 2, inclusive

Reopens Tues, Jan 3, 9:00 am MST

More info at: www.ausu.org/event/sorry-were-closed/

All closures are free time for those noted.

mandatory because the dealership constituted them as such. After this, I put forward my final pair of questions. If I was being provided a “quote” by this specific Nissan dealership, why was it so different from the information on “deskit.dealercorp”? “Deskit.dealercorp.” is a software that Nissan provides every Nissan dealer with. It clearly outlines every charge, but not a single Nissan dealership I visited was using it to go over the costs associated with buying a brand-new car. However, the reason I chose not to name drop the software earlier in our exchange was because I prefer to leave a few rounds in the chamber so that I can pull the trigger on any BS response.

Additionally, I asked to be connected with a member of OMVIC’s executive team because the conversation seemed to be too high level for OMVIC’s program administrator and because the executive committee had members who owned dealerships in Ontario. By speaking with them directly, I knew that no part of my message would get lost in translation and that I could leave the executives with some thoughts to reflect on, but also because my knowledge of Nissan’s corporate procedures and protocols for dealers overwhelmed program administrator. In the end, it was a productive talk, and I hope that they do something with my feedback because there is no reason why OMVIC has failed to create a standardized version for quotes or to require that a quote accurately reflect a bill of sale. Misrepresenting costs on an unofficial quote in order to pass them off as mandatory costs is bad business.

How much money was I able to save?

On the day that we visited the Nissan dealership, we were quoted an after-tax price of \$32,548.60 for a 2023 Nissan Kicks SV. After working my magic, I was able to get the same car at another Nissan Dealership for an after-tax price of approximately \$29,400. The breakdown of pre-tax costs was as follows: Dealer MSRP: \$23,998, Freight/PDI: \$1,850, A/C Tax: \$100, Tire Tax: \$20, OMVIC Fee: \$10, so a pre-tax total of approximately \$25,978. That comes out to a total after-tax saving of approximately \$3,150 or 10%.

Buying a car is a high stakes chess match

For some people, my approach might be too aggressive, too unflattering, or it might make them too uncomfortable to do it themselves, so these people can seek out organizations like Car Help Canada or similar ones. They’re an organization that brand themselves as being able to negotiate the lowest purchase price of any vehicle. Some people may also believe that having a long-term relationship with an official dealership is contingent on making concessions to the sales agent during the purchase of a vehicle and paying more for their car, but there is no connection between the two. For me, buying a car is a high stakes chess match, and I know that no sales agent will ever have my best interests in mind. I am not in the business of making friends, but I am in the business of filling my pockets with cash savings, and it is a mentality that many would benefit from if they adopted it.

When I think about the way I was underestimated by this Nissan dealer, it reminds me of the time when “Pikey” Mickey, from the movie *Snatch*, was underestimated by “Gorgeous” George. For those wondering what happened to “Gorgeous” George, know that the film’s narrator says this about “Pikey” Mickey, “It turns out that the sweet-talking tattoo-sporting pikey was a Gypsy bare-knuckle boxing champion. Which makes him harder than a coffin nail.” Now, “Pikey” Mickey and I have quite a bit in common like our love for “dags”, our knuckles speak for themselves, haggling is a part of who we are, and illegal bookies really hate us. But neither of us could have imagined that the hunt for a vehicle would take us where it did, on an epic journey, and leave us with an awesome story to share. I am just happy to know that my parents are happy with the deal they got, and that maybe others can learn from my experience to save big on their purchases too.

Alek Golijanin is an AU alum who considers himself a gentleman first, a scholar second, and a combat sports fanatic third. In that order.



Fly on the Wall

Problems with Peace and Love

Jason Sullivan



Christmas as a Marxist Might See It

In our heart of hearts, many of us at times feel a bit hollow about the holidays. Besides garish ads, so predictable that they lampoon their own excesses and try to have us in on the joke, the general tense, tone, and tenor of the shopping frenzy seems to first imbibe a year's frustrations and then spew it out as a series of pricey purchases. But wait, surely mutual joy and glad goodwill toward humanity can abound at the holidays. We'd all have a holly jolly merrier-ass time if sentiments of peace and love abounded. Yet maybe, just maybe, like a twinkling Christmas light that doesn't shine just right,

the problem with the season isn't in attitude so much as in that the reason for the season falsely appears to be based on fraternal beatitude. At no time of year and no place more than under a Christmas tree do economic inequalities appear more clearly. Yet, out of love we tend to purchase gifts based on heartfelt sentiment, even though our minds know we are encouraging a system that connects possessions with caring. AU critical thinking to the rescue!

The ambivalent nature of the Holiday shopping season isn't exactly a secret. Karl Marx would guffaw at the would-be astuteness of this observation. Enjoying his daily pint of cool pale ale, English style—as he was in exile in London—he'd probably address us at AU with the look of any scientist about to brusquely take us aside in order to impart his discovery of objective historical truths. To him, our economic circumstances matter more than how we feel about one another. Circumstances, he'd note, change not with the whims of our minds but with economic facts on the ground. Marxism sees class conflict as the driver of history; in each epoch different classes of people, based on their relations to economic power, duke it out over control of resources. The winners set the priorities and write the rulebooks. And, voila, we have a consumerist Christmas spirit.

All of this might seem a bit old hat, even worthy of an eye-roll from students and onlookers alike. Consumerism seems as old a target as saving the whales or putting trash in its place. And stereotypical sermons of righteousness based on economic injustice are part and parcel with the political mindsets of our times. Marx, however, was less interested in feelings and intentions than on cold, hard, facts about who controls the levers of industry, both producers of goods and progenitors of ideas. The ideas of any time period are invariably the ideas of the ruling class, he famously said. And ideas that resist those ideas are also suspiciously popular among those who decide what kind of life we all live.

In no uncertain terms, like a Grinch come to set the record straight, Marx lambasted socialist alternatives that began with hallowed phrases about peace and love and moral injunctions to be good to one's fellow citizens. Not all spiced wine and plastic garlands, the window dressing of leftist revolution is problematic from a Marxist perspective. When sentiments lead, we ought to suspect that we're being duped. If we're all in life together and equally how come so many of us feel so disempowered when seeking housing and monetary security?

Here a slice of humble pie is doled out by Marx himself, who saw his sociological research as one that discovered scientific truths about history rather than philosophical realities about human nature and morality:

“The robe of speculative cobwebs, embroidered with flowers of rhetoric, steeped in the dew of sickly sentiment, this transcendental robe in which the German Socialists wrapped their sorry ‘eternal truths’, all skin and bone, served to wonderfully increase the sale of their good among such a public’ (251).

Marx noted that 19th Century aristocrats, part of a declining class of landed gentry losing sway by the day to an ascendant urban business class bourgeoisie, often sought common cause with landless peasants. Under banners of equality and justice (think here of buy green advert campaigns, and that ruthless tinkle of Salvation Army jingle bells awaiting toonies outside grocery stores), aristocrats gently prodded their serfs to follow them into revolutionary action based on trust and goodwill and parochialism, rather than any real rearrangement of property relations. Better scraps was all they seemed to offer, more crumbs for their mice. Marx saw that the ruling class was pleased to deploy pleasantries if it would avert any real uprisings against the oppressed: “To the absolute governments, with their following of parsons, professors, county squires and officials, it served as a welcome scarecrow against the threatening bourgeoisie” (250). A class in decline, said Marx, seeks to cultivate friends anywhere it can. And in the 1800s the industrial movers and shakers, the bourgeoisie, were on the rise over and against the frills and gimmicks of traditional nobility.

In our times, being academic and all, we see how business motives clearly trump traditional aspects of the Holidays. Think of how few people listen to the Monarch’s Christmas message compared to those who are busy unwrapping an ungodly number of parcels, bundles, and generalized plastic gadgets. Perhaps one reason that consumerism works so well is it all seems to be about us, the shoppers, in much the way that the aristocrats in Marx’s time claimed to be seeking reforms in order to help and aid those they had kept underfoot for so long.

In the end, to opt out of the Holidays remains a difficult and socially sanctioned act. Sure, we can say that gifting means participating in a system that reduces our love to goods at a store, usually tacky, but the spirit of the season seems to say *this time it’s okay*. One seems to be betraying social goodwill by not buying and dispensing trinkets from the mall. Or we can make our own gifts knowing, if our artistic talents are lacking and laughable, that in theory it really is the thought that counts. Should we choose to accept the task of not shopping for gifts, we will find many an hour of AU studies freed up when we would otherwise be out frantically shopping for that special knickknack that, in theory, will at once appease our conscience and bring joy to our special someone. Plus, we can theoretically indulge in more family time and in a less apprehensive sense; time and attention are huge gifts to give, especially with those beloved cellphones turned off and out of sight.

The best gifts are often not found in stores at all but are dispensed straight from our brain in combination with our heart. So, this Holiday season, maybe, let’s remember to thank our loving ones for their support in our private scholastic struggle (maybe by dedicating an essay or a Voice article to them?) With that in mind I’d like to dedicate this column to my dear wife, Janice! ♥ And in case you’re wondering, we don’t do Christmas presents in this house!

Reference

Marx, K. (1848). ‘Reactionary Socialism’ in *The Communist Manifesto*. Retrieved from <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch03.htm>

Jason Hazel-rah Sullivan is a Masters of Integrated Studies student who loves engaging in discourse while working in the sunny orchards and forests of the Okanagan.



Music Review—No Bad Slays

Jessica Young



Artist: Slayloverboy

Album: No Bad Slays

Southern California alt-rapper, Slayloverboy, has released his newest album *No Bad Slays*. The album is available for streaming anywhere you get your music.

Slayloverboy has also released music videos for several of the tracks, including [“Where Do We Go,”](#) and [“My Life is a Horror Movie.”](#) Of the single, “Where Do We Go”, Slay says, “This song basically talks about my early journey with music and basically thanking my girlfriend for always sticking with me even when we can’t physically be with each other.”

The album consists of ten tracks: Where Do We Go, Born to Lose, Idk Where I Been Lately (featuring Sybyr), 2 Die 4, Nobody Even Say What's up No More, I Feel Like I'm Dreaming,

FML Anthem, Chain Smokin' (featuring Bobby Raps), Night Crawler, and Pain Killer.

All of the songs clock in at three minutes or less, with a few songs being around a minute and thirty seconds, and the average being around two minutes and thirty seconds. Personally, I think when all the songs on an album are short, it can seem like a lack of effort on the artist's part. It feels like at least some of the tracks could have been developed more.

Slayloverboy reminds me of Soundcloud/emo rappers like Lil Peep and Lil Xan—mumble, monotone, sad-boy rap that sounds like it was mixed in their bedroom. More significantly, Slayloverboy reminds me of these artists because they have all curated their content to project the image of a drug addict, “barred out” on Xanax (brand name of a prescription anxiety medication, benzodiazepine) and drinking lean (the street name for a mixture of codeine-promethazine cough syrup and pop).

25-year-old producer DJ Fu produces songs for Schoolboy Q, Meek Mill, and Lil Xan; the latter who made his name, quite literally, through his links with drugs, and someone Fu considers to be one of his “best friends”. Fu was quoted in [Dazed](#) as saying, “It’s wild because in the 1980s and 1990s it was attractive to be the entrepreneurial dope dealer, but now it’s cooler for rappers to be the actual drug addicts; it’s a whole different flip. At one point, you were looked at as crazy and completely discredited if you were addicted to drugs, but now it’s cool to be barred out. It’s glorified. If LeBron wears Jordans then everyone wants to buy those sneakers, and it’s the same with rap. If Future is rapping about [...] codeine, then people will want to imitate him as he’s the king.”

This generation of rappers is rapidly dying due to drug overdoses (Lil Peep, Mac Miller, Juice Wrld, to name a recent few). In Canada, it’s estimated eleven people a day are dying from an overdose. Furthermore, young Canadians aged 15 to 24 are the fastest-growing population requiring hospital care from opioid overdoses.

Now, I don’t know much of anything about Slayloverboy. I don’t know if he actually has a drug addiction, if he casually uses drugs, or if he’s simply projecting this image for the followers. I do

know that the opioid crisis is nothing to play around with, and I can't morally agree with artists promoting doing these kinds of drugs to young people. But you can still check out Slayloverboy on [TikTok](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).



Inspired!



Marie Well

Today, I was reading a book on grooming your kids to become elite athletes. Reading books by athletes is excellent for developing high-performance mindsets. The book is called *Mental Toughness for Young Athletes* by Troy Horne and his athletic son, Moses Horne. I've learned from this book that it just takes an idea—a flash of inspiration—for a dream to bloom. For instance, you were inspired to pursue a university certificate, diploma, or degree at some point. Who knows what battles you've fought, won, or lost, but here you are, tackling a life-changing goal.

But what exactly inspired you to start a university program? My mentor pushed me to do so when I had no belief in myself. Of course, you might have a different story. Regardless, we all have unlimited potential, and just one encouraging word can change our lives. Encouragement is also constructive in mending a crushed spirit, whether from a loss in sports, failure on an exam, or any other misfortune. But the truth is that failure is necessary for success. For instance, you can only be a star basketball player if you lose

countless games. Nobody wins every game unless they have a short-lived sports life. Interestingly, according to Horne's book, the best players often have the most losses.

But what stood out most in the book today was a blurb on Serena William's dad. Serena, as you may know, is a top female tennis player. But did you know that her dad was inspired to turn his girls into tennis champions before they were born, despite him not having much money or tennis skills? That's the power of belief.

I have a young nephew who is two. His family lineage has kinesthetic intelligence, and his great grandpa is an enormous sports enthusiast. So, my role in my nephew's life is exposing him to various toys, especially sports toys. And I found for him the KidSport charity that funds one season of sports annually for children in need. I also plan on sending my nephew books about the Olympian mindset and sports rules as soon as he can read them.

When children are continually exposed to various toys, you can better determine their true interests. Of course, no matter what the child pursues, there will be successes, failures, and self-doubt. But with a hard, intelligent work ethic, and lots of encouragement, any barrier to success can be overcome.

We all have unlimited potential, and a single encouraging word can ignite our dreams. So, "believe in others until they believe in themselves." That quote was from a friend's mother who inspired my youth in ways I'll never forget. So, program the mind with nothing but positives to unleash our infinite potential.



Four Tips on Living a Less Materialistic Lifestyle

Xine Wang



I love me a new purse or a cozy jacket. But at what point do these items become meaningless? When you already have them but need five more of course! Our relationship with items is very much governed by our capitalistic and consumption-focused world. It's difficult when social media is used as a form of advertising and when we are surrounded by people who are materialistic. This is what we were taught to believe; owning more things, more houses, more bags, more items means more successful.

With Christmas around the corner, I've heard so many times when people have purchased unnecessary goods for their home and their families. Materialism is dangerous because it means having to keep up with trends. It also means you will spend more time maintaining your items. For example, when I moved to larger living quarters, it also meant that I needed to clean up more space. When I purchased more furniture, it also meant I needed to spend

time cleaning it. When you own more clothing, it takes more mental energy to decide what to wear.

So how can we escape this never-ending cycle of materialism?

Focus on experiences

When I first became more independent with my finances, I went on many shopping sprees. I emptied my wallets on new purses (yes, I was quite obsessed with beautiful bags), a better car and designer furniture, but, as time passed, I realized an additional purse or an additional car added no meaning or value to my life. It didn't improve my quality of life, and it certainly didn't make me happier. Experiences are valuable because they become a memory or a topic you could connect with someone down the road. Last week I went to spin class for the first time and now I can strike a conversation with a spin fanatic.

Focus on relationships

Sometimes it might be easy to forget that we don't own our relationships. We don't "have" a boyfriend or girlfriend or partner, we don't "have" a friend or a mentor. We shouldn't stop investing in a relationship just because we know it is there. Spending time with our loved ones and meaningful experiences will mean you're less tempted to purchase unnecessary items.

Create distance between your money and yourself

If we view money as an extension of ourselves, we will constantly be looking for ways to showcase this - whether it be through purchase of status symbols such as luxury goods. By creating a buffer between your money and you, your money will be used to better your experience and lifestyle. But you will not be trapped in a cycle of consumption.

Cleanse

Just as you would cleanse your body and mind with a hot bath and meditation, donating or trashing old items in the house can be liberating. It means you're letting go of what you don't need. I'm guilty of hoarding things I don't need all the time. I have the mindset that "perhaps one day I will use this" however if you haven't used something for five years, chances are you're not going to need it.



A Hair-rific Experience

Alek Golijanin



Every single one of us has had a bad hair experience. Sitting in a hair salon or barbershop while someone has worked on our hair and it resulting in us regretting our decision to ever show up. How we respond to something as simple as a bad haircut has a lot to do with our personality. Most people might get angry or cry, but me, I chose to improvise when I found myself at the receiving end of a bad haircut.

It was a few days before Christmas 2021, and I had been growing out my hair just because I had no reason to get a haircut. But, having a nice haircut for Christmas pictures is the equivalent to having a beach body for summer. I remember scrolling through Google and finding two hairstyles I thought were pretty sharp, a hairstyle sported by both Bradley Cooper and Matthew McConaughey, a half surfer half business flow. That was the haircut I wanted to get, and it was the first time since 2012 that I had grown out my hair, back when I looked like a

pirate extra from the Pirates of the Caribbean.

My regular barber was away on vacation, so I decided to go to a new barber who had a reputation for being good and fast. Fast might work for short tops and fades, but you can not do Hollywood and fast. Shortly after entering the barbershop, the barber hit me with, “Yallah bro, what do you want to do?”, so I showed him a picture of Bradley Cooper and Matthew McConaughey and said, “This style!” He gave me a weird look, pausing for a bit before saying, “Okay. No problem.” It did not take long for me to realize that I was in a big problem. The barber was using clippers to trim my hair. He had no idea what he was doing, so after screwing it up pretty bad I told him I would settle with a “bankster” haircut. A “bankster” haircut is similar to Richard Gere’s flow in Pretty Woman or think of Shooter McGavin, basically combovers on all sides. The barber gave me another weird look, pausing again before saying his trademark phrase, “Okay. No problem.” However, problems were all that I would be left with.

By the end of the haircut, it looked like I had cut my own hair, and I was left with a short top and a fade, far from the half surfer half business flow, and nothing remotely close to a “bankster” look. When the barber asked me how I liked my haircut, I lied and said that I liked it, but nobody could like a haircut like that. It made me want to be an ostrich in the Savanna so that I could burrow my head into the ground. Instead, I asked the barber to tell me how much I owed him, and I ended up paying his standard rate.

When I got back to my car, I had a flashback of another hair disaster that occurred almost ten years prior, after I had gone to a fancy hair salon and asked for a Joe Dirt mullet. On that occasion, I ended up with a layered mullet that had nothing “Joe Dirt” about it. The decisions you make upon entering your 20s carry less weight than those when you are exiting them. I could afford to have a bad haircut back when I was entering my 20s but not on my exit out of them.

Fortunately, this story has a happy ending not only because my hair ended up growing back and I was able to return to my original barber, but also because I managed not to fall out of favor with the ladies after that terrible haircut.

The dynamics behind a sense of self

But what is it about my sense of self that allowed me to be gracious about a bad haircut when others might have gotten in arguments with the barber or hairstylist and even refused to pay? I attribute it to maintaining perspective. Having a bad haircut sucks, but a bad haircut is insignificant in the grand scheme of things. However, when we allow ourselves to be defined by the way we look or the way we dress, that takes us further away from our true sense of self. Without a sense of self, we have no sense of identity, and without a sense of identity we may struggle to shift from our present self to our desired future self.

Some experts say that identity is something that is often out of the direct control of a person: that it is the result of internalized values that they gather from their parents, their communities, and the media that they consume. Although it may seem that we lack control over our identity, that is only true during our development years, because, as mature adults, we are able to identify those socially conditioned parts of our identity that may be unfavorable so that we can work on them. It may take time to rework those unfavorable parts, but it is possible, and there are many stories of people that have changed integral components of their identity in order to grow.

One way to think about identity is to view it as a multi-layered representation of who we are. For us to better understand “who we are”, it requires we peel through those layers before we can get to the core of “who we are”. However, none of that is possible if we are unable to recognize and to synthesize the various aspects of our identity, and that means we need to work on gathering a better understanding of who we are at our core. The closer we get to our core, the stronger our sense of self becomes. Once we get to the core of “who we are”, it allows for us to make changes about ourselves, like replacing gathered values from our developmental years with learned values from our mature years, so that we may grow. Most importantly, the values at our core become our core-essential values, and those core-essential values go on to serve as the navigation system which guides the way we view, interact, and respond to the world.

Alek Golijanin is an AU alum who considers himself a gentleman first, a scholar second, and a combat sports fanatic third. In that order.



Student Sizzle — AU's Hot Social Media Topics

Following What's Hot around AU's Social Media Sites.

AthaU Facebook Group

Seeking portals. A new student wonders how to access their student email account; replies offer clues for initial set-up student email accounts.

Discord

Ready, set...wait. A platform outage prevents several students from accessing their exams, causing re-scheduling headaches and frustration; others offer tips on avoiding rescheduling fees due to such tech issues.

reddit

If only the walls could talk. An exam-taker wonders if ProctorU will accept a door-less room such as a kitchen for an exam space; responders say they have used kitchen spaces with no problem.

Twitter

@aulibarchives tweets: "Looking for a great holiday read? Why not grab something home-grown by our @au_press? We've got it here <https://aupress.ca>."



Beyond Literary Landscapes

Winter

Natalia Iwanek



From my early beginnings as a young introvert, the public library has always been a bit of a refuge. Years later, not much has changed, albeit with an additional affinity for endless hours spent scouring second-hand bookstores to add to my ever-growing “to-read” pile.

From one bookworm to another, this column underscores and outlines various literary genres, authors, and recent reads and serves as an introduction for those unfamiliar with these works, as a refresher for long-time aficionados, and maybe as an inspiration for readers to share their own suggested topics. Do you have a topic that you would like covered in this column? Feel free to [contact me](#) for an interview and a feature in an upcoming column.

Who

This week, instead of focusing on a literary theme, author, or time period, this column focuses on something that many students, in many parts of Canada and the world, are

currently experiencing, namely the approach of colder weather and the winter season. Grab a blanket and some hot tea, and get ready to enjoy these icy texts.

Examples of notable authors who wrote about the winter season include Varlam Shalamov, Nikolai Gogol, Waubgeshig Rice, and Charles Dickens.

What

Some examples of wintry texts include *Kolyma Tales* by Varlam Shalamov, *The Overcoat* by Nikolai Gogol, *Moon of the Crusted Snow* by Waubgeshig Rice, and *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens.

Where

These texts take place in northern Ontario, Great Britain, Imperial Russia, and the former USSR.

When

These works are a mix of different historical time periods, written in the 19, 20, and 21-centuries.

Why

These sweater-weather, winter-focused texts may be of interest to AU students currently spending more time indoors due to cold weather, as well as those who enjoy stories of survival in harsh elements.

How

AU’s wide range of diverse courses make it easy to study this topic in depth. Courses related to Winter Literature are available in a variety of disciplines, including one’s that may fit into your Degree Works. (Always check with an AU counsellor to see if these particular courses fulfill your personal graduation requirements!)

AU students interested in learning more about this topic may enroll in [ENGL 460: The Ecological Imagination](#), a senior-level, three-credit course, which “investigates the links among literature, culture, and the environment, asking students to consider the role of cultural and literary analysis in the face of climate crisis and ecological complexity.” (Please note that this course requires

several prerequisites, including ENGL 211: Prose Forms and ENGL 212: Poetry and Plays. An intermediate-level ENGL course is also highly recommended.)

Students interested in writing their own winter-themed poems, short stories, or novels, may choose to enroll in ENGL 381: Creative Writing in Prose, a senior-level, three-credit course, which focuses on “your work and its development.” (Prerequisites include ENGL 211 and ENGL 212, professor permission, and a B-grade in ENGL 353: Intermediate Composition.)

For those considering a more non-fiction approach, consider ENGL 384: Writing Creative Non-Fiction, a senior-level, three-credit course, which “offers students the opportunity to write creative non-fiction and receive feedback on their writing.” (Similarly to the abovementioned courses, prerequisites include ENGL 211 and ENGL 212, and professor permission.) Happy reading!

Natalia Iwanek (she/they) is currently completing her Bachelor of Arts in English with a minor in Political Science at Athabasca University.



Sure-fire Ways to Get Fit This New Year

Marie Well



I The new year is almost upon us, so you may choose to make some resolutions. If fitness is a goal, then you've just entered fantasy land, because the highs you are about to feel will be worth the pain and effort. You will gain incredible results in as soon as three months. With that said, here are sure-fire ways to get fit this new year:

Convert your home to a gym.

Why not load your dwelling with gym equipment, such as a chin-up and dips bar, exercise bands, and other nifty devices? When the equipment is right in front of you, you're more likely to use them. So, place these gym items in the room you use most often.

I am fortunate because I have a mentor who is a fitness expert. As a result, I have all the above equipment. With that equipment, I do two or more hours of exercise most days. But I read that a fitness female guru does 45-minute workouts daily, and she looks super fit. Even 20 minutes of dancing or yoga without any equipment is terrific. It

depends on your preferences and goals.

Enjoy your workouts.

A workout can feel better than Disneyland for a kid. It can be the day's highlight, shooting off endorphins and producing excellent physical results. The secret is the more you exercise, the more enjoyable it gets. It's like working harder and harder at school until you receive straight A's and the highest mark in every class. In other words, excellent results are so thrilling they inspire you to work harder.

During my master's degree, I was so high on my workouts that I exercised for a minimum of 2.5 to 6 hours daily. As my exercise was extreme, all I wanted to do was sleep, and I didn't get much work done. One lady, a soccer team captain, said she had to stop playing elite-level competitive sports because it affected her education. So, find that right balance for working out where you feel the highs, you work hard, but you don't wipe out. That is unless you want to become an elite

athlete. Two to two-and-a-half hours of working out are my sweet spots, although I'm aching to do more.

Schedule your workouts.

Schedule time, such as lunch hour or after work, to exercise. If it's scheduled, then you're more likely to do it. In other words, exercise becomes habitual at that given time.

I'm so excited when it's almost time to finish work. That's because I do my workout around five or six, which takes nearly the rest of the evening. Then, around eight, I have an ice-cold shower followed by high-protein snacks. It's the highlight of my day. The more consistently you exercise, the better it feels and the easier it gets.

Cycle everywhere you go.

Cycle to the gym, school, and work. Bonus points if you don't own a car. A driver instructor advised furnishing a bicycle with mirrors, a horn, lights, and a license plate. Also, he said to cycle in the center of the road and not off to the side. That's because, statistically, the cyclists who drive on the side of the road are typically the ones who get into accidents. At least, that's what he claimed.

But you'll need to condition yourself for cycling. For example, after years of not exercising, I did an hour of cycling, and my legs were so stiff I could hardly walk for a week. So, I cycled shorter stints until I built up strength. Then, as I didn't own a car, I relied on the bicycle for all my transportation. Cycling for transportation is a great way to develop cardiovascular fitness.

Socialize at gyms.

Make gyms your favorite hangouts. Enroll in a dance class, a martial arts club, or a yoga class with friends. Or join a sports team, such as rugby, with or without a friend. Fitness for fun beats hanging out at bars and clubs so far as I'm concerned.

My former work colleague and I may start taking spin classes together. We've entertained ideas of cycling or doing martial arts together, too. But in all honesty, I prefer to work out without any socialization. Working out at home is just fun.

Treat yourself to a healthy snack after your workouts.

For example, if you do a cardio workout, like running or cycling, then treat yourself to carbs like fruit, veggies, or oats post-workout. However, if you do muscle-building exercises, like weights, follow your workout with protein. And if you cross-train, which involves multiple types of exercises, combine carbs with protein.

After working out, I eat lots of protein, like Greek Yogurt, salmon, and beans. I tend to overeat and gain weight. But my pants are getting looser, and my stomach has, surprisingly, flattened. Exercise makes food tasty, and you don't need to worry about weight when you've burned off the calories.

Make a goal of becoming a fitness instructor.

Why not go for the gold and become a fitness instructor in aquatics, cycling, or group fitness? You'll have a blast, gain a skillset, and embark on an instructor-level fitness journey. I knew a wonderful woman who owned an energy company and taught fitness classes in the park at lunch. Oh, what a role model she was! One day, I would like to teach fitness, too.

Your new year's goal may be to gain a higher fitness level. And once you feel the "highs," you'll countdown the minutes until your next workout. But, of course, it's the holidays, and there's no better way to be merry than to get fit.





Christmas Without

Dear Barb:

As Christmas Day is approaching I can feel the tension rising within my family. We rarely get along through the year, and as a result, Christmas get-togethers are not an enjoyable experience. I have tried to find an excuse not to attend the family dinner, but since this is our first year without my dad, I want to be there for my mom.

Dad passed away six months ago, and mom has been depressed ever since. I tried to discuss with my siblings that we should try to get along for mom's sake, but they look at me like I'm crazy and denied there has ever been problems at Christmas. Meanwhile, I can remember last Christmas my oldest brother walked out in the middle of dinner because of the bickering. That was Dad's last Christmas. My mom is getting older and who knows this may be her last Christmas and I want it to be as pleasant as possible. Can you suggest any way that I can defuse the family tension so we can all have a comfortable Christmas?

Looking forward to your response, April.

Hello April:

Thank you for taking the time to send this email. Christmas is always a stressful time of year. There is such a tremendous build-up to Christmas day and expectations are high. Be realistic, your family dynamics are not going to change just because it is Christmas day. If your siblings didn't get along last week, they most likely won't get along

this week. If the tensions are severe and you do not feel that your siblings will be able to put their conflict and anger aside for the day, then consider splitting up your guests. Get together with some for Christmas Eve and others for Christmas day. Invite your mother to both events, this way she will be able to see all her children in a more pleasant atmosphere. That is one option, although I believe you would rather keep the family together, especially for this Christmas being the first one without your dad.

Perhaps you could start a new family tradition this year. Possibly celebrate a Christmas brunch, instead of dinner. A simple shift like this will create new dynamics within the family. Also, you must appreciate that your family members may experience their grief in different ways, some may want to talk about memories of your dad but for others, remembering is too painful. Eliminate all expectations and go with the flow. It is admirable that you want to create a nice Christmas for your mother and that you appreciate the pain she is experiencing. It will be a difficult Christmas no matter what you choose to do as a family, but you will get through it.

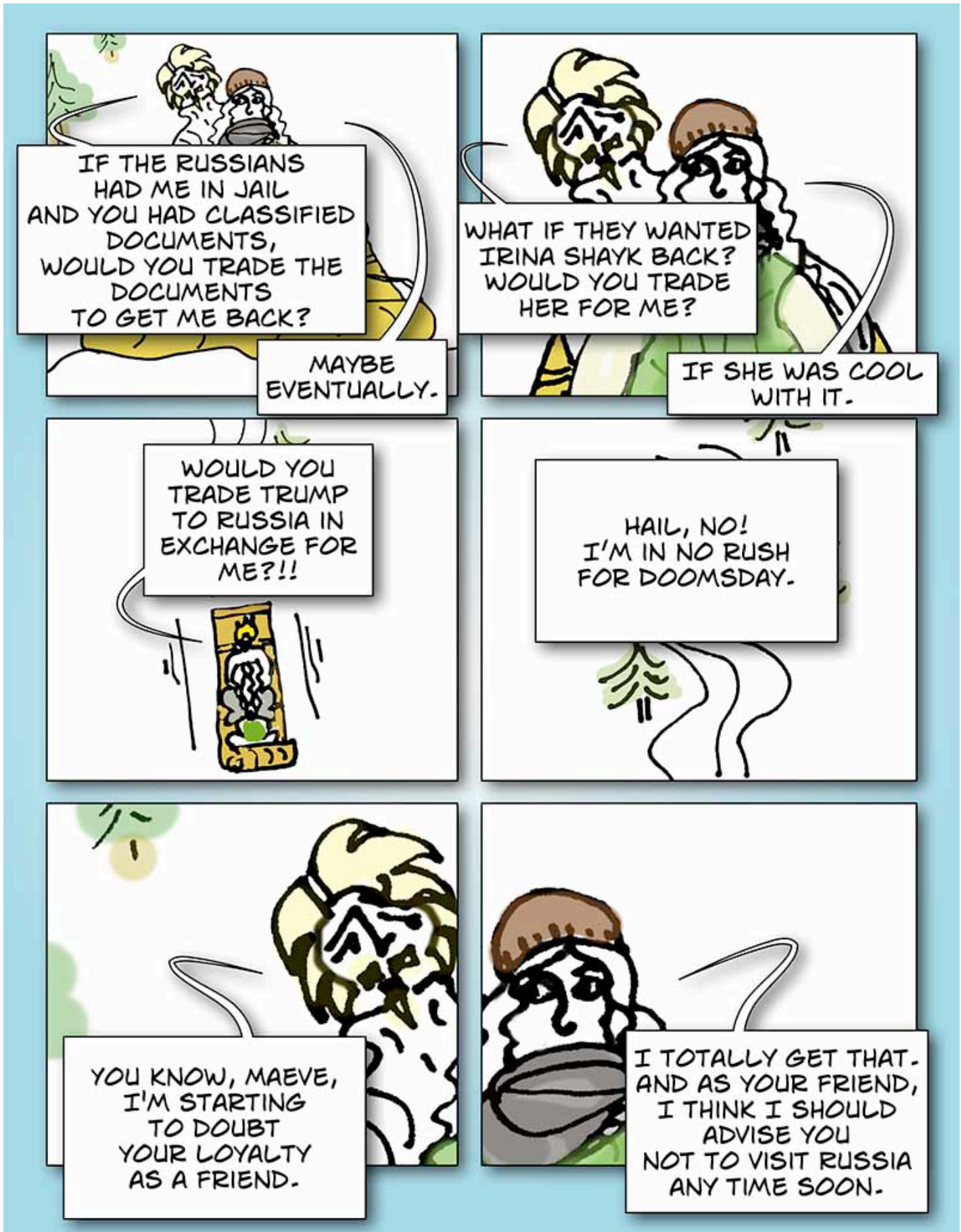
Best wishes to your family.

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Poet Maeve
Russian Exchanges

Wanda Waterman





UPDATE

COMMUNITY. RESOURCES . SERVICES



#67 A TALE OF TWO PRESIDENTS

A Tale of Two Presidents!

[Listen in](#) as AUSU President Karen Fletcher sits down with AU President Dr. Peter Scott to talk about the big plans for AU as Canada's premiere distance education institution as well as the vital question of whether oatmeal is in fact soup. *Starring: AUSU President Karen Fletcher and AU President Dr. Peter Scott*



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Forthcoming titles investigate intriguing topics, from racism in Southern Alberta, the power of the law, racist practices in the Canadian justice system, to the digital education environment. [Check out the latest AU Press catalogue](#) for a sneak peek at upcoming releases!



PRESENTS

AUSU

Indigenous Student Award

There is a new award offered at AU - the [AUSU Indigenous Student Award](#)!

The application is available [here](#) and the deadline to apply is **January 15, 2023**. Once you complete the applications, find the submission portal [here](#).

Questions? Please contact the [Student Awards Unit](#).



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