

THE VOICE

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BEST OF THE VOICE 2023



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The Best of the Voice Magazine 2023

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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

Best of The Voice 2023

Karl Low



It's that time again, folks. At the beginning of each year, I like to have a look back, with your help, at the articles that made for the Best of the Voice Magazine over the past year. Of course, like previous years, this isn't just a pick of whatever the top viewed articles are, but rather a representative look at the best of a typical Voice Magazine, with picks from each of our regular columns, writers, and articles, such that if you wanted a birds eye view of what makes a Voice Magazine a great one, this issue is a perfect example of the kind of thing we strive to be.

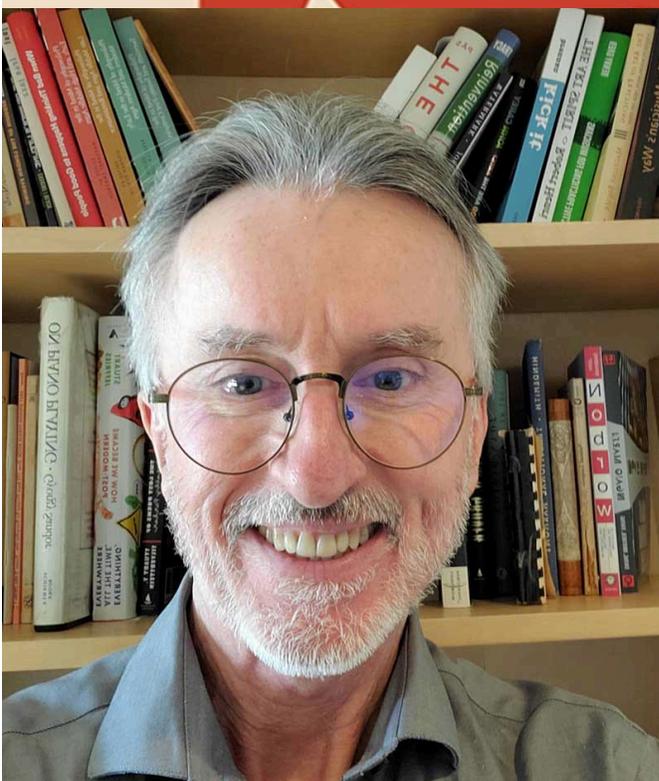
This year, we've got interviews, advice, humour, articles that dig into different areas of society, or that have an effect on AU itself. And almost every article in here was nominated by readers like you, I just got to be the guy who made the final choice among those.

So, without further ado, I welcome you to 2024, and encourage you to start it off by looking at what made us great in 2023!

Enjoy the read!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karl". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that loops back under the 'l'.

MINDS WE MEET



The Voice Magazine recently had a chance to chat with David Story (he/him), a Faculty of Humanities Major with a Minor in Philosophy from Toronto, Ontario.

On a personal note, David let us know that he is “a professional musician and educator.” He continued, “Previously, I spent 4 decades in the entertainment industry as a musician and producer in three countries. I’ve worked with the famous, infamous, hopeful, and hopeless on big stages, little stages, and occasionally on TV; playing jazz, pop, orchestral, and occasionally country music. It was a colorful career. I have a parallel career, that continues, in the arts as a synthesist, percussionist, and pianist playing avant-garde and experimental music.”

When asked how he best studies, David had some great tips for fellow students. “I block off time during the weekdays for a bit each day. On the weekends, I burrow in the office for longer shifts. I do not listen to music when I study. However, I do take a break every hour, and a walk every two hours.”

As for his advice for new students and/or prospective students? David had two main points: “You need to be a strong independent learner,” and “It takes longer than I anticipated to complete assignments.”

When he is not busy studying, David enjoys playing the drums and the xylophone with his friends, as well as spending time with his wife. In fact, he considers his wife “of seven years ... a retired professor of education and former associate dean” to have had the greatest influence on his desire to learn.

He also finds time to read, mentioning *Time Power* by Brian Tracy as the one book that has made an impact on his life. “It is a book that made me confront and organize my priorities at work and play. I return to it every couple of years and reassess my progress,” he stated.

In addition, he let us know about his most memorable vacation, which was “a summer on the Mediterranean playing my piano, drinking wine, eating paella, and hanging out.”

His most memorable AU course so far has been PHIL 240: Ancient Philosophy: The Rise of Reason in a Mythic World. “It brought wonder back into my life. The intellectual life of a 63-year-old man can get a little stale. It is a real kick in the pants, as my grandfather used to say. I find the readings inspiring and the assignments humbling. In short, it has been, and continues to be, a transformational experience,” he explained. He’s found his online learning experience to be “effective,” explaining, “I work online as a musician/educator which helped temper my expectations.”

Although David’s experience with communicating with his tutors has varied “from tutor to tutor,” he mentioned that “everyone has been encouraging.”

The Voice Magazine asked David what his first project would be if he were the new president of AU. He stated that he would “fight to preserve the independence of the university from political interference.”

We also asked David which famous person, past or present, he would like to have lunch with, and he chose French author and philosopher Voltaire. He explained, “He was a real hell raiser against entrenched authority and funny as can be. Lunch would be at a Michelin starred restaurant in the French countryside sometime in June. The wine would flow as he gives me an update on heaven.”

David also let fellow students know about his most valuable lesson learned in life. “Who you associate with determines everything. It is a lesson I unfortunately learned late in life,” he stated.

And for his proudest moment? “The A I earned on my first course at Athabasca. It was ENG 255. My high school career was a disaster, though my college days were a more successful endeavor. However, as my first degree was in jazz composition, I was unsure if I was up to the discipline of academic study.” Best of luck David!

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!

A number of MWM articles were nominated this year. I picked this one from the list as it has a little bit of everything, a student with a bit of an unusual current career, a connection to the issues of the time, some advice, and comments toward both the positive and negative aspects of the AU experience.



Best of Fiction 2023: The Magic Hat Lucy Djorno A Wearable Wish Fulfiler

All Aden wanted for his birthday was to ride on a bus. All he had ever wanted was to ride on a bus. But his parents told him that walking everywhere was better. Aden didn't think walking anywhere was better, and he thought it had more to do with money. But money is something you can't talk about unless you have plenty of it.

Grandpa visited the afternoon of Aden's birthday. He brought a gift in a paper bag. Aden opened the bag and found a hat. Not a store-bought hat, but a hand-made one Grandpa had picked up at the second-hand shop. The hat's design was made of four different colours, and sort-of looked like a hockey toque but the colours didn't match any team Aden knew of.

He thanked Grandpa just the same. Aden put the hat on to show how much he liked it, even though he didn't, really.

Grandpa winked at Aden.

"It's a magic hat, Aden," said Grandpa.

"Magic, like how?" asked Aden, unconvinced.

"Well," said Grandpa, "just put it on and make a wish and you'll see!"

Aden put the hat on. He closed his eyes tightly and said his wish in his head. *I want to ride on a bus.*

"Have you made your wish?" asked Grandpa? "Well, let's go outside and see if it came true."

Aden's mother helped him get his coat and boots on, and she pulled the zipper right up to his chin. "Have fun," she said.

Aden didn't think going out in the cold was going to be fun. He hoped Grandpa wouldn't make him walk too far.

Grandpa and Aden walked halfway down the block. Then Grandpa stopped, and he turned around as if he was looking for something.

There it was, right on time.

Aden stood at the curb with his mouth hanging open. It was a bus, and it stopped right next to him and the front doors opened wide. Aden felt a blast of warm air exhale from the bus.

"Get on," said Grandpa, giving him a little nudge. "It's your birthday wish."

Aden climbed up the steps and turned left to face all the bus-riders. Grandpa paid the driver, then held Aden's shoulder and steered him to an empty seat.

Aden was entranced. He didn't utter a single word during the whole ride. He just looked at the people getting off the bus and getting on. He was fascinated by the cord some people pulled, and the red lights that spelled S-T-O-P near the front of the bus.

The windows were fogged up and Aden wiped a window with his coat sleeve so he could see the shops and cars they passed. He unzipped his coat, put his mitts in his pocket, and took off his hat. It was so hot in the bus, but he loved the feeling of the wheels rumbling under his feet.

A few blocks later, Grandpa told Aden to pull the cord. Aden pulled it, and watched the S-T-O-P lights come on at the front of the bus. When the bus pulled up at the curb, Grandpa and Aden got off the bus.

"That was awesome!" breathed Aden. He spoke quietly, as if he'd just come out of church.

"We'll have to walk back," said Grandpa. "I only had the fare for one way."

Aden pulled his zipper up to his chin again, and pulled his mitts out of his pocket. It was then he realized he'd left the magic hat on the bus.

He felt a bit sad about the hat, but he was still floating in elation from the bus ride. Aden pulled his hood over his head and walked back with Grandpa. Aden chattered the whole way about the bus ride.

Gary found the hat as soon as he took his seat on the bus. He felt sorry for whoever had lost it, because it was a miserably cold day out.

Gary took the bus every day to and from work. He had only moved to the city a few months ago and riding the bus was his only social life. He saw the same people on the morning bus, and a different group of people on the afternoon bus. He nodded to his fellow passengers, but nobody ever talked much on the bus.

I wish I could meet some people my age, thought Gary. He'd like to go to the movies or to coffee shops, but he didn't like going alone. It was difficult to meet people in a big city.

When Gary got off the bus at the downtown depot, he hesitated. His apartment was only a block away, but he decided to make one stop before he walked home.

He went inside the bus depot building, where people waited for their connecting buses to arrive. He walked up to the ticket desk and asked if there was a lost-and-found box somewhere. He held up the magic hat.

"I found it on the bus," Gary told the ticket seller. She was a nice-looking girl about his age. She smiled at him as she reached for the hat.

"That was nice of you to turn it in," she said. "I haven't found people in town to be too helpful since I moved here."

"I'm new here, too," said Gary. He had an idea. "Say, do you like movies? I've been wanting to see the latest Rapid Ryker flick. Just need someone to go with."

"Funny, I was just wishing a second ago that I could go see that movie!" said the girl. "I'm Ellen, by the way. I'm off work in, like, two minutes. Can you hang around and maybe we can grab a coffee and make plans for the movie?"

Ellen tucked the magic hat in the lost-and-found box next to her desk, where it waited for its next assignment.

Having some regular fiction in The Voice Magazine was always something I looked forward to, and this year it came to fruition, with Lucy D'jorno submitting a number of flash fiction pieces. Being able to write complete stories in such a short format is a difficult skill, and I was happy to see she gained some recognition for it as this was one of a couple of her pieces that were nominated. I chose this one from issue 3132 on August 25th because, in a way, it's actually two short stories, both complete, both wholesome and somewhat heart-warming, and both providing the reader a real picture of the story and characters, including the titular character, an inanimate object that is left with just enough mystery to make it interesting.

Best of 2023 Seletion: The Creepiness of Googling Yourself

Alek Golijanin



Have you ever tried Googling yourself and paying attention to the search engine suggestions that pop up as you type? Well, that process is made possible by something known as algorithms, and it is what the digital world runs on.

An algorithm is a procedure used for solving a problem or performing a computation and they act as an exact list of instructions that conduct specified actions step by step. Algorithms are the lifeblood of search engines like Google and Bing, and they are what makes search engines so effective at providing us with the answers that drive our curiosity. Over time, search engines have been able to spot out patterns with specific searches to the point that they will suggest what users are trying to search for before the search is fully typed.

Sometimes searching yourself on Google or Bing can be a good way to waste some time, but other times it can turn into quite the experience, for better or for worse. Here is how that "experience" turned out for me.

Mi amor vida

If someone was to ask us to guess what searches were synonymous with Leonardo DiCaprio, I would say that it would be searches that revolve around his love life and it would include questions like “Who is DiCaprio dating?”, “Is DiCaprio married?”, “Did DiCaprio get married?”, “What is DiCaprio’s wife’s name?”, and “Does DiCaprio have a child?” These searches are quite funny because DiCaprio’s “taste in women” is critiqued every few years, as he gets older, and his “new” girlfriends get younger.

Now, imagine swapping out “DiCaprio” for your name and having these exact questions get suggested by Google or Bing. Believe it or not, that is what I got, and although I found it hilarious at first, it became quite creepy. Whoever the people were that were inquiring about mi amor vida, they are better off watching TMZ because the love life of people of Ottawa is boring compared to the love life of people in Hollywood.

Ringo Outlaw

My last name is Golijanin, it is not Scofield, like the two brothers from Prison Break, and yet Google and Bing were suggesting, “Is Alek Golijanin still alive?”, “Is Alek Golijanin in jail?”, “Is Alek Golijanin not in jail?”, and “Where is Alek Golijanin now?”. To be fair, I was born in the Balkans, I did grow up in Heron Gate, and I have travelled to Colombia and the Dominican Republic, countries that are ranked 1st and 2nd for being both drug trafficking and human trafficking hubs, and that might be peculiar to some people.

Who knows, perhaps people are living out their dreams of being private investigators by conducting searches over the internet. However, what makes me curious is whether or not these searches occurred after people watched police shows like CSI, True Detective, or Criminal Minds. Maybe. Maybe not.

“I’m broke baby! I ain’t got no money!” – Paid in Full 2002

The next set of questions that were suggested by Google and Bing would lead me to believe that they were asked by finance majors, “What is Alek Golijanin’s salary?”, “What is Alek Golijanin’s net worth?” and “What is Alek Golijanin doing now? Whoever the people were that were curious about these aspects of my life, they are better off applying to work at the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA), and if they end up getting hired, they could find the answers to their questions by carrying out a search in the CRA’s internal database. It may get them fired, but it will get them the answers that they yearn for.

For me, unless someone was driving a super car or a mega yacht, or if they were playing in the big leagues or on mainstream TV, I would not bother wasting time to look up their “worth”. However, it sure would be funny if I paid one of those “Forbes” pages to proclaim me a billionaire, similar to how they have done with some celebrities, who were nowhere near being billionaires. And if I am unable to make it on the “billionaire list”, maybe I can try to pay to get on one of those “Top something under something” lists, which are also completely meaningless, but just as vain.

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

This one was one of my selections. It comes from issue 3116 at the end of April, and I chose it in part because it’s a fun topic but also because it subtly highlights one of the darker areas of modern society, just how easy it is for good information to be completely wrong in an incorrect context. And while Google and other information tools are great at finding good information, as this article shows, putting it into the correct context can be another issue entirely.



Best of 2023 Selection: 10 Skills to Go From Housewife to Domestic Goddess

Marie Well



Is it anti-feminist to want to be a domestic goddess or a housewife? Not when we throw in skills like IT and home repair. And not when we don't have to be female to gain the status, either. All we need is the intense desire to be the best homebody ever.

But it's not enough to be a domestic goddess wannabe. No. The ultimate state is to be the ideal domestic goddess—a vision of household excellence. So, what does an iconic domestic goddess do? Here are ten superpowers domestic goddesses must have to be the stars of domestic performance:

Janitorial and decluttering skills: Have we ever had our closets organized where all the reds, blues, pinks, and yellows each had their section? Sigh! I had it once, and to be domestic goddesses, we must have it again. Decluttering requires extra shelving, storage bins, downsizing, and labels. But the janitorial arts, too, are a must. We have room to grow as domestic goddesses if we don't yet have microfiber cloths, an ostrich feather or microfiber duster, a whisk broom, a cleaning toothbrush, and a cleaning apron.

Interior Design: Do we follow the rules of three (three vases; three bowls) and have wall pictures that contain colors of the furniture, pillows, or ornaments in the room? If so, we've likely mastered interior design aesthetics. But can interior design be a hobby? Yes, and it can be more—it can be the hallmark of a goddess. It can increase home value, improve mood, and enhance productivity. Therefore, every domestic goddess needs interior design courses.

Ironing and laundry military style: Every domestic goddess must know how to make their loved ones look as good as highly decorated military personnel. This can go as far as ironing pants using wax in the creases. My grandma's obituary had one person comment that she "had the shiniest shoes and the sharpest creases." That's the mark of a domestic goddess.

Gardening and landscaping: Plants, flowers, and gardens signal that a domestic goddess is nearby. We can sign up for gardening classes. And gardening counts for exercise, improves mental health, and helps with anxiety. Gardening as therapy has two prime benefits: the act is cathartic and soothing, and the vegetables and herbs are health-giving. And we mustn't discount the excellent oxygen from fresh plants. Mom had plants hanging everywhere in her home—and seven acres of flowers. Domestic goddesses give their households the optimal in plant life.

IT skills: What are the best IT skills for a domestic goddess to learn? AU has an introductory Web programming course. That's an excellent start if we like unstructured, project-based learning. Other IT skills are mastery of Microsoft Office, cloud computing, cybersecurity, and AI. A true domestic Goddess will not just have a cursory understanding of these topics but be able to program in at least one area.

Financial investments: Domestic Goddesses don't just do budgets and manage finances; they also invest in the stocks and options markets. A family member says the stocks and options markets are a sure-fire way to lose money. But that's not the case when we've honed the craft. And it can take years of study on stocks and options to have profits vastly outweigh losses—and

it's still not guaranteed. Some investing skills to learn are technical analysis, trader psychology, and day trading. And once we master essential stock investments, we can graduate to the Chicago Board of Options Exchange's free options education. Options investing is the sign of a domestic goddess with financial wizardry.

Sewing: The ability to sew a button is necessary for any domestic goddess. But what about the ability to take a pattern and make a clothing item that perfectly fits our loved ones? Now, that's a domestic goddess! Better still, what about the ability to create a pattern—from scratch—and make an original dress or suit? Let's take that reasoning further: how about the ability to modify clothing to give the illusion that our household members are all hourglass figure types? Again, domestic goddesses have this knack.

Home repair and renovations: A domestic goddess who can repair a sink, TV, sewing machine, toilet, and washing machine is admirable. In other words, a domestic goddess with trade skills is a household boon. I read that hardware stores, like Rona or Lowes, offer classes in home repair and renovation. Some home repairs may even be tax deductible; others require a permit. A DIY home repair goddess can transform any bathroom, floor, and kitchen into a domestic paradise.

Dietician and culinary skills: Every household demands a dietician, given the rise of inflammatory and chronic diseases. And who better to assume this role than the domestic goddess? The home may even need a dog dietician. Indeed, a dietician with culinary skills is the lottery prize for any household. Fresh fruit, flaxseed smoothies, kale, and spinach salads are tell-tale signs that a domestic goddess lives here.

Massage: Who doesn't love a massage? The massage benefits range from stress relief to muscle tension alleviation. And every domestic goddess must have massage skills. Community colleges offer massage therapy training for professional purposes. But for those who want massage expertise but are pressed for time, there are YouTube videos, library books, and online courses. So, massage the whole household. Massage the kids' backs. Massage the dog. Dog massage is an art every pet owner should know, especially if the pet is stressed. And massage everyone's feet. Foot massages are highly coveted in other parts of the world.

Nothing is more fun than gaining skills—and everyone who lives in a home needs domestic skills. So, why not fine-tune our inner domestic goddesses for the sheer fun of it? There's nothing anti-feminist about caring for the places we spend most of our time. And there's everything right about aspiring to become a 21st century domestic goddess.

Take an initial viewpoint that raises an eyebrow, then provide enough reasoning to raise the other eyebrow as you realize it's actually a pretty useful idea. Throw in some helpful hints and personal experience on how to get it done, and you've got a contender for a Best of the Voice article, like this one from issue 3121 in early June.



Best of 2023 Selection: Why You Should Try Omakase at Least Once in Your Life

Xine Wang



Recently I had a chance to tour Vancouver and try some of the freshest seafood in Canada. However, one thing that had been on my bucket list for a long time was “omakase”. Omakase is a Japanese word that translates to “I leave it up to you” or “chef’s choice”. In the context of dining, this refers to a style of meal where the chef curates and serves a multi-course menu based on their expertise, creativity, and fresh seasonal ingredients available. Rather than ordering dishes from a menu, omakase is a showcase of the chef’s skills and takes you on a journey of flavors that build up, but also round out, your entire meal.

It is a very different experience that I’ve never had before. I found the entire experience very intimate and entertaining at the same time. However, truth be told the entire meal was not cheap, and definitely not a budget dinner option. But given it was on my bucket list for years, I finally bit the bullet and decided to try it in lieu of an entire Japan trip this summer.

Here’s why you should try Omakase at least once in your life.

1. **Trust:** I found that when I typically order from a menu, I had full control of what I would be ordering. I tend to gravitate towards certain items and neglect others. At a sushi restaurant, I like to stay away from heavy carbohydrate options such as rice balls or maki rolls. At an omakase, the entire choice of the dinner was not in my hands. I found it initially very frustrating not knowing what my meal would consist of and wondering if I would be satiated at the end. However, the chef did an extraordinary job introducing each ingredient. He would be communicating with us at all times, entertaining us with knife skills and also explaining the ingredients that went into making the small tapa like dishes.

2. **Beauty:** As the saying goes, our eyes always eat before us. Even before we begin to dine, the colors, presentation, and plating is imperative to the whole experience. I find that even though sometimes I cook well at home, when the food isn’t presenting well (too mushy, not enough colors, or a lack of texture and variety) it makes for a boring meal no matter how good it tastes. The entire omakase experience was like an art show. The various colors from the fresh green wasabi to the pink translucent features of each fish were a visual showcase. The chef really paid attention to the aesthetics, and the best part was being able to witness how he created the stunning pairings of color and taste.



3. **Culinary education:** I found one aspect that I often missed during my culinary experience was understanding the history behind the cuisine. I also didn’t understand traditional Japanese cuisine as I often ate Japanese fast food such as katsu and fast-food sushi. However, Japanese cuisine emphasize on fresh, local ingredients. Especially



ensuring the ingredients are in season. For example, edamame is currently a popular snack in Japan as it is in season right now. Another ingredient that is harvested in the summer is eggplant, which was used in the tempura I had as part of the multi-course experience.

Whether you're a food enthusiast, an adventurous eater, or someone looking to explore new culinary horizons, trying omakase allows you to immerse yourself in a world of flavors, textures, and culinary craftsmanship. It's an experience that goes beyond a typical meal, offering a sensory journey that celebrates the artistry and passion of the chef.

Xine Wang is a post-graduate health-science AU student, aspiring clinician, globe-trotter, parrot-breeder and tea-connoisseur.



Xine Wang had the most articles nominated by readers. This one, from late June, issue 3124, I chose because of the combination of beautiful imagery and the look at a cultural experience that echoes the diversity of experience brought by all AU students.



Scholarship of the Week

Digging up scholarship treasure for AU students.

Scholarship name: Children's Aid Foundation Scholarship

Sponsored by: Children's Aid Foundation of Canada

Deadline: January 24, 2024

Potential payout: \$5000 per academic year

Eligibility restriction: Applicants must have been or will be in the temporary or permanent care of the Ministry or Department responsible for child protection services up until their age of majority birthday or had been in permanent care of the Ministry or Department responsible for child protection services for at least 12 months; and be attending a post-secondary institution full-time or on a reduced schedule due to an academic accommodation, for a full school year starting in September or January. See [full eligibility requirements](#).

What's required: An online application, details of which will be revealed after you create a login.

Tips: Check out other scholarships also sponsored by the Children's Aid Foundation.

Where to get info: cafdn.org/for-youth/educational-support/



Best of 2023 Selection: Seventeen Determined Minutes

Jessica Macleod



Can you think of an important task you know you should be completing but you're just not getting around to it? Maybe it's an assignment, or some cleaning and organizing, or your workout. You want to do it, really, you do. Particular goals or dreams may even be tied to this task. You want that end result of a good mark, a clean house, or reaching that target level of fitness, yet you find yourself putting things off. I've found a trick that steers me away from overthinking and non-doing and into productive action. I call it *Seventeen Determined Minutes*.

I know what you're thinking: seventeen minutes is not enough, not for something important or meaningful. Maybe you've automatically rounded the time down to fifteen minutes. Is this your pessimism coming through? Perfectionism? Some all-or-nothing thinking? For whatever reason, your mental refrain probably sounds like this: *I'll get into it when I have more time or a better mindset, and then I can do a better job*. I hate to break it to you, but that sort of thinking only keeps us stuck and disappointed in ourselves.

When faced with this tiny chunk of time (it's only seventeen minutes after all), many people will check email, scroll through social media feeds, and see what's new in the headlines or on YouTube. With that kind of mindset, we're blinding ourselves to many daily opportunities for productivity by killing our time instead of making the most of it.

Seventeen minutes can be beneficial, however. In this short period of time you can start that assignment with a brainstorm and notes, you can tidy up, or you can do some cardio. I've used this trick for all those tasks. I swear by it for doing some new writing every day. And guess what: *Seventeen Determined Minutes* may also help you continue the task past the allotted time. It can also make the next step, which is doing it again, more likely.

Try It

Pick a task you dread or have been putting off. Designate a start time. Adjust the alarm on your phone so that when the time expires, you hear something cheerful. Adjust your thinking from the whole task or goal to merely seventeen minutes of effort. Prepare yourself for a tiny bit of progress.

Start your timer and then give it your best shot for seventeen minutes. Open your mind to the experience of doing this one task, right here in the present moment, ignoring inner chatter or distractions.

When the alarm signals your achievement, enjoy that moment. Take a satisfied breath and then either keep going or schedule your next session.

Why it Works

When we change our expectations, we change the experience. At the end of seventeen minutes, the larger task or goal may not be complete. The quality you expect at your finish line may be a far cry from these early efforts. But for that chunk of time, you are turning off cognitive distortions (the perfectionism, pessimism, fear, and all-or-nothing thinking) and instead achieving marginal gains. In his book, *Atomic Habits*, James Clear argues that marginal gains made over time are key. "If you want better results," he says, "then forget about setting goals. Focus on

your system instead” (Clear 2018). By systems, Clear is referring to the processes you employ to get things done. In other words, how you do things impacts your likelihood of success or failure. Runners don’t reach a finish line just because it is their specific goal. They get there through months of building strength and endurance. They get there one stride at a time. I don’t get to be a writer without writing regularly.

Seventeen Determined Minutes can be one of those small but effective changes to your systems. Once we start something and sustain our effort, even for a short period of time, the task no longer seems so uncomfortable. If you’re out for a run, you eventually reach a moment when you settle into a comfortable pace and the rest of the run is easier than the first block or so was. In yoga or meditation, the rewards arrive when we can focus more on our body or breath than on our busy day or the world around us. More often than not, those moments of change do not come in the first five minutes. We have to settle into a bit of a commitment, but not one that seems too daunting.

When the alarm sounds at the end of *Seventeen Determined Minutes*, we’ve accomplished something. We are in process. We have moved. We’ve achieved a marginal gain, which is way better than no gain at all. Seventeen minutes ago, we had the entire task ahead of us. Now we don’t.

After only seventeen minutes of effort, we have put in the time and honoured our commitment. We’ve made visible progress and built confidence that we can carry forward. We are now more likely to repeat this success. Almost certainly there will be more to do. Quite often our first efforts are pretty rough. However, we will take the next step with more certainty when we know that our previous step was sound.

I see *Seventeen Determined Minutes* as crucial to my writing system. Plus, it almost always leads to a period of productivity that extends beyond the set time. It’s my warmup. It’s my confidence builder. It gets my butt in the chair, brain working, and fingers moving. I write in stream-of-consciousness style and let any and all ideas, thoughts, and details pour onto the page. This brief period of time is also a respite from my critical mind, which I’ll employ at a later stage. While I didn’t write this article in seventeen minutes, I did use seventeen-minute chunks of motivation to help me write it.

There’s nothing magical about the minutes themselves. The magic comes from how we see those minutes and the system we’re building through them. Putting in seventeen minutes of determined effort builds confidence, fights procrastination, and increases productivity. If we know we can meet that simple objective once, we know we can do it again, and again, and again. It’s arriving at your finish line one manageable step at a time.

References

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Jessica MacLeod is a writer, editor, and indexer happily living with her family in rural Eastern Ontario. She loves learning, creating, reading, writing, and actively enjoying the outdoors.

From our May 19th edition, issue 3119, this article was nominated by a couple of readers, with one pointing out that it actually worked to help them keep on track. We all know how hard it can be to keep up with what we need to do, so with this method now having been vouched for, I figure it deserves to be here among The Best of the Voice 2023. Hopefully you'll find its help is still accurate.



Best of Beyond Literary Landscapes

Natalia Iwanek

Death and Dying



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 will be underscoring and outlining various literary genres, authors, and recent reads and can serve 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’s column focuses on a literary theme, which may, at first glance, appear quite bleak. However, as this is simply a natural process of life that we will all meet one

day and have surely considered, it is also a theme that has naturally been contemplated by various authors countless times, in both literature and non-fiction.

What

Some well-known works that focus on the literary theme of death and dying include *The Death of Artemio Cruz* by Carlos Fuentes, *As I Lay Dying* by William Faulkner, and *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* by Gabriel García Márquez.

Other examples include *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* by Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare, and *When Breath Becomes Air* by Paul Kalanithi.

Where

These works are set in Mexico, Colombia, Italy, Imperial Russia, as well as the United States.

When

These works take place during the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries.

Why

The theme of death and dying may be of interest to students who would like to contemplate existential themes in life, as well as those who would like to consider how the treatment of death is portrayed in various cultures and across various time periods.

How

AU’s wide range of diverse courses make it easy to study this topic in depth. Courses related to Death and Dying are available in a variety of disciplines, including one’s that may fit into your Degree Works. (Always check with an

AU-thentic Events Upcoming AU Related Events

Library Chat

Tues, Jan 9, 10:30 am to 2:30 pm MST
Online

Hosted by AU Library
www.athabascau.ca/library/index.html
No pre-registration needed; access through chat box on home page

Library Chat

Thur, Jan 11, 10:30 am to 2:30 pm MST
Online

Hosted by AU Library
www.athabascau.ca/library/index.html
No pre-registration needed; access through chat box on home page

AUSU Psych Night with Dr Kharah M Ross

Thur, Jan 11, 5:00 to 6:00 pm MST
Online

Hosted by AUSU
www.ausu.org/event/psych-night-2/
RSVP through above link

All events are free unless otherwise noted.

AU counsellor to see if these particular courses fulfill your personal graduation requirements!)

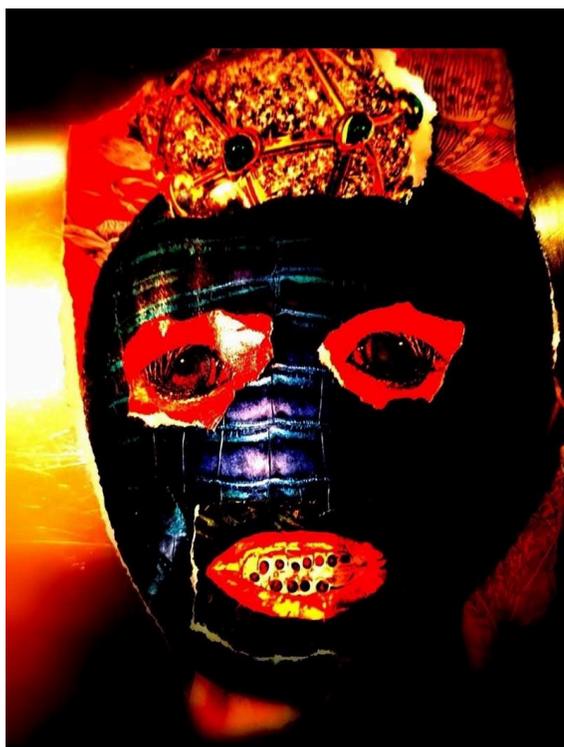
AU students interested in this topic may consider ENGL 492: Research and Writing Projects in Literature, a senior-level, three-credit course, in which they “may wish to focus on a particular literary theme, idea, or theoretical problem.” (Please note that ENGL 211: Prose Forms and ENGL 212: Poetry and Plays, as well as two senior-level English courses and the permission of the course coordinator are required prior to enrollment). Happy reading!

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

I was wondering if the Beyond Literary Landscapes column would receive any nods because it's quite a different format from articles you'd see pretty much anywhere else. But part of what makes AU unique is that this was a reader's selection. After all, where but AU would you find a reader who found what is essentially a thematic recommendation suggestion as something that made an impact to them.

Best of [blue rare]: Ra-Ra-Rasputin: Life Lessons From the Mad Monk and Others

Oliver Moorcraft-Sykes



As I get older, I place increasing importance upon self-improvement in both body and mind. Rarely a day goes by when I am not seriously reflecting upon all the ways that I can become even more self-actualized and humble. In pursuit of this progress, I incorporate gleanings from a variety of sources into my daily learning. For instance, upon rising mid morning, you can often find me studying a variety of texts, both scientific and mystical, from the *I Ching* and the Bible to the *Malleus Maleficarum* and *The 48 Laws of Power*. Most importantly, I pay close attention to the examples of several inspirational historical figures, considering them to be my mentors across time and space.

When I think of a sensible approach to living a rich and full life, it's hard for me not to think of the late nineteenth/early twentieth century Russian mystic and holy man, Grigori Rasputin. I will grant you that, with his greasy beard and general Charles Manson vibe, the man also known as the Mad Monk may not be everyone's idealized picture of mental and physical wellness. Still, here was an hombre who, despite being a heavy drinker

and clearly more than just a little bit coo-coo-cachoo, managed to rise from humble origins, befriend Nicholas II (the last czar of Russia), and become enormously influential within his court.

Admittedly, he made many enemies along the way. Still, he managed to survive numerous assassination attempts, including stabbing, strangling, and drowning. For someone like myself, who tends towards hypochondria, this level of robustness is quite inspiring. In one such incident, Grigori fortuitously escaped cyanide poisoning because he had been eating honey-laden Russian tea cakes washed down with sweet madeira wine. You may feel that his is not a relevant example for you, as no one is out to get you, but you would be surprised! Also, having a well-developed taste for booze and pastries myself, I often like to trot this story out as an admonition to my more excessively diet-obsessed friends. I think most mental health professionals and inspirational speakers would agree that resilience, enjoying life, making an impact in the world, and ultimately

being immortalized in a disco earworm by Boney M are all important hallmarks of a healthy mindset and well-lived life.

Nor is Rasputin the only example of oft-maligned figures to whom we should be looking for inspiration. Vlad the Impaler, for instance, has much to teach us about hard work and dedication. Both Kim Jong Un and Donald Trump exemplify the benefits of impressive self-esteem.

When we take the time to reflect, on a deeply personal level, about self-improvement and where to look for guidance and motivation, it behooves each of us to carefully choose the role models to suit our individual values. For me, these figures may be Caligula or the Unabomber. Others, though, may well feel that Mahatma Gandhi or even Martin Luther King are more closely aligned to their personal ideals. There is no right and wrong here; to each their own, no matter how quirky the choices of others may seem. I only hope that, in my own small way, I have been an inspiration to you, my faithful reader.

In mid-October, this article, from issue 3139, inspired a reader to suggest it for The Best of the Voice, 2023, and while it was never explained why, I personally like to think it's the dark humour being put on display while still making a solid point as to what we should look for in a life well lived. In a way, it's taking the concept of a silver-lining and slyly pointing out that the cloud remains dark, despite the lining, and that maybe that's okay anyway.



Best of Fly on the Wall

Jason Sullivan

The Most Wonderful Time of Year in the Tiniest of Moments



Good fiction's infused with all the senses; like Christmas morning, there's sights and sounds, flavours and feelings, thoughts and memories. For me a wondrous childhood holiday moment was my Mother giving me a half teaspoon taste of gravy and asking my single digit self: "does it need more salt?" Perked up to my full youngster height at being cast into this new role of responsibility I'd cock my head to one side, slowly sip the stock, and pronounce my verdict. Nothing felt more empowering at that age than being asked to savour gravy and reveal my thoughts. And no gravy did I savour more, on account of its being seasoned with adding meaning, special importance. Both myself and the gravy elevated in worth and self-worth by my embracing the instant.

I was aware even then of the privilege of having a loving family where these sorts of tasting events occurred. Some of my peers

had tales of holidays that mostly involved hiding in their bedrooms from the tantrums and rampages of the adults in their lives, so the conscious awareness that I was a lucky gaffer had been implanted in my mind. Yet, a recent CBC Radio interview reminds us that often the holidays are triggers toward dark memories, past years haunted by the ghosts of Christmases even further past that were unpleasant in myriad ways. What we'd all prefer, of course, is to relive that holiday

haze of love and peace and goodwill betwixt family members – and leave the past in the past. And so, this episode of the radio show called *Tapestry* delves into the possibilities of fully tasting and wholeheartedly embracing the smallest of possible positive experiences.

The interviewee was a social psychologist named Fred Bryant; he reminds us of something that we all claim to know but forget at a moment's notice: "happiness isn't in things. Happiness is in the relish of things." He asks us to engage in "sensory perceptual sharpening", a process whereby, like a tuning fork, we learn to more deeply encounter the essence of given moment. Instead of looking at brains and chemicals Bryant's empirical intrigues start where the real magic happens: our rational, if complex, flighty, whimsical, and dallying, metaphysical minds. What we choose to pay attention to truly can be an object of our choice, and not a miserable one either—such as an obnoxious diet fad or the effort to never be accused of micro-aggressions such as eye rolls at the family dinner table. Instead, with a simple injunction that we seek to savour life, Bryant opens a panoply of possibilities for our personal betterment.

To savour is to be aware of experiences in their details as itemized aspects of consciousness, but also as realities that are part of a forged process whereby we are actively searching for release from the stresses and strains of our lives. "Just because you're not down doesn't mean you're up", Bryant coyly intoned. Pleasantness and niceties are fine, and countless memes and bumper stickers imply that yes, we'd prefer good karma to bad and that typically dogmas loose in a back-alley encounter with karma. But deeper than ideologies and sanctimonious catch phrases, suggests Bryant, is the attainment of a larger sense of release from the deepest of modern afflictions: "hypersensitivity to hassles".

At Christmas, more than any time of year, annoyances and frustrations can take on downright Biblical proportions. It can be enough to make you want to go sleep in a manger somewhere! Yet, when we're aware that we want to shoot for the stars of sensitivity to enjoyments hitherto unknown, that's when we get rolling in a positive direction on our psychological journey. Like Christmas shopping and, right when you're feeling too bedraggled to proceed even a step further, you find the perfect gift for that beloved someone, perseverance in pursuit of pleasure is what Bryant is all about. There will always be pitfalls along the way and, if we're honest, we know that not every Christmas can possibly be the best one ever, but the magic of savoring is in the making enjoyment a conscious goal—animated by clarity of purpose that only the simplest of goals can provide. Being happy doesn't have to come at the expense of others, either. Nor need it be shared outside of the confines of our craniums. We can simply effectively, and in as many instants as possible, remember to remind ourselves to be here now and see what everything looks, tastes, feels, and smells like. At least one of those senses will likely yield a sense of enjoyment to the master of the machine, our mind.

A corollary here to seeing the best savoury moments in life is an acceptance that not every moment has to be perfect. Just think how much frustration is cast aside when we embrace imperfection, that bacon that got too crispy or that ornament that broke during an instant of doggie commotion. "I've surrendered the pressure, it's incredibly freeing" stated football player Christian McCaffery about excelling on a team of great players rather than as the lone standout with a mediocre club. Sentiments like his can remind us, amidst the toil and hassle (loving toil, loving hassle, we know the discursive drill) of the holidays that it's important to just relax and exhale. Mommy time means wine time to some, a doobie time out to others, but graciously, AU gives us access to potentially the most edifying pastime of all: ducking away from the fray to participate in our private enterprise of bettering our academic minds.

Savouring our scholastic journey can involve a bunch of small bites, or symbolic sips, but it also goes deeper than that. A sense of awareness of the untimed present is implied when we stop and sniff the proverbial flowers of existence. Even indoors we're always-already right there in reality, in the cosmos, in the universe that is at once our forever home and the place that we do all of our

thinking and feeling and appreciating. Yet the outdoors does beckon too, and can be a great means to the graceful end of a holiday visit.

As we mosey out under the winter stars, we can feel the fullness of existence, something that Henry David Thoreau spent much of his writing seeking to illuminate. Thoreau gives a slant on savouring the grand reality of our surroundings; here he reminds us that sometimes serenity comes not from accomplishments or even flavours but from the sheer enjoyment of things as they are. "No Yard! but unfenced Nature reaching up to your very sills: a young forest growing up under your windows, and wild sumacs and blackberry vines breaking through into your cellar; sturdy pitch-pines rubbing and creaking against the shingles for want of room, their roots reaching quite under the house. Instead of a scuttle or a blind blown off in the gale, a pine tree snapped off or torn up by the roots behind your house for fuel. Instead of no path to the front-yard gate in the Great Snow, no gate, no front-yard, and no path to the civilized world." (Thoreau, 1854) The magic of nature is hard to beat, but along with that is the need to sometimes just let things be. If you're blessed with not having to leave the house for a couple days maybe try the old Thoreau method and don't shovel snow for a day. It's like a micro-vacation and, plus, if you want some peace and quiet, folks might think you've left town! Enjoying things as they are, after all, begins with letting things be.

As a boy my Dad would sometimes bring me along to his forestry job sites. And, when a lull in motion and breeze was just right, he'd say "Son, listen! Do you hear that?" The sheer silence would envelope us both and, like a library of souls immersed in the gift of learning, the miracle of nature would unfurl for our sensory enjoyment. It's this appreciation of the goodness that's in life, and the great privilege it is to be alive and to look not only onward to another year but inward to a sense of peace with the present, that may truly be the greatest offering that the Christmas season provides.

Happy Holidays to all and may we all remember to savour as many moments as we choose!

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Even though this one just came out in our last issue of 2023, it was a reader nomination and is a solid example of the Fly on the Wall. I'll readily admit that Jason's columns can be a little tricky to get through; they're not something you approach if you're looking for an easy-breezy read, but they're almost always worth the consideration that they take. This one was no exception.



Best of 2023 Selection: Ableism in Our Textbooks

A Course Review

Jessica Young



Recently I took the AU course PSYC478: Autism Spectrum Disorder. As the mom of a little guy with autism, I thought this would be a great course for me to learn more about my son's disability. While my tutor was excellent, I was dismayed to find that my course materials were riddled with ableist language, sentiments that devalued people with autism, and heavily promoted a highly controversial form of therapy.

First, I took issue with the repeated use of the term "high-functioning autism" throughout the text. Many people in the autism community have expressed that this kind of labeling is harmful. When an autistic person is labeled as "high-functioning" it can minimize their—very real and difficult—struggles; while labeling a person as "low-functioning" is insulting, could make them feel embarrassed or powerless, and dismisses their strengths. People labeled as "low-functioning" can still be extremely intelligent, creative, funny, wonderful people—something that this label does not imply. This is not to mention the connection to the Nazi regime's "euthanasia" campaign against people with disabilities

(which I have also [written about](#)). A more accurate, kind, and inclusive way to communicate the abilities of someone with ASD would be to refer to their level of support needs—as in, they have high, moderate, or low support needs.

Second, the text heavily promoted ABA therapy—a highly controversial form of therapy that many people in the autism community find abusive and traumatizing. ABA therapy asserts that children should be in therapy 20 to 40 hours per week. 40 hours per week is the equivalent of a full-time job. While I understand that there is research supporting that children can make significant gains in this time, I wonder how this would affect their mental health? Might some of these children grow up to feel like they spent their entire childhood "working"? How do the results of ABA therapy compare to less intense, gentler, or more incidental teaching/therapy styles? These are some of the questions that I would have loved for PSYC478 to address.

Furthermore, the videos of ABA "training" that were required for the course made me severely uncomfortable—in my opinion, these therapists look like they are training dogs, not teaching innocent, vulnerable children. I would not allow a therapist or teacher to treat either of my children that way. This is not to mention the story mentioned in Unit 10, about a little boy named Cooper being physically restrained at a table for "table time" while he screamed and tried to get away. This practice is supposed to facilitate play skills—but how is a child supposed to learn (or play, for that matter!) if they are experiencing that level of distress? Did Cooper actually learn to calm himself at the table, or did he just shut down?

Third, the author refers to autistic children and their "healthy" siblings on page 200. My son is not unhealthy. He is neurodivergent. His sister is not the "healthy" sibling. She is neurotypical. Using "healthy" and "unhealthy" as a descriptor further insinuates that there is something wrong with the autistic person, or perhaps there is something that parents could have done to change the diagnosis.

Finally, no where in the text or course commentary were the voices of people with autism represented. It is baffling that AU would feel that it is appropriate to talk about a group of people without including them in the conversation. I think that it is important to note that Indigenous voices have been represented in every Indigenous Studies course I have taken (which is wonderful!)—but why aren't the same provisions made for people with disabilities? Do they not also deserve the chance to speak for themselves?

I love going to AU—I would never have been able to get my degree without it. While I don't want to show my amazing school in a bad light, I also think it is incredibly important for institutions to be held accountable when they miss the mark. I would hate to think of a student who had little or no lived experience with autism, or perhaps a parent of a newly-diagnosed child, taking this course and leaving with an inaccurate, outdated, and frankly—negative perception of what autism is. Language is extremely important when spreading awareness and advocating for people with disabilities.

I am sure AU should be able to find a new textbook to be used for this course that presents a more balanced view of autism and incorporates the voices of people on the spectrum. If this is not possible, perhaps a more thorough course commentary that addresses these issues, or directing students to outside resources is in order. I believe AU has a responsibility to remedy this situation, not only for the students who are paying to receive an education, but for everyone in the autism community.

Jessica is completing her Bachelor of Human Resources and Labour Relations degree while pursuing her passion for writing and drinking coffee.

I'd forgotten about this article from issue 3106, way back at the middle of February, until a reader brought it up. I was very glad they did, as my understanding is that this article spurred some changes and a re-examination of some courses at AU. And any article which can lead to improvements at the university level absolutely deserves to be included as the Best of the Voice.



Unearthing classic articles from previous issues of *The Voice Magazine*

Working on *The Voice's* Best of 2023 issue got us wondering about previous "Best of" issues. We took a stroll through the archives to find these articles, which were featured in the Best of 2013 and the Best of 2003, respectively.

Here come the etexts! Christina M Frey looks at AU's plan to convert text books for most courses from paper to etext. "It's ironic that AU, long known for accommodating students requiring ultimate flexibility, is implementing a program that in practice is quite inflexible." *A Book in the Hand: E-Text Initiative*, January 3, 2014. See more of the Best of 2013 here: www.voicemagazine.org/issues/volume-22-issue-1/

Who needs this stuff? Bill Pollett outlines his plans for after he completes his degree. "Far from resting on my laurels, though, I will enjoy only the briefest of celebratory dinners (I'm thinking instant noodles and Pabst Blue Ribbon) before swiftly enacting Phase Two of my life plan. This stage will involve the gradual and systematic unlearning of all the academic twaddle that I have previously absorbed." *Unlearning*, December 31, 2003. See more of the Best of 2003 here: www.voicemagazine.org/issues/volume-11-issue-52/

Best of 2023 Selection: Liking My Teacher— The Benefits of Adversity

Elisa Neven-Pugh



I truly believe that sometimes the best teachers don't come from books and the classroom but from family. In my case this is my dad's cousin who my sister and I affectionately call Aunt Margaret. When we were talking recently, she said something that finally cleared up a stumbling block in my perspective. We were talking about inspiration and having a positive perspective. She pointed out that while she has sayings to remind her that there are no bad days, there's a difference between that and hard days. This perspective is something I have struggled with for months.

That is, it really is OK to see the good in everything. I really don't have to feel guilty. For example, my reaction to my advocacy being shut down at the school. Do I still get emotional about it? Yes. Do I find myself requiring some mental health assistance lately because of things like this affecting self-esteem in a couple areas of my life? Yes. Do I feel shame about my emotions? Yes. But perhaps maybe it's not shame as much as it is feeling self-conscious. Self-conscious that I actually want to go “This

hurts but... Yes! I make them uncomfortable. That means I'm doing something right in the realm of advocacy and social change. Score! :-)”

And when it comes to the emotions, even the ones that make me feel really uncomfortable, like anger and depression, I find myself celebrating, “Thank goodness I'm experiencing life and I am not desensitized or so angry that I can't see other people's struggles.”

Okay, to be honest, the last one is still more subconscious than the be brave narrative. However, the point is I am getting there. I'm getting to a point where if someone said to me “You can make everyone rally behind you in a positive way and you can change the world tomorrow. And have no spasms. You would never run into another naysayer,” it would be tempting to be honest, especially about the naysayer bit.

But I hope my response would be “No I like my teacher.” Meaning of course the teacher of challenge. Spasms hurt. But they pass. Skepticism hurts, but it only motivates me to show the strength of what works for me. Discrimination hurts. And it must end. But, until then, it gives me purpose..

Sometimes, I don't have this perspective. But I am trying to because I know it's the most effective treatment I have ever had. I'm not ignorant of structural problems. I'm saying it's still good to be me.

So, look up. You might find silver.

Elisa writes infrequently, so I was quite happy when this article, from issue 3140 near the end of October was nominated because I agree that it's one of her best—balancing hopefulness with reality, all wrapped in a solid read with a kicker ending line.



Best of 2023 Selection: The Lie Down Lowdown

Barbara Lehtiniemi

A romp around two crazy-making verbs



O Lay down and go to sleep! A phrase we may have heard when we were children, or said it ourselves to our own restless toddlers. "Lay down and go to sleep!" But wait, is that right? Or is it "Lie down and go to sleep"?

I flatter myself that I have a good grasp of the English language. Spelling is my superpower, punctuation my passion. Grammar—well, mostly okay, but it can be a bit of a grind.

There are two similar verbs that continue to confound me: the verbs "to lie" and "to lay". (Lie in this case meaning to recline, rather than to tell a falsehood. But perhaps there's a connection somewhere.)

Whenever I write something and I want a character to take their ease on a flat surface, such as a bed, or if I want them to take an item and place it somewhere, I have to look up whether I want them to lie or to lay.

Confusingly, the past tense of lie *is* lay. And don't get me started about the present participle of lie (okay, I'm already

started: it's lying. Seriously.)

No matter how many times I look them up, I can't seem to fix it in my mind which verb means which and is conjugated in what way. I always have to stop and look it up (my go-to reference is the 2013 Voice article [Writer's Toolbox – Now I Lay Me Down and Weep.](#)) Or, as is often the case—I reword the sentence to avoid using either lie or lay.

Since I've already had to look it up today, I can tell you the following:

The verb "to lie" pertains to the self—the person performing the action. If I want to take my ease on the sofa, I will lie down. (The memory aid for this is that "lie" contains an "I"—if only I could remember to think of that!)

The verb "to lay" pertains to something or someone other than the self. If I want to place an object (or, I suppose, a small person) on the table or the floor, I will lay it (or them) down.

That's so easy, right? I lie down. I lay my tools down. I lay the baby on the blanket.

But wait, there's more! If the action took place earlier today, then I would say that I lay down on the sofa. I lie on the sofa (now), I lay on the sofa (in the past.) As for my tools and baby, I lay them down (now), I laid them down (in the past.)

Now with the past participle: I have lain on the sofa for an hour now. I have laid my tools down several times. And with the present participle: I am lying on the sofa right now (not literally; I'm actually sitting at my desk.) I am laying my tools down now.

Screaming yet? I am!

It makes the bedtime prayer "Now I lay me down to sleep" a bit confusing (shouldn't it be "lie"?). Except that the person praying is laying themselves down like an object (I lay ME down to sleep, rather than just I lie down to sleep.) Bit of a technicality, but it's correct—I think.

I've always thought I should let sleeping dogs lie. But should I let them lay? The more I think about it, the more my head hurts.

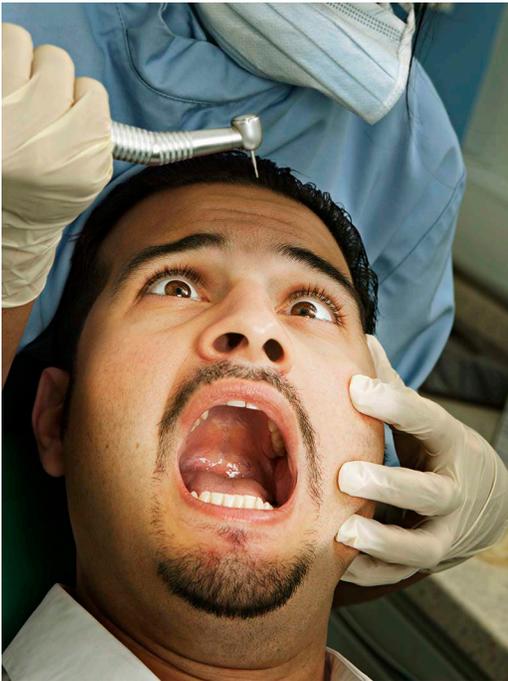
I think I'd better lie down for a while.

Barbara Lehtiniemi is a writer, photographer, and AU graduate (BGS 2018.) She lives on a windswept rural road in Eastern Ontario.

There was a time a few years ago, when every issue of the Voice Magazine would have a bit of writing advice to help students with essays or what have you. While that seems to have fallen out of favor with writers (not with me, I'm an English nerd, through and through) I was happy to have this piece from issue 3109 in early March nominated. It seems like such a simple concept, but I've seen enough writing to know that it's not that easy for many people. So maybe this is just the piece you need to make sure your next essay has that extra bit of polish. Helping students with their work? That has to qualify for the Best of the Voice, right?



Best of 2023 Selection: What Happens When We Stop Eating Sugar? Marie Well



I stopped eating foods with added sugar, except for a restaurant business lunch every two weeks. That means having natural sugars, such as in milk, is okay. But it's not okay for sugar to be in the "ingredients" list on the packaging. That's because sugar on the ingredients list has been added and is unnatural and, therefore, in my opinion, toxic.

Since cutting out sugar, I've saved a thousand or more on dental visits, which is what I spent the prior year. And I look and feel much better. By sharing my story, I hope we all consider the benefits of removing added sugars from our diets.

With that said, here are the benefits I've experienced since cutting out added sugars that we all stand to gain:

We no longer crave sugar. If I eat even a $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of sugar in one day, I get these uncontrollable urges for donuts at Tim Hortons. I mean, the cravings are overwhelming. It's a battle to resist sweets. But if I consistently eat nothing with added sugars (meaning nothing with sugar in the "ingredients" list), then I have zero cravings for anything sweet. And healthy treats like unsweetened hot cocoa, plain yogurt, hemp hearts, and frozen berries taste a thousand times better than they would if I were addicted to sugar.

We look facially better. The tiniest sugar in the ingredients list will appear on my face. Within a week, I'll get acne beside my nose or on my chin. It'll grow horrifically over two weeks and then fade away. But since I've consistently avoided anything with added sugar, I get zero acne. But even a savory sauce on a restaurant meal containing a tiny bit of sugar will cause my face to erupt with an acne mark. So, I ask the servers to skip adding salad dressings or sauces to foods I order. And I enjoy the taste better that way, too, as I've conditioned my body to prefer food in its natural state.

We reduce dental visits to zero. I have the worst teeth. Every second or third month, I used to need dental work, and one dentist consistently recommended "three" fillings each visit. So, now,

the majority of my teeth are comprised of fillings. But since I stopped eating added sugar in the "ingredients" list, I get zero cavities.

We have less chronic inflammation. I wondered why chronic fatigue rarely impacts me these days. There is a correlation between feeling less fatigue and cutting out added sugar. Added sugar can cause highs and crashes—and, yes, fatigue. So, if a chronic condition drains our energy, added sugar should be the first thing to go.

We look leaner. I can only maintain my lighter weight if I exercise frequently and avoid oils, sugars, processed foods, and restaurants. Cutting out sugar is critical. That's because once we eat a bit of sugar, we crave more. And that leads to weight gain. (The same goes for deep fried foods.) I used to eat a daily chocolate brownie from Starbucks. And it beefed me up. It took months to lose the weight. So, cutting out sugar (and exercising) helps us maintain a healthy weight.

So, what do we eat if we cut out all added sugar? I eat a lot of fruit, nuts, canned salmon, sardines, plain yogurt, almond cashew milk, Sunny Boy cereal, hemp seeds, bell peppers, sauerkraut, greens powder, beetroot powder, unsweetened hot cocoa, matcha tea, and not enough vegetables—and that covers 85% of my diet. Sometimes I eat baked chicken and bananas. And I go out for a business lunch every second week, which I order baked or poached with all sauces and dressings removed.

If we avoid sugar, we benefit remarkably. And it's easy to do. But remember, 100% abstinence is easier to achieve than 99%. After all, we deserve to look beautiful and feel healthy.

This article, from issue 3141 in late October, was a reader nomination, and contains a number of the things you'll find in many articles in The Voice Magazine, some advice, some personal experience, and some general take-away ideas that are interesting ones, such as the idea that 100% abstinence is easier than 99%.



Best of 2023 Selection: The Institution of Policing is Self-Harming Itself

Alek Golijanin



Policing is far too important and far too complicated to give credence to any idea that suggests that we get rid of the police or make it harder for the police to do their job. Law and order are the two things that allow for Canada to be Canada: the Canada that the world knows and loves. With that said, it is also important to understand the history behind policing, both police successes and failures, because the institution of policing is cracking from within, and it is entirely self-inflicted.

Today's version of policing has structures around the institution to ensure a just system, where everyone is equal under the law, unlike the earliest forms of policing which date back to ancient Egypt, Rome, China, or even the medieval Middle East. Compared to today's version of policing, those places were lawless, barbaric, and the concept of criminal justice was completely absent. Instead, the idea behind today's policing is that it is comparable to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, where the inherent dignity and inalienable rights of all people are the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world. Despite that seemingly perfect starting

point, the structures that prop up the institution of policing seem to be the ones that are contributing to the expanding cracks in the system, maybe even amplifying them.

While activist groups and their slogans have been blamed for the unfavorable perception of police personnel across North America, specifically the “Black Lives Matter” slogan, that explanation seems a cop out. The social movements and protests that arose out of “Black Lives Matter” all needed a spark to ignite them. That spark came by way of the structures of policing not living up to their potential or intended purposes, causing issues ranging from legislation to oversight bodies and the courts.

The unintended consequences of legislative change.

While watching a recent local news segment, I learned of a story about a legal dispute between community organizers and the police services board, where community organizers were arguing that changes made to them being able to address the board were viewed as and unconstitutional infringement that hampered the ability for community members to adequately have their issues heard by the board. Reducing the talking time by 40 percent made it quite difficult for delegations to provide substantive talking points and to potentially raise intersecting issues, but also limiting a person’s ability to publicly address an oversight body, simply due to the fact that they were signing up every month to do so, was being viewed as an infringement on democratic ideals.

Should our courts rule that the changes do not constitute an infringement, which I expect they likely will because of the grey area nature of the legal language and how it seems the legal standard for infringement is not being met, public opinion on this outcome should be that it is wrong. Although court decisions like this one are legal, the courts have demonstrated that the standard for legal and illegal is not the same as the standard for right and wrong or moral and immoral. However minor that these changes may appear to be, I believe they are an infringement on democratic ideals. And on every historical occasion where there were attacks on democratic liberties, however small, it resulted in unexpected and negative outcomes. In this instance, it is likely to help spread cracks throughout the already fragile institution of policing, even though it is unlikely to be the desired outcome by those with decision-making powers.

The unwillingness to address legislative deficiencies.

Some of the most important structures of the institution of policing are provincial oversight agencies, since policing is largely a provincial matter, and there are similarities between provinces regarding the oversight roles that such structures play within their own province. These provincial bodies are worth getting to know for anyone that wants to get better informed on what it takes to improve the status quo and create the conditions for a healthier society, because these bodies are not impervious to getting things wrong. I experienced it firsthand.

The Ontario Civilian Policing Commission (OCPC) is one of three civilian police oversight agencies in Ontario, with the other two being the Special Investigations Unit (SIU) and the Office of the Independent Police Review Director (OIPRD), but the OCPC has the broadest powers out of the three. The OCPC is a quasi-judicial agency that receives its powers and duties from the *Police Services Act*, and their main responsibilities include conducting investigations and resolving disputes regarding the oversight and provision of policing services. In layman’s terms, they are the “fixers” when a municipal police service starts to veer off track from their mandate and responsibilities.

If the OCPC is to commence an investigation into police matters it can do so in one of two ways: (1) in response to requests from one of the prescribed entities, or (2) on its own motion. Regarding the first manner, “prescribed entities” refers to the Solicitor General, the Independent Police Review Director, a municipal council, or a municipal police services board. With regard to the second, the OCPC will consider information on its own motion and on a discretionary

basis. Although this sounds great in theory and reads great in writing, the execution of these policies can result in the deviation from what is expected to what actually occurs, thus harming the integrity of the institution of policing.

My “deficient” experience with the OCPC

Earlier in the year, I wrote about the controversial slogan, “Defund the police”, and I used that discussion to segue into providing insights on the structures around policing from my own experiences with interacting with those structures. I also shared related takeaways from my time spent as a public policy learner at Harvard Kennedy School’s executive education program. During that period, my educational background proved instrumental in helping me navigate the explanations I would receive as to why certain things could not be done – distinguishing between perceived limitations and real limitations. What I could not imagine was that I would wake up one year later to a response from the OCPC regarding the complaint I had submitted the year prior, but it happened. The OCPC were now requesting to reconnect with me regarding those same matters, after a year had passed and after they had advised me that they had no jurisdiction to further investigate the matter.

Back when I wrote about the issue of defunding the police, I discussed how I reached out to different oversight agencies after one of my childhood friends, who is also a member of my ethnic community, ended up becoming a victim of organized crime. One of the oversight agencies I wrote to at the time was the OCPC, and they eventually responded to me by stating that they had considered the information I provided and to advise me that they did not have the jurisdiction under the *Police Services Act* to further investigate the matter. Then in 2023, an email from the OCPC arrives requesting that I share subsequent information with them. However, there was no introduction, no explanation, nobody had signed off on the bottom of the OCPC’s PDF letter, but they were now “thanking me for bringing the issue to their attention”. Twelve months later and after already stating that they had no jurisdiction, something seemed to have changed, or so it seemed.

The bizarreness of the situation led me to call the OCPC a few days later and I left a request to connect with someone over the phone. The OCPC’s response was that they acknowledged my request but that the OCPC requested that individuals provide information in writing and that the fastest way to do that was over email. Instead, they asked me to provide any questions that I had in writing and over email. Once again, nobody had signed off on the bottom of their PDF letter. Whatever they wanted to do now, given how much time had elapsed, something seemed off and I wanted nothing to do with a “for show” circus.

Instead, I wrote back with suggestions for the OCPC’s two appointees located in Ottawa, and I advised the OCPC that I would look over the OCPC’s policies and aim to make them aware of any systemic barriers that might be holding them back and to share my findings with those with decision-making powers, should they want to make changes to the legislative deficiencies. Sadly, I also made it clear that I was no longer capable of assisting the OCPC with this matter and that any further correspondence from the OCPC about this case would be reviewed and filed, but that I would not be responding to any further communication about this matter. So, I wished them well with their investigation.

It was only after my offer to do a policy review for the OCPC that I received a signed PDF letter, which requested that I “not communicate anything publicly about our communication at this time”. Still, I responded by reiterating my stance and by wishing them well their investigation, and I obliged their request.

A month later, the OCPC decided to contact me once more, this time sharing with me a response provided by Ottawa Police Services Board’s (OPSB) response, which was quite troubling, and asked that I consider providing my own response. At no time did I ever consider dignifying the

OPSB's response or the OCPC's handling of my complaint with any sort of formal response other than mentioning that the investigation was twelve months behind schedule and that there was nothing that was going to come out of it at this point and time, but there were real-life consequences when people played policing and when the lives of newcomers and early-generation Canadians were devalued.

No time for the blame game.

The manner that I had reconnected with the OCPC seemed so bizarre and unprofessional that I needed to get a better understanding of their policies and protocols. How the heck did we go from "Sorry, we do not have jurisdiction" to "Thanks for bringing this matter to our attention"? To figure that out, it required reviewing how the OCPC went about conducting their investigations and living up to their mandate.

The million-dollar OCPC deficiency discovery came in the form of a question, "Was there the potential for the OCPC to be negatively impacted and prevented from fulfilling their mandate as a result of selective omissions of both fact and law by the way of selective statements made by police services boards and their lawyers?" There was in fact a major deficiency that was preventing the OCPC from carrying out their investigations and living up to their mandate: there was legislation that prevented criminal defence lawyers from sitting on police services boards and the law society allowed lawyers to defend the interests of their clients by any means necessary.

The problem with that equation is that there was specific language in legislation that prevented criminal defence lawyers from sitting on police services boards, which are meant to serve as an impartial body at the municipal level. Additionally, the Law Society of Ontario was on record saying that the only way they would be able to initiate disciplinary actions regarding a lawyer who decided to intentionally provide legal misinterpretations to prevent a police services board from taking a hard but necessary position, was if the matter was adjudicated and if the presiding judge made remarks about a lawyer's conduct. Thus, the legislation addressing who was ineligible to sit on a police services board seemed to have been carefully created with an understanding of the limitations of Law Societies while also blackwashing all criminal defence lawyers.

The conclusion that these realizations bring us to is that by having an individual whose background in criminal defence law sit on a police services board, a board's lawyer would no longer have the privilege of being able to intentionally misinterpret the law to allow for a police services board to avoid making hard decisions. The unfortunate in all of this is that many people are not privy to information and experiences that might allow for them to come to these realizations on their own. If it was not for all the manipulating and deceiving that I feel has occurred over the decades, we could have been changing things decades ago and we would be in an entirely different place by now.

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

Alek Golijanin has been looking at various aspects of the law and the legal framework within Canada for quite some time now. This article, back from issue 3137 at the end of September, was one of his earlier explorations of the system driven by his own experiences, and a reader selection.





Dear
Barb

Barbara Godin

Attention Please

Dear Barb:

I am a guy in my thirties, and I have recently been diagnosed with ADHD. I always knew there was something wrong. I have never been able to focus on anything for more than a few minutes. Even in school, my teachers called my parents because they couldn't manage me. My parents were told to put me on medication, but they chose not to after reading up on the long-term effects. Therefore, I struggled but managed to get almost through high school. The ADHD has been manageable at times, although as I'm getting older I find it more difficult to manage. I have been given medication, which helps for most of the day, but as soon as it wears off I am pretty frazzled and at times explosive. I am finding it difficult to maintain relationships as well. What advice would you give to someone in my situation? Thanks, Greg.

Hi Greg:

You are bringing up a very important topic. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ADHD is defined as "one of the most common *neurodevelopmental* disorders of childhood. It is usually first diagnosed in childhood and often lasts into adulthood. Children with ADHD may have trouble paying attention, controlling impulsive behaviors (may act without thinking about what the result will be), or be overly active."

Adults with ADHD (Adult Attention-Deficient/Hyperactivity Disorder) present challenges in all aspects of adult life, from relationships, work, finances, time management, and more. I am not going to focus on the causes and symptoms of ADHD, but rather include some strategies that will help to manage the condition.

Since you are already on medication that's a start, but you also must learn additional coping skills. For individuals with ADHD, the greatest challenge is maintaining focus. Initially when attending a meeting or lecture you are able to focus, but if the topic becomes boring, your mind loses interest and you become restless and find it hard to stay focused. Taking notes while at these meetings will help to keep your attention on what the speaker is saying. This will be a way to bring your mind back to the task rather than going off somewhere. If you are given instructions, repeat them back to the person, that will help you to make sure you clearly understand.

Also, when attending long meetings, feel free to move around, when given the opportunity. A stress ball will help to relieve some of the restlessness and will not bother those around you. Eating well, getting enough exercise, and having adequate sleep patterns will also help you manage your symptoms. Following a regular routine in your daily life will also enable you to focus on what you need to do. I don't know if you have tried meditation, but try short periods of meditation, to begin with, and lengthen the periods as you feel ready. Try some meditation apps on your smartphone. Implementing these changes will not magically make your ADHD disappear, but over time it will help you manage your symptoms and feel better about yourself and your life. Best of luck Greg, I hope this information has been helpful. There is a plenitude of information online about managing ADHD.

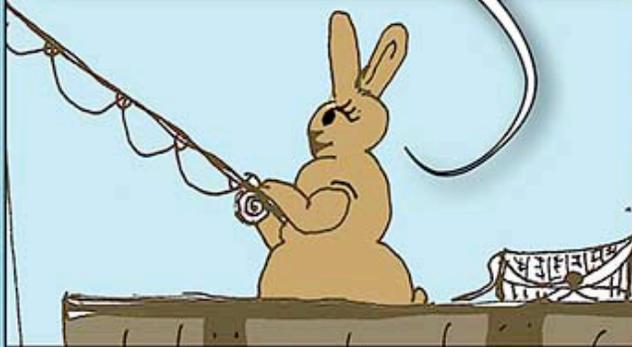
Email your questions to voice@voicemagazine.org. Some submissions may be edited for length or to protect confidentiality; your real name and location will never be printed. This column is for entertainment only. The author is not a professional counsellor and this column is not intended to take the place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

While Barb Godin has moved on to her own publishing career, this article from the middle of June, issue 3123, was still nominated by a reader, and I have to admit Barb's advice and the issues she brought forward every week were one of the things that added to what made The Voice Magazine a good read each week.



Poet Maeve
Next Young'Un

YOU KNOW, MAEVE,
THERE'S TIMES
I THANK MY LUCKY STARS
I WAS BORN A RABBIT.



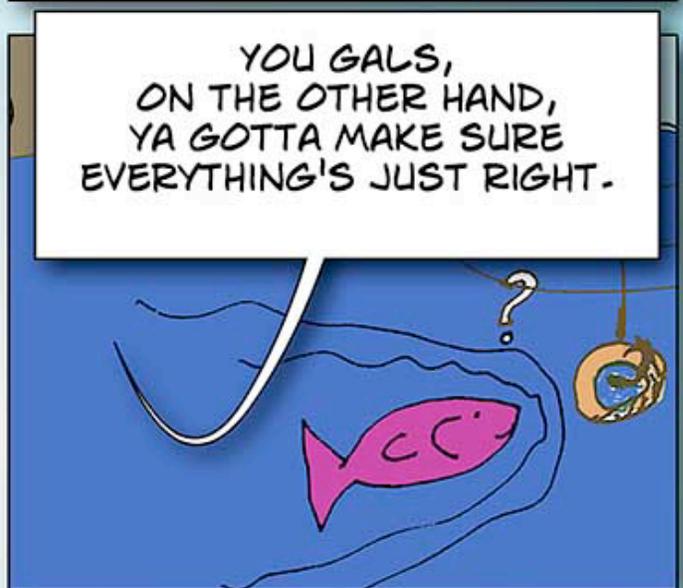
WHY?



NEVER HAS TO ASK MYSELF
IF I CAN PROVIDE
A GOOD HOME
FOR MY NEXT YOUNG 'UN.



YOU GALS,
ON THE OTHER HAND,
YA GOTTA MAKE SURE
EVERYTHING'S JUST RIGHT.



AND IT ISN'T ALWAYS.



I FEEL SORRY FOR YIZ.

NOT AS
SORRY
AS US.
(SIGH.)



Best Wishes This Holiday from AUSU



The holiday season is upon us, and as the year draws to a close, we at Athabasca University Students' Union (AUSU) want to take a moment to extend our warmest wishes to all Athabasca University (AU) undergraduate students. We hope that you have a safe and happy holiday break. As we reflect on the past year and look ahead to the future, we want to express our gratitude for being part of your academic journey.

Office Closure

Please note that our offices are currently closed for the holiday season. We will reopen on **January 2, 2024**, for regular business hours. During this time, our team will be taking a well-deserved break to recharge and spend time with their families. However, even though our physical doors may be closed, we are still here for you.

Prioritizing Rest, Leisure, and Nutrition

The holiday season can often become a whirlwind of activity – shopping, attending gatherings, preparing meals – leaving little time for rest and self-care. As you enjoy this well-deserved break from your studies, we encourage you to prioritize rest and leisure activities that bring you joy and nourish your body with wholesome foods.

Rest is crucial for recharging both physically and mentally. Take advantage of this downtime to catch up on sleep or indulge in some quiet moments of relaxation. Whether it's curling up with a good book by the fire or taking peaceful walks in nature, find activities that help you unwind and rejuvenate.

Engaging in leisure activities that bring you happiness is equally important. Use this opportunity to pursue hobbies or interests that may have taken a backseat during busy study periods. Whether it's painting, writing music, or exploring the great outdoors – do things that make your heart sing.

While indulging in holiday treats, remember the importance of nourishing your body with nutritious foods. Try to incorporate fruits, vegetables, and whole grains into your meals to keep your energy levels up and support overall well-being. A healthy diet can contribute to feeling more energized and ready to tackle the upcoming year.

Contacting AUSU

During our office closure, if you have any urgent requests or inquiries, please send an email to ausu@ausu.org. We will respond promptly upon our return in the new year. Your satisfaction is important to us, and we look forward to serving you with renewed dedication and enthusiasm.

Have a Safe and Happy Holiday Break!

As we bid farewell to another year, we want to express our appreciation for allowing us to be part of your educational journey at AU. We hope that this holiday break brings you peace, joy, and relaxation.

From all of us at AUSU, we wish you a safe and happy holiday break filled with laughter, love, and rejuvenation. May the upcoming year be one of growth, accomplishment, and success in all your endeavours. Happy holidays!

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