

THE

VOICE

MAGAZINE

Volume 16 Issue 31
August 8, 2008

Summer in the City

Welcome to Toronto

Around AU

AUGSA announces
new council

The Mindful Bard

Orpheus in the Bronx

Plus:

From Where I Sit,

AUSU This Month, and much more...



CONTENTS

WELCOME TO THE VOICE PDF

The Voice interactive Table of Contents allows you to click a story title to jump to an article. Clicking the bottom-right corner of any page returns you here. Some ads and graphics are also links.

Features

Editorial 3

Articles

Around AU: New AUGSA Council 4

Cityscapes: Toronto 5

Columns

The Mindful Bard 7

From Where I Sit 9

AUSU This Month 10

News and Events

Did You Know?: AU Library E-Books 8

International News Desk 12

Click of the Wrist 13

Education News..... 14

From the Readers

Letters to the Editor..... 2

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We love to hear from you! Send your questions and comments to voice@ausu.org, and please indicate if we may publish your letter.



EDITORIAL

Sandra Livingston

**PETA Doth Protest Too Much**

Even for those who ardently believe in animal rights, who loudly protest the cruelty endured by millions of unfortunate creatures in factory farms, PETA's latest move is bound to ruffle some feathers.

It has to do with an ill-thought-out marketing scheme—one that is in such poor taste they have yet to find a media platform willing to run it.

There are no graphic images, no bludgeoned seals. Instead, it is a simple block of text—but one that compares the slaughtering of animals for food to the senseless murder of 22-year-old Tim McLean as he slept on a Greyhound bus.

The ad closes like this: "If this ad leaves a bad taste in your mouth, please give a thought to what sensitive animals think and feel when they come to the end of their frightening journey and see, hear, and smell the slaughterhouse."

There are many who will object to this ad simply because they see nothing wrong with eating meat. They have already dismissed the claims of PETA, as well as many other reputable, academic sources who have documented the very real brutality on many factory farms and slaughterhouses.

But let's leave them out of it. Let's look, instead, at why this ad should indeed leave a bad taste in the mouths of those who choose a vegetarian or vegan lifestyle because they believe the alternative is inhumane.

PETA's position is that they are against cruelty to animals, whether that comes in the form of physical abuse or emotional anguish. And although they are proudly known for their "uncompromising views on animal rights," it's not a stretch to say that *any* deliberate cruelty is wrong—whether it's directed at humans or animals.

In short, people should not knowingly cause suffering, whether physical or emotional, to other creatures in order to suit their own agendas. But that's exactly what PETA has done with the advertisement equating Tim McLean's murder with the slaughter of animals.

Right now, there are family members who are in unimaginable pain because they have lost their child in a horrific, random killing. There are close friends who have expressed shock, sadness, and deep emotional distress. And almost before they have been able to digest the tragic loss (much less begun to heal), PETA has capitalized on that suffering to fulfill their own agenda.

Perhaps, following the plea in their ad, PETA should have given "a thought to what sensitive [families] think and feel" when they see their child's murder reduced to a marketing ploy.

Eliminating the torture, abuse, and neglect of animals is a worthy cause and one that, as a vegetarian especially, I support. But in this case, PETA doth protest far, far too much.

AROUND AU

AU Graduate Students' Association Announces New Council



For many, the process of completing their first undergrad degree can feel a little like being lost in a maze: navigating program requirements, filling out registration and funding forms, keeping track of assignment and exam schedules.

And just when it looks like academic life is all figured out, there's the whole new set of challenges that come with pursuing a master's degree.

At Athabasca University, though, the recent AU Graduate Students' Association (AUGSA) election means those challenges will be that much easier to

navigate—the AUGSA has just announced its new council, and their first meeting is scheduled for September 3.

The new councillors are Mary Ratensperger, Rose Mary Craig, Daniel Bzdel, Cynthia Amerongen, David Keene, Rob Janzen, Robbie Chernish, Michael T. Balaski, and Ron Jagmohan.

The elections mark a key stage in the Association's development, and as the [AUGSA website](#) says, the new council "is excited to continue developing the policies, services, and benefits for Athabasca University's Graduate Students."

Councillor bios are available on the website, and it's easy to see the invaluable experience the new councillors bring to their roles.

They have experience in fields as diverse as nursing, education administration, finance, systems engineering and more. Some have completed a large portion of their master's program, while others are just beginning.

All share an enthusiasm for advocating on behalf of AU's graduate students, though, a commitment that one councillor's bio sums up well: "It will be my honour and pleasure to sit on the inaugural Athabasca University Graduate Students' Association."

To find out more about AU's graduate degree programs and courses, visit the online calendar [here](#).

"The Graduate Student Association of Athabasca University (AUGSA) is dedicated to serving its students worldwide, by promoting a global community and acting as a liaison between students and the University."

Objectives:

- ***To promote the general welfare of the graduate student body and provide official representation on behalf of graduate students.***
- ***To advocate for and disseminate information with respect to opportunities for research, development, employment, teaching and funding.***
- ***To provide orientation and procedural information for new students and encourage opportunities for peer-to-peer mentoring.***

CITYSCAPES

Behdin Nowrouzi



Toronto, Ontario

Toronto is the largest city in Canada and considered to be its commercial and financial hub. Situated on the northwest shore of Lake Ontario, the city is home to over 2.5 million inhabitants. Including the city's outlying areas (known as the Greater Toronto Area or GTA), Toronto is home to over 5.3 million people—nearly half of Ontario's population.

Approximately 50 per cent of Toronto's residents are born outside of Canada, making it the most diverse city in the country, as well as one of the

most diverse cities in the world.

By the 1950s, the GTA had experienced a large influx of immigrants from Europe and later on from Asia, Africa, and South America. As a result, the region's population has increased dramatically and become home to over 100 languages and counting.

Economy

Toronto is home to some of the country's largest financial, commercial, and industrial institutions. Fuelled by the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway and the rise of Quebec separatism, Toronto surpassed Montréal as Canada's largest city.

Many multinational corporations have their Canadian head offices in Toronto, and the city is also a major centre for film and television production and a popular tourist destination.

Culture

Toronto is home to numerous museums, attractions, landmarks, sporting events, and festivals. Its diversity is reflected in a plethora of activities, including [Caribana](#), the [Canadian National Exhibition](#), and the [Canadian International auto and air shows](#).

Many of Toronto's cultural events have long histories in the city. For instance, Caribana's beginnings can be traced back to 1967, when Toronto's citizens of Caribbean ancestry had a massive party on Olympic Island. This event has expanded into a month-long celebration with a youth parade, art shows, King and Queen Competition, and family activities. Moreover, there are many opportunities to try food from different Caribbean regions, such as spicy chicken, smoked salmon, Caribbean crab cakes, or pelau (caramelized chicken with rice and peas).

Another Toronto attraction is the CN Tower, one of the tallest structures in the world and a well-known tourist destination.

In September, the [Toronto International Film Festival](#) draws Hollywood celebrities and film enthusiasts.

Toronto is also home to many professional sports teams, including the Toronto Argonauts, Toronto Blue Jays, Toronto Maple Leafs, Toronto Raptors, and Toronto Football Club.

For shopping, the GTA offers ample opportunities to browse, buy, eat, and enjoy a day at the mall, including the [Toronto Eaton Centre](#), [Yorkdale Shopping Centre](#), [Square One](#), and [Vaughan Mills](#).

The arts are well served in Toronto with the [Art Gallery of Ontario](#) and the [Royal Ontario Museum](#). Science enthusiasts will enjoy going to the [Ontario Science Center](#), while history buffs will learn a great deal about the city at [Fort York](#) or [Casa Loma](#).

Selected Neighbourhoods

Yorkville

Yorkville is Toronto's most exclusive retail district, filled with nightclubs and art museums. This area also boasts some of the most expensive real estate values in the country. Many events take place in this neighbourhood, from [nuit blanche](#) to [IceFest](#). Check out [Yorkville](#) for more details.

Rosedale

Lined with beautiful and magnificent homes, Rosedale is home to some of Canada's most expensive real estate. Some of Canada's wealthiest and most prominent people live in the area, including leaders in business, government, and industry.

Kensington Market

Known as the Jewish Market in the early 20th century, this unique area of Toronto has transformed into a vibrant and diverse collection of art studios, grocers, and specialty shops selling everything from vintage clothes to retro furniture.

There are also a variety of café shops and restaurants offering foods from all corners of the world. Visit [Kensington Market](#) for more details.

The Annex

The Annex is a neighbourhood located in downtown Toronto. The Annex is home to many families and long-time residents, but also to students due to its proximity to the University of Toronto. It is not uncommon to see students living in the area or for professors to purchase homes there.

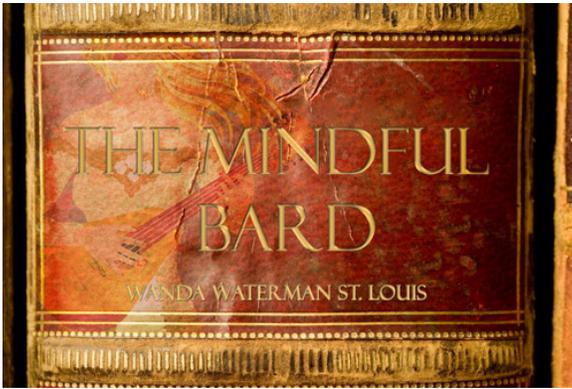
The city of Toronto website provides further information on the [Annex](#).

Riverdale

Riverdale is a thriving community just east of downtown Toronto. Riverdale was a former town that later joined the city of Toronto. The Canadian television show *Degrassi Junior High* is named after the Riverdale street of the same name.

Geographically, Riverdale is a large neighbourhood made up of smaller regions, including East Chinatown, South Riverdale, Riverside, and the Studio District (home to film and television production).

You can find a complete list of Toronto neighbourhoods [here](#), or visit the City of Toronto's [website](#) for more information.



Books, Music, and Film to Wake Up Your Muse and Help You Change the World

Book: Reginald Shepherd, *Orpheus in the Bronx: Essays on Identity, Politics, and the Freedom of Poetry*

Publication date: 2007

Publisher: The University of Michigan Press

There was once a poor southern gal who decided her children would escape her world of suffering by means of superior intelligence. She bought her son Reginald books before he was born and diligently nurtured his remarkable gifts during her few remaining years in the valley of the shadow of death.

Had she foreseen the significance of her son's eventual contribution to American letters and to the world at large, the knowledge of it may have considerably sweetened those years.

Shepherd has restored the magic to the way we think about poetry; that is, he has offered us a way of seeing poetry that puts the boots to preceding theoretical models, at the same time reviving ancient modes of language. As I have quoted before in this column:

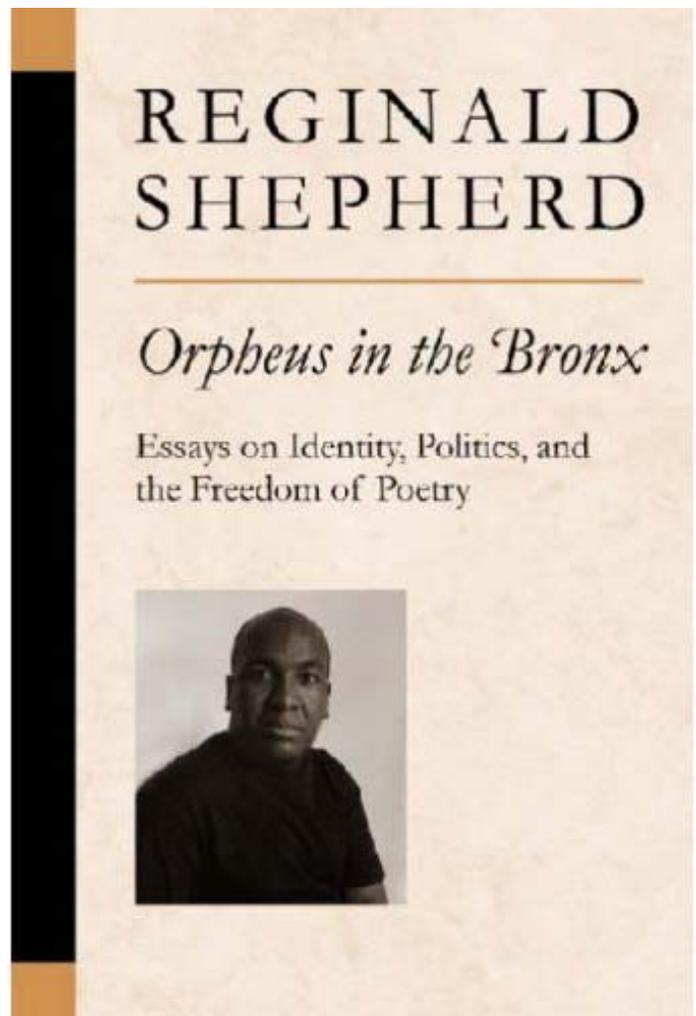
...it is the primary function of literature, more particularly of poetry, to keep re-creating the first or metaphorical phase of language during the domination of the later phases, to keep presenting it to us as a mode of language that we must never be allowed to underestimate, much less lose sight of.

Northrop Frye

Shepherd has rescued primitive metaphorical language modes from the tyranny of subsequent language modes by several means, one of which is a startlingly elegant view of the creative process.

To paraphrase him (somewhat simplemindedly, I'm afraid—you'll really have to read the book) the relationship of subject to object, of imagination to reality, of poet to thing described, is not one of reference but relationship.

He brings the idea of relationship to the fore so that instead of seeing a struggle between two poles he sees the two poles' interdependence, the quickening of their contact a gestation of meaning.



Shepherd touches in several places on his conviction that poetry does not create social change, that if you want to change the world you have to become a social activist.

Don't make the mistake of interpreting this to mean that Shepherd considers poetry insular, elitist, and lacking in transformative power; if you've followed this column you'd know such an argument would get short shrift here.

Shepherd insists on the avoidance of the *mal fois* that says one is enacting immediate social reconstruction via the writing of a poem, about liberation, say, or injustice.

But he is keen on revealing poetry's true vitality: "Poetry rescues nothing and no one," he writes, "but it embodies that helpless, necessary will to rescue, which is a kind of love, my love for the world and the things and people in the world."

Another means by which Shepherd has rescued metaphorical language is his insistence on poetry as a necessary aesthetic form. Despite tales of poetry's demise, of its lack of relevance in the postmodern world, of its failure to engage enough readers to give it any kind of cultural influence, Shepherd has presented enough cogent arguments in its favour to dig it out of years of stale arguments designed to repress it.

"Thus poetry continues," writes Shepherd, "despite the frequent reports of its death."

Orpheus in the Bronx lives up to eleven of *The Mindful Bard's* criteria for books well worth reading: 1) it is authentic, original, and delightful; 2) it confronts existing injustices; 3) it gives me tools enabling me to respond with compassion and efficacy to the suffering around me; 4) it makes me want to be a better artist; 5) it gives me tools which help me be a better artist; 6) it displays an engagement with and compassionate response to suffering; 7) it inspires an awareness of the sanctity of creation; 8) it is about attainment of the true self; 9) it harmoniously unites art with social action, saving me from both seclusion in an ivory tower and slavery to someone else's political agenda; 10) it stimulates my mind; and 11) it poses and admirably responds to questions which have a direct bearing on my view of existence.

The Bard could use some help scouting out new material. If you discover any books, compact disks, or movies which came out in the last twelve months and which you think fit the Bard's criteria, please drop a line to bard@voicemagazine.org. For a list of criteria, go [here](#). If I agree with your recommendation, I'll thank you online.

DID YOU KNOW?



AU Library E-Books

Are you looking for one more reference to take that essay from a B to an A? Need to double check a quotation or page number, but you've already returned your books in the mail? Then AU library e-books just might help you find what you're looking for.

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From Roman mosaics to sensor technology to literary classics, there's something for everyone.



*From
Where
I Sit*

Hazel Anaka

August Is

August is here sooner than usual, it seems. The summer so far has been marked by many rainy, unsettled days and cooler than average temperatures. Haying season in our part of the world is running later than normal—if there's anything normal about farming, that is. Thoughts turn to the upcoming harvest. Will it too be late?

Maybe it's my imagination but I think the flowers in the yard are looking a bit tired already (though the lilies are blooming their little hearts out). The nights are getting cooler, and the days noticeably shorter.

Finally you can buy blueberries in a container larger than a pint without having to hawk your jewellery first. Nine dollars for four pounds of those precious, antioxidant-loaded little morsels of goodness seems like a deal. Last year I bought several containers and repacked and froze dozens of one-cup serving sized bags.

For those women who are bakers, canners, picklers, or jam makers this is the beginning of a busy, bountiful time of reaping what has been sown. All I've got are green onions to chop up and freeze. The dill I planted succumbed to the weeds in my tiny garden plot.

August marks a niece's 15th birthday, Greg and Carrie's sixth anniversary, and our 35th. There are also two grad parties to attend on the same night, wouldn't you know. Oh, and Hilary's moving. Again.

August first is the halfway mark as summer marches resolutely into autumn. For teachers and students it's half over. It's hard to know who's more distraught over the realization. It's the start of back-to-school shopping for supplies and clothes.

I love the stationery departments overflowing with paper products, pens and pencils, and all the extra must-haves. I've been watching the sales flyers and visiting computer departments waiting for a back-to-school deal on a new laptop. My six-year-old Toshiba hasn't given up the ghost yet but I'm fed up with the small screen, USB ports in the back, and no built-in wireless card.

As much as August signals coming changes it also means smiles. Fairs, rodeos, and show 'n' shines fill the remaining weekends of summer. Tonight I drove past the Tim Hortons in Fort Saskatchewan and saw about a hundred motorcycles in the parking lot. Some people know how to seize the day and enjoy.

I inevitably smile when I see vintage cars rolling down the highway. It may be a candy-apple red '57 Chevy or a lime-green muscle car from the '70s. These guys are cruising down the road, window down, arm resting on the door, taking it cool. They know they look good, they know heads are turning. They're not tailgating or cutting people off; they're enjoying every moment.

We've got four antiques: a '37 Olds, '67 Monaco, '70 Super Bee, and '72 Nova. I can't remember the last time we went cruising.

Let's see, finish making the hay or go cruising? The answer is clear, from where I sit.

AUSU This Month



Merchandise Still for Sale

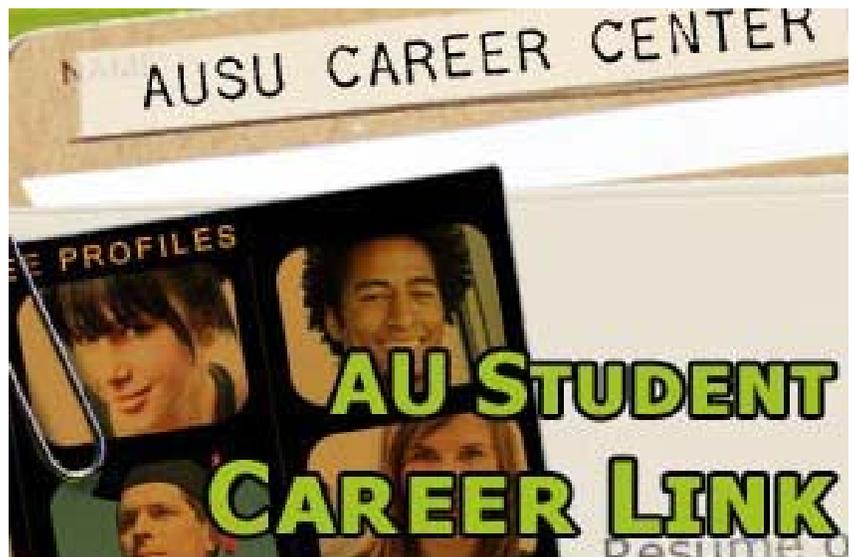
We still have some locks and memory keys available for sale. Both of these were designed with ease of mailing in mind, which means they're small enough to be easily stored pretty much anywhere. The wristband USB key is a unique way to carry around your assignments, online materials, and even emails while you're on the go. With a 1 gigabyte capacity, it can even handle a good chunk of your music collection, and the design means you no longer have to worry about losing it. *The Voice* memory key has less capacity (512 MB) but the dark, flip-top design is classy enough to accompany you anywhere.

AUSU Lock Loan Program

Still running, and still popular, the lock loan program can allow you to rest easy knowing your valuables are safe if you're taking an exam at the Calgary or Edmonton campus. The locks can be set to any combination, and are loaned to people without any deposit, but we ask that you please remember to reset them to 0-0-0 before returning them so that we can continue this program.

Employment Site is here!

Many of you will already have seen the link to our new employment site on the front page, and while there are not a lot of employers in evidence yet, it's a great opportunity to get your resume, skills, and talents in there. The Personnel Department is busily working on finding employers who could use your unique abilities as a distance education student. Be sure yours are available to get the early opportunities!



Appointments

AUSU VP External, Barb Rielly, has stepped down from her position as chair of the AUSU Awards Committee, and new Councillor Bethany Porter has taken on the role. Council wishes Bethany good luck in this position, which can involve making some hard decisions.

Increasing AUSU's representation within AU, VP Finance and Administration, Sarah Kertcher, has been appointed to AU's integrated learning centre steering committee. This committee will examine the possibility of integrating all AU sites in the Edmonton Area into one building. Sarah will ensure that the committee keeps concerns of our members with respect to ease of access and exam conditions as well as AUSU's own special needs for storage and physical office space well in mind.

The MyAU steering committee sees two new AUSU representatives, President Karl Low, and VP External Barb Rielly, joining to provide their input on how MyAU could be better structured to meet your needs. If there's something that's been bugging you about the MyAU system, now is a great time to call or email our office and let them know. We'll be sure to bring your concerns forward.

SmartDraw Program Continues

If you haven't yet, you might want to download a copy of SmartDraw. AUSU has purchased a licence agreement to supply the award-winning SmartDraw software to all AUSU members (current undergraduate students). To access this deal and find out more, visit the front page of our website.

SmartDraw allows you to create a wide range of graphics for your assignments and submit them electronically in a Word file. You can also place your graphics in Excel or PowerPoint files, or export them as TIF, GIF, or JPEG files to make a web graphic or even a logo. Just a few of the graphics you can make include Venn diagrams, genetics charts, graphs, organizational and flow charts, and Gantt charts.

For any course that requires charts that cannot be easily created in Word or Excel, this should be a real time saver and make it easier to submit all portions of an assignment by email. Remember, though, that you should always check with your tutor to find out if there is a specific format he or she prefers. Your tutor does not have to have SmartDraw to view these graphics, however.

Installations under this program are good for one year. The package includes both the Standard and Health Care editions of SmartDraw.

AUSU Handbook/Planner 2008 has a few copies left!

We still have a number of copies of the 2008 AUSU planner available. We're getting closer to the end of the year, however, so our supplies are steadily decreasing. We've added a few enhancements this year, including cheat sheets for common citation styles, a clip-in page-marker ruler, and a funky fridge magnet to remind you to get your weekly dose of *The Voice*.

As always, we're excited to know what you think of the planner, and especially want to hear of any improvements you think could be made.

Chat with a Councillor

Have a beef? Want to know where your \$8 per course goes or who's trying to make it work for you? Check out the AUSU chat times on our front page. Every Councillor has agreed to spend an hour each week making themselves available to you for your questions, concerns, or just to shoot the breeze while you take a break from your studying. It's not only a great way for you to learn more about what AUSU can do for you, but for us to learn what you want from AUSU. We hope to see you there!



Create professional-looking flowcharts, timelines, graphs, and more, in minutes, all by yourself. Then go spend some quality time with your family.

Free for AUSU members. Visit www.ausu.org



 SmartDraw

INTERNATIONAL NEWS DESK



At Home: India's banks expanding in Canada

After more than 25 years in Canada, the State Bank of India (SBI) is thinking of expanding operations here—and they're not the only Indian bank to do so. ICICI, based in Mumbai, will open its ninth Canadian branch this month, and as many as three other Indian banks are planning to follow the trend.

"We follow our customers. It's as simple as that," Sriram Iyer told reporters. "And since so many Indians are immigrating to Canada, it was an obvious choice." Iyer is president and CEO of ICICI's Canadian subsidiary, ICICI Bank in Canada.

The move marks a major shift for India's banks, not only in location but also in the services offered, especially for SBI (international asset base as of March 31, 2008, of \$265 billion US).

A public-sector institution, SBI's mandate is to minimize exposure to risks. For example, until this month Canadian customers were unable to access their accounts through a debit card, but the recent launch of the bank's first debit card in Canada is a sign of the changing times.

Originally, India's banks focused on the large ex-pat Southeast Asian communities in British Columbia and Ontario. Now, they're expanding into markets such as Quebec and Alberta, and widening their focus to include Canadian businesses that want to invest in India's booming economy.

Although the comparatively small Canadian market may not seem a likely place to expand (30 million Canadians versus a market of over 1.2 billion in India), it's the growing prosperity of Indo-Canadian customers that's attracting the notice of the banks.

As Sunil Jagosia, past president of the Indo-Canadian Chamber of Commerce, explains: "Nobody wants to be left behind in the race to globalize. As the disposable income of Indo-Canadians rise[s] . . . they maintain two residences—in India and Canada—and it is this segment of wealthy clients the banks are pursuing."

The public sector Central Bank of India and the Bank of Baroda are also scheduled to launch Canadian operations. For their part, Canadian banks are seizing the opportunities in the growing Indian economy. The Bank of Nova Scotia has five branches in India, and the Royal Bank of Canada opened a representative office in India's commercial capital of Mumbai early this year.

In Foreign News: Indonesian fuel retailers ordered to sell biofuel

Depending on which side you listen to, biofuel is either the answer to our environmental problems or a scourge that will deposit even more carbon into the air as forests and grasslands are destroyed. Either way, fuel retailers in Indonesia have been given their orders: they will now be required to make biofuels roughly three per cent of their national sales.

According to the [Asia News Network](#), the regulations will take effect in October but the Indonesian government is “offering no incentives for compliance.”

Currently, the required minimum for biodiesel is expected to be one per cent, while the minimum for bioethanol will be three per cent. The policy is still being developed and the minimum percentages are subject to change.

The policy is expected to help the country reduce its dependence on fossil fuels, and minimum mandatory percentages of biofuel will be increased annually.

“Our target is for biofuel to contribute five percent of the national energy portfolio by 2025,” Evita H. Legowo told reporters. Legowo is director general for oil and gas at the Energy and Mineral Resources Ministry.

Although the government is setting mandatory production levels, getting consumers to purchase the biofuel may not prove as easy: the supposedly green alternative is currently no cheaper than subsidized fossil fuel.

CLICK OF THE WRIST – At the Post

In spite of all the communication tools at our fingertips, there’s still something uniquely exciting about receiving an official-looking envelope or brightly wrapped parcel in the mail. This week’s homage to all things postal celebrates the beautiful (stamps made of wood), the artistic (one-of-a-kind mailboxes), and the downright weird—including some things you should never, ever try to mail.

The Pony Express

For a service that endured a mere 19 months, the Pony Express has lasted much longer in public sentiment, holding its own as a legend of the American West. Maybe the modern postal service could follow its cue: in spite of the hazards faced by riders, only one mail delivery was ever lost.

Strange Mailboxes

Tons of photos of strange, artistic, and just plain interesting mailboxes from around the world. Planes, trains, automobiles and . . . leprechauns?

Picture Postage

Forget about personalized mugs or T-shirts—why not show the world your smile with personalized postage stamps?

Postal Experiments

A feather duster, a tooth, a rose—all these unwrapped items (and more) made it through the United States Postal Service relatively unscathed. But your inflated helium balloon won’t be accepted.

Eight Unusual Postal Stamps

Who knew there are embroidered stamps, stamps made of wood, stamps containing CDs, and even more postage oddities? Just don’t try licking the ones that contain meteorite dust.

EDUCATION NEWS

Ben Poggemiller



An academic guffaw

Two University of Manitoba profs study the origins of humour

WINNIPEG (CUP) -- Over four decades ago, Carl Reiner and Mel Brooks introduced the world to the 2,000 Year Old Man, who detailed life throughout history in a series of comedy sketches.

Reiner would ask the ancient curmudgeon, played by Brooks, questions like, "Do you have any children?" and get meaningful answers like, "I have over 1,500 children, and not one comes to visit me on a Sunday."

Think that's dated? Well, it seems that humour has been around for a lot longer than 2,000 years, and maybe even longer than Brooks, according to two psychiatrists at the University of Manitoba.

Dr. Joe Polimeni and Dr. Jeffrey Reiss have been studying the origins of humour in humans. According to a university press release, "tens of thousands of years ago . . . something about the situation prompted one of our primitive ancestors to say

something funny for the benefit of eliciting a response from a fellow tribesman." In other words, the first joke was told.

Dr. Polimeni and Dr. Reiss have narrowed down the origin of the first joke.

"Our analysis provides only a minimum estimate for the evolutionary age of humour. It is likely at least 35,000 years old. I would suspect, by indirect evidence, that it's probably older than that . . . It's even possible, though unlikely, to be even 2,000,000 years old," said Dr. Polimeni.

That's one old knock-knock joke.

The two doctors started their research into humour while studying schizophrenia. Patients with schizophrenia have difficulty understanding certain forms of humour. Dr. Polimeni and Dr. Reiss created a "humour test" which they hoped could be part of a larger set of tests used for making the difficult distinction between schizophrenia and manic depression.

"After learning about humour, we recognized that there hadn't been a comprehensive review exploring the possible evolutionary origins of humour for some time. So we studied the subject methodically and published a review article entitled, 'The First Joke: Exploring the Evolutionary Origins of Humour,'" said Dr. Polimeni.

This study of schizophrenia has led to a possible link between humour and spirituality. Polimeni explained that 50-60 per cent of delusions in schizophrenia have religious content. There are cognitive similarities between humour and spirituality, and evolution has an efficient tendency to adapt two functions to one structure. An example is the tongue, which helps with digestion and also allows us to speak.

“It is only speculation, but perhaps the cognitive structure of humour was used to create a capacity for religious thinking in the brain. Religious thinking is believed to be about 50,000 years old—so it may fit with the possible age of humour.”

So laugh a prayer and pray a joke. Dr. Polimeni says humour and spirituality may have evolved together to relieve stress, improve communication, and help people socialize.

What is the purpose of humour, then? There are several possibilities according to Dr. Polimeni and Dr. Reiss, such as dealing with absurd situations, letting out repressed sexuality or aggression, and concern for social status. However, no clear answer is evident.

“That was one of the points of our paper; we couldn’t elucidate a clear pattern for the social purpose of humour in hunting and gathering societies,” said Polimeni.

“In our paper, we argued that to fully understand humour, you have to study it in traditional societies. Our methodical approach had too much statistical variance and therefore we concluded our analysis had failed . . . this was only one portion of our evolutionary paper. When we looked at the examples of humour in traditional societies, they, in fact, broadly appeared similar to Western humour. We just couldn’t prove that similarity scientifically using the methods we had chosen.”

However, Polimeni said that “it seems that one of the primary social purposes of humour is to quell heated disputes. The first joke may have diffused a situation where Og was going to pummel Ug.”

In fact, humour has saved many a dork from certain thrashing, including myself. I’m beginning to think Ug used self-deprecating humour to stop Og from taking his Star Wars collectible cards.

Perhaps this uncertainty is a good thing. I’ve never wanted a computer to tell me what’s funny, and comedy is certainly not a science. I’m looking at you, CBC.

I’ve also found that the second I try to figure out why something is funny, it immediately stops being funny, but that hasn’t stopped Dr. Polimeni. “You have to have a reasonable interest in comedy to be able to spend hours analyzing simple jokes. I sometimes spend one to two hours thinking about all the angles in any given joke. And yes, I’m guilty of having spent almost an hour analyzing the joke ‘Why did the chicken cross the road?’”

When asked about his favourite joke, Polimeni responded: “The most I ever laughed was at the Cheech and Chong joke about being glad not to have stepped in dog poop. I was, however, 14 years old.”

What I really wanted to know is if we’re the only ones that are funny. According to the *Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*, which I believe to be 100 per cent accurate, humans are the third smartest beings on Earth behind dolphins and mice. Are there any squeaky dolphin jokes?

Polimeni answered, “I’m not sure. A group of scientists have claimed that a certain 50 Hz chirp in rats is akin to humour, but I personally wasn’t convinced with their assertion.”

Fair enough, but I have reason to believe that the dolphins in Stanley Park were laughing at me and not just tittering from the thrown fish.

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THE VOICE

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