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Magazine

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The Voice is published
every Friday in HTML
and PDF format

To subscribe for weekly
email reminders as
each issue is posted,
see the 'subscribe' link
on *The Voice* front
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Special thanks to
Athabasca University's
The Insider for its
frequent contributions

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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



ZOVUE

Sandra Livingston



AU students are no strangers to new technology. Whether they're submitting assignments in Moodle, ordering library resources online, or getting together in the AUSU Discussion Forums, "virtual" connections form a big part of their day.

One AU student has taken that experience a step further: Fred St. Peter is part of the team behind the first real-time social shopping website, [Zovue](#).

Fred is a full-time, fourth-year student in AU's Bachelor of Commerce - Accounting program, and he also works at the company that developed Zovue's technology, Vega Advertising.

"Zovue was designed and developed over the past three years," says Fred. "It launched in July of 2009 [and] I joined the project in March of 2009."

So what makes this such a unique project? Like most other social networking sites, Zovue offers the usual array of video and file sharing, instant messaging, and blogging, among other features. But that's where the similarities end.

"Zovue is different," explains Fred, "because it combines social networking with online shopping. The reason this was done was to combine two increasingly popular Internet destinations into one landing point. The benefit [is] true online social shopping."

That doesn't just mean adding things to a shopping basket or reading product reviews by strangers.

Instead, Zovue's social shopping happens "in real-time where friends shop together using remote web page sharing. This feature does not require any downloads or software installation. It is part of the website and it allows a group of remote friends to view and interact with a common screen." This means that users "have the opinions and feedback from trusted, and known, friends at the time when they are most relevant—while the shopper is shopping.

"Another difference," adds Fred, is that "Zovue was created entirely in Adobe Flash." This gives the site a smooth flow and "an attractive, customizable look," he says.

Even if you can practically shop online in your sleep, remote web page sharing is definitely a new twist. You can browse through catalogues with your friends, "drawing" on pages and adding notes and advice about potential purchases. The online catalogues are remarkably similar to the experience of flipping through real pages and "are categorized and fully searchable . . . with high quality photos."

As Fred explains, "Other websites offering social shopping are basically using comments sections and posted reviews on static boards. This information becomes outdated and there is no direct interaction between shopper and reviewer. Also, the shopper seldom knows the reviewer and the product has to have been reviewed prior [to] the shopper seeking the information."

As many as four friends can share a web page at the same time, and the technology only works in real time. (If you want to talk about that dress or those golf clubs with a friend who's off-line, you'll have to leave a comment in their profile.)

This "new, never-done-before feature" isn't the only project in the works, either.

"Zovue is currently developing remote web page sharing, which will allow users to browse outside of Zovue.com," Fred says. "This feature could be used to create a social atmosphere where people can surf the web together from their remote locations." Zovue is also working on widgets, those "applications so many like to use on social networks," such as "games, newsfeeds, etc.," he adds.

As online social networking continues to grow, real-time social shopping is one of the more intriguing new technologies to emerge from it. And there's no telling what the possibilities will look like even a few short years from now, or how the ability for remote web page sharing could translate into areas from health care to education platforms and everything in between.

If cutting-edge developments like Zovue are any indication, the online future looks very interesting indeed.

CLICK OF THE WRIST – Smokin'

To most of us, smoke is annoying. It stinks up your clothes, pollutes the air, and sets off the smoke detector when you burn the toast. But to some people, it's a work of art. This week, we take a look at the unexpected beauty of smoke.

Smoke Art

If these images are any indication, photographer Mehmet Ozgur is very, very patient. As this site explains, he's spent years gathering images of smoke formations and then layering them to create these striking pictures.

Coloured Smoke

The ephemeral shapes created by smoke are beautiful enough in black and white. But when those same images have colour added, the effect truly highlights the depths and shadows. The smoky tendrils photographed here came from burning incense.

Photoshop Smoke Art

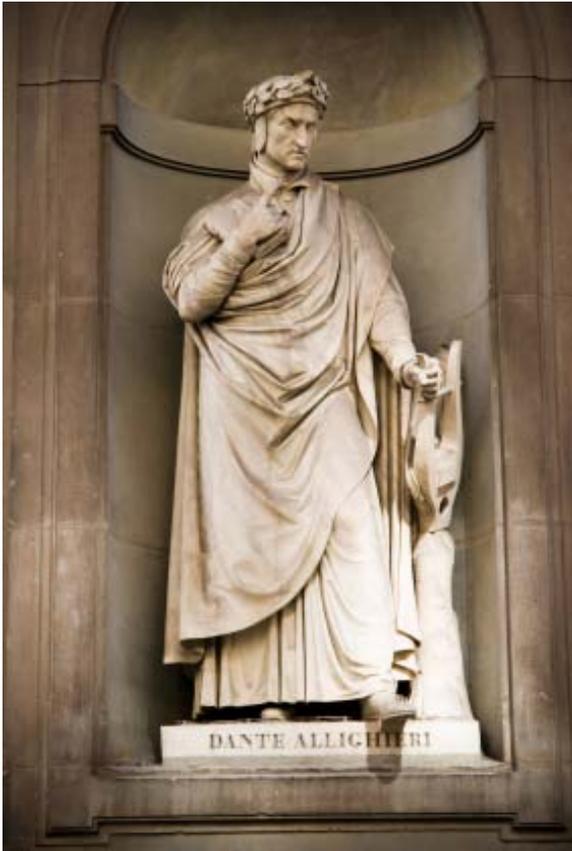
These gorgeous smoke figures are the result of some Photoshop magic, but they're stunning nonetheless. And if you want to try your hand at creating some smoky special effects, this site has several tutorials to choose from.

Smoke Photography Tutorial

If you prefer to create your smoke art from behind a camera, this video offers plenty of information to get you started, even for beginners.

Smoke Photography and Art

This astonishing collection of photographs goes beyond the tendrils created by incense. And some of them don't fall precisely into the definition of smoke. But dry ice, mist, jet contrails, factory smokestacks (and more) all make for some striking images.



Dante's *Inferno*: Extracurricular Longing and Divine Inspiration

Undying romantic love and philosophical descriptions of hell are not normally associated with the third grade. My enduring memories are of dramatic recesses involving a tall pirate ship in the sandy playground.

Boys would climb to the top of the mast and jump off, occasionally landing awkwardly and breaking bones. The duty teacher would come rushing over to escort the victim/culprit to the office for medical treatment. Meanwhile, girls were congregated in circles on the grass playing with My Little Ponies or sticker collections.

Yet not everyone fit into these stereotypes and as it turns out there have always been exceptional people who transcended normal gender roles. Some even fell in love with passion normally reserved for adulthood. In Renaissance-era Florence one such special boy was named Dante Alighieri. His entire life's output has been said to be tied to a girl named Beatrice whom he fell in love with when he was nine and she only eight.

Dante was born 1265 CE into a lower-aristocratic family and as such was educated more by a tutor than in what we would call a classroom. His educational apprenticeship occurred "under the direction of Brunetto Latini" and consisted of rhetoric, grammar, philosophy, literature and theology."

It is likely that the individualized nature of his early instruction affected his interaction with the opposite sex. Without the gang or collective mentality of childhood gender roles, he was able to see across the boy-girl divide in a way most of us never would have imagined when we were being forcibly seated boy-girl boy-girl during circle time on the kindergarten carpet.

When he met Beatrice she "became in effect his Muse," even to long after her death at the age of 24. Following this early encounter his educational experiences included "some thirty months" frequenting "the schools of the religious orders and the disputations of philosophers." By his own account, all Dante's subsequent experiences are filtered through his feelings for her.

Dante stated that his purpose in self-expression was to "write of her what never yet was written on any woman." In pursuit of this goal he became a member of the Stilnovo school of poetry. Stilnovo poets followed an Aristotelian form of logic that sought explanations in what one might term a pre-scientific method. The resulting poems were "a deep analysis of the love feeling, even psychologically . . . a sort of love theory."

The Stilnovo school's analytic approach to love may seem odd to we who live in an educational world characterized by a strict ideological division between left-logical and right-expressive brains. Stilnovo was

about creating an organic unity of the self expressed poetically. For students involved in the Stilnovo school method, “the works of art must see the contents perfectly melted with the form.”

In other words, the ideas, theories, and research method of pure philosophy needed to be combined with the raw, colourful, and metaphorical aspects of pure art. The binary cleavage between “math nerd” and “art star” was meaningless in this context. Dante’s theme was “the significance of his love for Beatrice” yet this love became an arbiter of more universal ideas such as the “nature of love and human psychology.” It wasn’t just butterflies in the stomach or of the heart; it was about feeling butterflies as symbolic of divine permeations extant in all aspects of life.

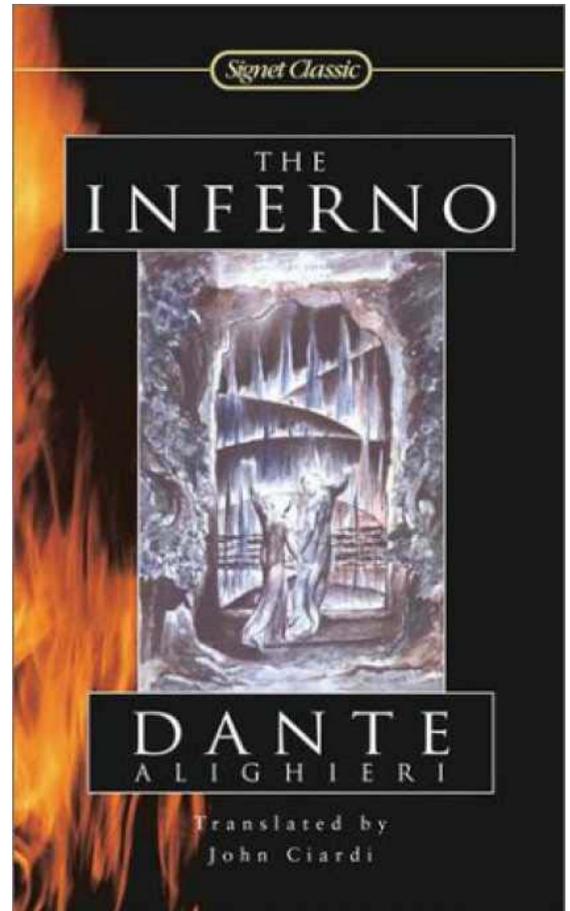
Having met Beatrice, Dante found his love unrequited due to the “dictates of courtly love,” which made her socially unattainable. In his most well-known work, *La Divina Commedia (The Divine Comedy)*, he is said to have expressed his disappointments and frustration at this reality. She came to “embody the divine incarnation of love that inspired him throughout his life.” It was a mixed blessing, however, as he noted in a description of a conversation with himself following that first encounter with her: “Now is your bliss made manifest.” “Alas! How often henceforth shall we be troubled.”

This desire for unity and bliss translated well into religious terms. In fact, Dante came to describe and conflate his feeling for Beatrice as representative of a truly religious experience whereby God is felt through another person as an intermediary. The result of seeing his love as the outcome of divine inspiration was that the religious nature of his writing became a personal testament. To overcome the impossibility of being with Beatrice, he expressed her to himself as an aspect of the universally accessible divine: “The Lady, exerting on her lover a power derived from the participation of her understanding in the divine . . . transmit[s] the influence of the First Mover to the universe at large.” She was God’s light shining onto his soul.

The way Dante’s educational experience intersects with his personal feelings can be explained by the sociological and philosophical concept of Pragmatism. Discussed by the theorist John Dewey, whose work included educational and psychological theory, Pragmatism involves the idea that people are “existentially free agents who accept, reject, modify, or otherwise define the community norms, roles, beliefs, and so forth, according to their own personal interests and plans of the moment.”

Dante pragmatically used religious imagery and themes to express his heartfelt desire to be with his childhood love, Beatrice. This is interesting because so often education is expressed as learning as though the pupil is an empty chalice waiting to be filled with information. Pragmatism expresses the individual as an active agent within a world of “dynamic processes and not static structures.”

Of course, to see structures as dynamic takes a willingness to use a sort of bionic vision. To see beyond the surface requires a disavowal of the way truths are promulgated. As a product of a religious society that was



rapidly being coloured by humanist pre-Christian Greek and Roman philosophies, Dante was able to create a reality that expressed not only the truths of his time but also of how he actually felt about his life.

Pragmatism states that “true reality does not exist out there in the real world; it is actively created as we act in and towards the world.” In this way, Dante’s *Divine Comedy* is a work of written expression that combines the universal with the personal, the divine with the earthly. This synthesis of elements is enabled by the application of one’s own extracurricular self to the otherwise static material at hand.

Dante’s ability to produce timeless poetry reflects his education in a personal setting, not unlike what Hollywood child actors receive today. It also is a testament to his strength to overcome adversity; not only the adversity of unrequited love but also political challenges. His family was on the losing side of a political battle in his home of Florence. The result was his later life being spent in exile. This physical exile paralleled his emotional exile from the woman he believed to be his only true love. Dante’s pragmatic solution was to manifest this feeling of alienation in terms most acceptable to his society. His experience is expressed allegorically as a journey through hell.

Dante’s *The Inferno* was not only about a subterranean landscape where “corrupt politicians were immersed in boiling pitch, traitors were frozen in ice and flatterers were plunged into excrement.” *The Inferno* is also about Dante’s own internal struggle with himself. His inner war is perhaps most of all expressed in his treatment of the lustful, “who merely got blown around in an endless storm.”

It is the storm of the heart that educational methods and materials least express today, just as in Renaissance Italy. Yet paradoxically it is this very turbulence that humanity’s greatest artists most clairvoyantly express.

DID YOU KNOW?



CanLearn

Pursuing your education can be a complicated (if exciting) venture: choosing a university, filling out enrolment forms, picking classes. And it’s even more daunting if you’re trying to navigate the complex world of student loans.

If you’re new to the process (or still wondering if student loans are right for you), [CanLearn](#) is a government portal that may help make the process easier.

From loans to grants to scholarships, CanLearn offers a variety of tools to answer your questions. A short video on the homepage outlines the basics of the student loan system, and there are tools to help you estimate just how much your education will cost before you even begin applying for loans.

Other sections walk you through the details of repaying student loans after graduation. The Continuing Education section includes a Q&A database geared toward adults thinking of returning to school.

There’s a wealth of information here, and even if the site doesn’t answer your specific questions you’ll find links to other resources that might, including a variety of partner organizations and the National Student Loans Service Centre.

IN CONVERSATION WITH . . .

Wanda Waterman St. Louis

**Rita Shelby, Part II**

*Rita Shelby is a Los Angeles-based jazz singer-songwriter known as much for her wisdom and indomitable spirit as she is for her incredible voice and brilliantly written songs. She recently released the CD *A Date With a Song* (soon to be recommended in *The Mindful Bard*), for which she wrote melodies and lyrics and for which Willie Daniels created the musical arrangements. She is also an author and an actress.*

Rita recently took the time to talk with Wanda Waterman St. Louis about family support, school days, mom's musical directive, and the new jazz standards.

Families Kicking In

[An aunt and uncle helped raise Rita while her mother pursued her music career.]

In order to understand the sacrifice that my aunt and uncle made for my mother and I you have to go back to the core of who we are as a culture. Even a hundred years ago members of our families were taken or killed or sold, so the idea of the sisters or brothers kicking in to help raise children is common. This makes the sacrifice no less special; it's just not that uncommon in our culture.

You Can't Make It!

When I was born, out-of-wedlock births were not as morally or socially acceptable they are today. It happened, but it was not as accepted.

My grandfather was a staunch Baptist minister. I'm sure my birth didn't go over very well. I know that my mother was more than convinced that she could not make it on her own. I can hear some of my aunties saying, "Child, *you can't make it out there by yourself!*" So there were a couple of aunts who wanted to step forward and help my mother and be supportive of her.

Music Will Not Die

My mother didn't complete her education. She mostly played piano for local churches and did odd jobs. It was very hard for her, but her music did not die until she did and I vowed that when she died the music would not die. My musical journey began with her.

My earliest musical experiences were in our apartment. My mother would play the piano. She bought me a piano and was my first piano teacher. She played in various churches, singing in the choirs. And I remember being in one of those choirs with her or sitting on the piano bench with her when she was playing.

My mother always wanted music to be my life's profession. She said, "Baby, if you can play and play well you can always make some money."

But I didn't play well. I didn't know if the gift was there and just lying dormant, I don't know if it was my own impatience with the instruments—I studied classical piano and classical voice, dabbled on the flute and guitar, but I guess I had an impatience to just get to it.

I always sang. So my goal was to be an actress and singer and dancer and all of that, and radio happened to me along the way.



Jazz Love in the Capital

I went to a phenomenal school in Washington, DC, and that's where the love for jazz began. I remember sitting in the music room when my teacher, the late Miss Cornelia Brown, taught us about Duke Ellington. I also remember her introducing us to Leonard Bernstein; she loved Bernstein and she was bent on me learning something called "A Simple Song." Well it wasn't a simple song! Leonard Bernstein wrote it, right?

I did not fully grasp all that had gone on in this country before I was born until I was in college. My life was *wonderful!* My junior high school was all black and I say that because we went through a time in our country when we went from segregation to integration and integration almost always meant *better*.

Washington, DC, was a predominantly black city by the time that I moved there so there was this one big group of people who had common interests, a common love. My junior high school had an archery team, a Latin club, a French club, a Spanish club, Future Business Leaders of America, a ski club, and an orchestra. There was a main principal and an assistant principal for every grade level. We had our own four-colour

newspaper! And we didn't walk around thinking we were upper class. It was just the way that it was.

Now I live in Los Angeles, which still has lines of class and cultural division. I don't believe that my zip code determines who I am, who I should hang with and what defines me. I thank Washington, DC, for that. I wasn't assimilated into another culture and made to believe that that culture's values were superior to my culture's values.

The Dawn of the New Standard

My desire for my songs is that they will become the new standards. When I made the commitment in 2002 to take this career on I determined that if I were going to step back into my musical gift I was going to allow that gift to flow in its most natural state, unencumbered by what I thought or how I thought my music would be transmitted.

AU OPTIONS

Bethany Tynes



Learning French, Part I

Fluency in both of Canada's official languages is becoming increasingly more common. The ability to speak French has even become a skill necessary to attain many jobs. How is language-learning experienced at a distance, though? Are AU French classes comparable to those found in "regular" brick-and-mortar universities?

Dr. Vina Tirven-Gadum, Assistant Professor of French Language and Literature, and Christine Purfield, an AU French student, were kind enough to share their thoughts in this two-part investigation of AU's French program. This week's article looks at AU's current and future French offerings, while next week's article will examine how the experience of learning a second language by distance compares to that of learning in a classroom setting.

AU's French department is housed in the Centre for Language and Literature, and "consists of two full-time faculty members, namely, Dr. Audrey O'Brien, and myself," says Dr. Tirven-Gadum, "as well as

five talented tutors, who have expertise in the fields of Language training and French Literature." Students have the option of completing either a University Certificate in French Language Proficiency or a Bachelor of Arts with a concentration, major, or minor in French.

One strength of AU's French program "is that we offer very high calibre courses which have been designed by faculty members who are experts in their field," says Dr. Tirven-Gadum. "These members have accumulated many years experience teaching French courses both in a traditional classroom setting and at a distance. Our courses offer a good grounding in French grammar, French syntax, French writing skills and in French and Francophone Literature.

"Presently, we are entering a new revitalizing phase in our curriculum offerings. To make our French degree more competitive and more in line with other French programmes offered at other Canadian universities, we are adding more French Literature and culture courses to the programme. To achieve this, [Dr. O'Brien] and I have designed or are in the process of designing many new courses," Dr. Tirven-Gadum explains.

Dr. Tirven-Gadum recently designed the course French 358: *Initiation à la littérature d'expression française I*, and is currently working on the continuation of this course, French 359: *Initiation à la littérature française II*. In French 358, students are given the opportunity to acquire "a basic knowledge of French texts that have marked French literature and culture from the Middle Ages (Marie de France, Villon) to the 18th century (Voltaire)," as well as to study "one of the most well-known and enduring French plays: *L'Avare* by Molière."

French 358 "will serve as a stepping stone to explore further French literature courses offered at this university or at other universities . . . Twelve students have already enrolled in the course since July 1, 2009, the opening date, and, so far, the feedback from students has been very positive."

French 359, meanwhile, "will consist of excerpts taken from French literary masterpieces from 19th, 20th, and early 21st centuries, as well as the Literature from French Canada (Gabrielle Roy) and Francophone

Africa (Senghor), etc.” Dr. Tirven-Gadum hopes that the course will be “opened for registration by the end of next year.”

Several other senior-level French literature courses are also underway, including French 420 and 422, currently under development by Dr. Tirven-Gadum in conjunction with subject matter experts, and French 474, which is being written by Dr. O’Brien.

French 420: *Poésie et théâtre du 19e siècle français* will see students “study a selection of poetry by French male authors, the poetry by French female authors, a play of the Romantic period and a selection of poetry

from *Les Fleurs du Mal* by the great poet Baudelaire,” says Dr. Tirven-Gadum. “What is particularly innovative about this course is the inclusion of women poets, most of whom have so far been excluded from courses in 19th-century French literature. These women poets were not only contemporaries to, but indeed close literary associates of, some of the literary giants of 19th-century France.”



**Dr. Vina Tirven-Gadum, Assistant Professor
of French Language and Literature**

French 421: *Le Roman du 19e siècle français*, will serve as “an introduction to the 19th-century French novel, through the study of works by Balzac, George Sand and Gustave Flaubert.” Dr. Tirven-Gadum believes that “what may be innovative and of contemporary appeal” about this course is the inclusion of George Sand, a female French novelist. “Students need to know of the existence of feminine (perhaps ‘feminist’) literature in France nearly a century before the word ‘feminism’ found a place in the French dictionary,” explains Dr. Tirven-Gadum.

French 474: *Le Cinéma francophone*, meanwhile, will allow students to explore French Canadian film “as an expression of a cultural identity.” The course also “examines the history and evolution of the French film industry in North America. The main emphasis is on the cinema of Québec but reference will also be made to Francophone productions from other areas of Canada’s cultural and socio-political domains.”

One common factor in all of these courses, according to Dr. Tirven-Gadum, is that they “will be appropriate, indeed ideal, for students intending to major in French.”

One such AU student is Christine Purfield, who originally enrolled in the four-year English program. “I needed to pick some electives and thought it might be fun to refresh my (very limited) French skills,” says Purfield. “Then I realized that I enjoyed the French courses as much as the English courses,” and switched to a double major.

“My favourite part is now,” Purfield says. “I’ve finished the prerequisites . . . and have moved on to the literature courses—with real novels!” She finds these French literature classes enjoyable, yet challenging: it’s not only the most fun part of her program, but also “the scariest, as I realize that I don’t know as much as I thought I did!” And with the selection of interesting, senior-level French courses constantly increasing, Purfield may soon find it challenging just to choose which classes she’ll enrol in next!

Be sure to check back next week as Purfield and Dr. Tirven-Gadum discuss the strengths and weaknesses of learning French by distance.



*Dear
Barb*

Barbara Godin

Friendship Isn't an Obligation

Dear Barb:

I've been reading your column regularly but have never read of a dilemma like mine. I have a friend that I've talked to from time to time through the years. We never had much in common, but I managed to maintain somewhat of a relationship with her. Problems began a few years back when my husband was diagnosed with terminal cancer.

Marie continued to call regularly, wanting updates on my husband's progress and then keeping me on the phone for extended periods. Consequently I began avoiding her calls, until I finally told her that I didn't have time for her as I was caring for my husband. She let up a bit on the phone calls until my husband's death. Then she began calling daily to see if I was all right. I appreciated her concern, but again began avoiding her phone calls. I don't want to sound ungrateful, but I have a lot of other friends that I feel closer to. As time passed she began sending emails asking why I was rejecting her. I just don't get it! Why would someone want to pursue a relationship with a person who clearly does not want to be her friend? How can I get through to Marie without hurting her feelings?

Looking forward to your advice.

Patricia

Thanks for writing, Patricia. I understand what you are saying. Sometimes people just don't "click" and it seems like this is the case here. You have enough friends and don't feel a need to expand your circle to include Marie.

Obviously you have expressed how you feel but Marie is not accepting it. Assuming she doesn't have any sort of mental or emotional disorder, she should eventually accept your position. On the other hand, she may be an emotionally fragile person who cannot accept rejection. I would suggest that you continue to tell her how you feel, while making sure you do not do or say anything that she could misconstrue and cause her to believe that you really want to be friends with her.

If you do all these things and she continues to bother you to a point where it's causing you considerable distress, you may have to obtain a peace bond. If she breaks the peace bond she may have to pay a fine or even spend time in jail. Obtaining a peace bond is only a last resort and I really don't believe things will reach this stage.

I am confident that if you stand your ground Marie will get the hint and move on to friendlier pastures. Good luck, Patricia.

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.



Intriguing New Developments in Alternative Music

"Is this something you feel you can share with the rest of us, Amazing Larry?"

Pee-wee's Big Adventure

That Guy That Sat Behind You in Lab and Never Said a Word? Look at Him Go!

Giant Hand

Coming Home, Empty Room Records, 2009

Kirk Ramsay's voice, so reminiscent of the squeaks and quavers of adolescent boys when they finally screw up the courage to talk to a real girl, is the perfect instrument for a series of odes to rejection, abandonment, victimization, hopelessness, and other cheery subjects. It's as if Johnny the Homicidal Maniac had finally decided to creatively channel all of those gruesome urges.

These songs sound like the guy woke from a nightmare, turned on GarageBand, grabbed his guitar, and warbled away without even thinking about how it sounded, then added a separate track of noises from whatever he could find lying around in his apartment. Well guess what? It works. And you'll definitely find yourself saying, "If *this* guy can pull off a musical career . . ."

Finally, Some Love Songs Worth Contemplating

The Dojo Workhorse

Weapons Grade Romantic, Meggar Music, 2009

At first it's hard to pinpoint what's so great about *Weapons Grade Romantic*. Nothing about it stands out as amazingly original. But it's just so darn *sincere*. Not to mention that the music is thoughtfully arranged (and well played) and the lyrics are deeply insightful.

Like this from "The Universe":

*"The universe is a powerful force;
She brought you to me when I needed you most.
Her boundaries are growing—watch them grow and keep going.
But then they're gone
With all our precious days here . . ."*

This album is full of such thoughtful, original explorations of romantic love, a subject that normally attracts clichés like flies to molasses. The lyrics are substantial, healing, and can only add to your understanding of relationships.

***"The villagers held me by the hand.
We walked in line, like a marching
band.***

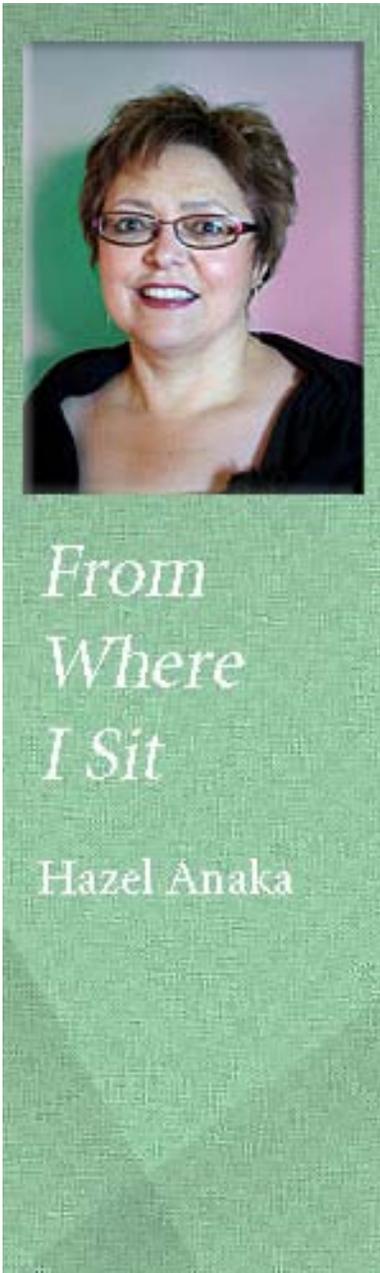
***As the trees disappeared
I saw what I had feared—***

Oh! A cave, a cave!

Oh! I'll be good!

Oh! I'll behave!"

Kirk Ramsay



The Task is Huge

After an absence of 10 years I'm back on the public library board in Andrew. That obligation means, among other things, manning the library for a couple of hours Tuesday evenings. My turn rolls around every two months. The procedural stuff came back during an orientation. The other things include meetings, fundraising, and increasing awareness and usage.

Andrew's public library is housed in a multi-use facility opened in 1991 or '92. It is a prototypical building housing the K-to-12 school, village office and council chambers, bowling lanes, and fitness and meeting rooms. The collection includes school and public library materials. I remember the timeframe because Hilary was the grade one student selected to do the ribbon cutting with then education minister Jim Dinning and school trustees. The cooperation and resource sharing inherent in this design makes good sense, especially in small communities.

The history book *Dreams and Destinies* (which I titled and helped write for Andrew's 50th anniversary and homecoming in 1980) states that the push for a public library began in 1949 with a petition by 68 electors. The village provided grants of \$300 in 1950, \$250 in 1951, and yearly grants of \$150. In 1950 the public library's collection of about 500 books was integrated into the school library and has been forever thus.

When our new board meets tonight we'll discuss the replacement of three computers for public Internet use, along with nuts and bolts issues like contents insurance, terms of office, and volunteer appreciation. Discussion about a 60th anniversary celebration in 2010 should be lively.

But perhaps a more pressing issue is increasing membership and patron usage. Libraries are the original recession fighters. With the price of a hard-covered fiction book closing in on 40 dollars and paperbacks up to 20 dollars, being a book owner is not cheap. I will always maintain a home library. I spend more on books than clothing. But that's me. Sadly, not every book is worth the purchase price or will ever be reread.

The library fills the breach. It provides exposure to authors and titles we may not know. It allows anyone, for the price of membership and compliance with rules (take care and bring them back), generous access to books, reference materials, movies, magazines, Internet, computers, and newspapers. Discards are available for 10 cents each! During my shift last night there were few visitors. I was able to check out movies I haven't seen and wander the stacks reacquainting myself with the offerings.

As a board and individually we need to remind people that a library: is a gift, use it or lose it; saves patrons big money; can be a social hub; enriches life. With 42 per cent of adult Albertans having trouble reading and writing, some 82,450 unable to read and write, and 20 per cent of Alberta high school grads having literacy levels too low to get entry-level jobs, the task is huge. I think we owe it to 68 visionary residents in 1949 to try, from where I sit.

Sister Aurora

There's a rainbow dancing in the sky tonight, and I think I'm gonna go outside . . .



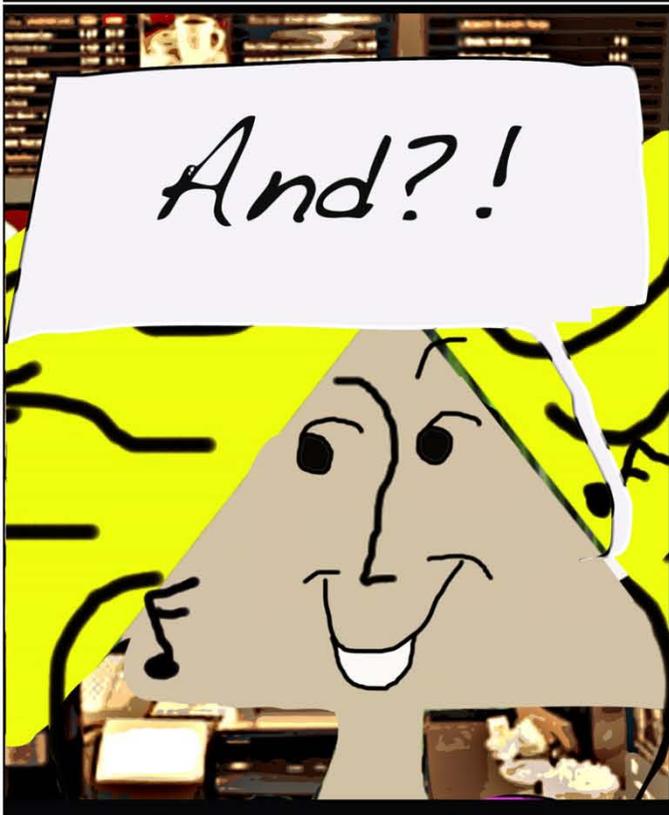
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Jodi! Ask your cute brother to come with us!



Lynn!

You're barking up the wrong tree-- he's gay, alright?



And?!



He's so beautiful! And funny! And such a great dancer! I just wanna hang with him!

Grooaaannnn...

AUSU UPDATE



New 2010 AUSU Handbook/Planners

The new AUSU Handbook/Planners are in the final stages of creation, and should be available within the next couple of months. We had great response on it being full colour, so we'll be doing that once more. Also, numerous suggestions for improvements have been heard and we're fitting in what we can while still keeping the book at a convenient, compact size.

Watch the AUSU front page for the pre-order form, which should be up in early December!

SmartDraw Program Renewal

Some of you who took advantage of our program to provide SmartDraw software to members have been getting notifications that your software license will soon be expiring. Fortunately, AUSU will be continuing this program, so if you haven't already, go to the AUSU home page to download the newest version.

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.

Think AUSU for Christmas

If you haven't already, take a look at our [merchandise catalogue](#) on the front page. Show your AUSU colors on your tree with one of our glass ornaments, and the hoodies and baby jumpers are great gifts for those important people who are supporting your pursuit of your degree.

We also have a selection of other items, such as *Voice* mugs and USB hubs, when you want to show where you get your student-focused news from.

Lock Loan Program Cancellation

Not everything is good news. And unfortunately, due to continued loss of loaner locks that was well beyond our expectations, AUSU has determined that it simply cannot continue to loan locks out to students at the Edmonton and Calgary Exam Centres. However, the locks are still available for purchase, and their popularity attests to their use and convenience. Used locks are being sold for \$2, new ones for \$4. Contact ausu@ausu.org for details.

The locks themselves are small and allow you to set your own three-digit combination, good not only for lockers at exam centres but also for the gym or anywhere that lets you use your own lock to guard your stuff.

AUSU Council Down to Eight

AUSU will be starting the New Year with only eight council members. Heather Fraser was removed from Council as a result of repeated absence from Council meetings. It is always a hard decision for Council when we have to remove someone the members have elected, but without full participation it gets more difficult for Council to move forward. Council does hope, however, that this gives her more time for her many other endeavours, and wishes her the best.

Election Policy Changes

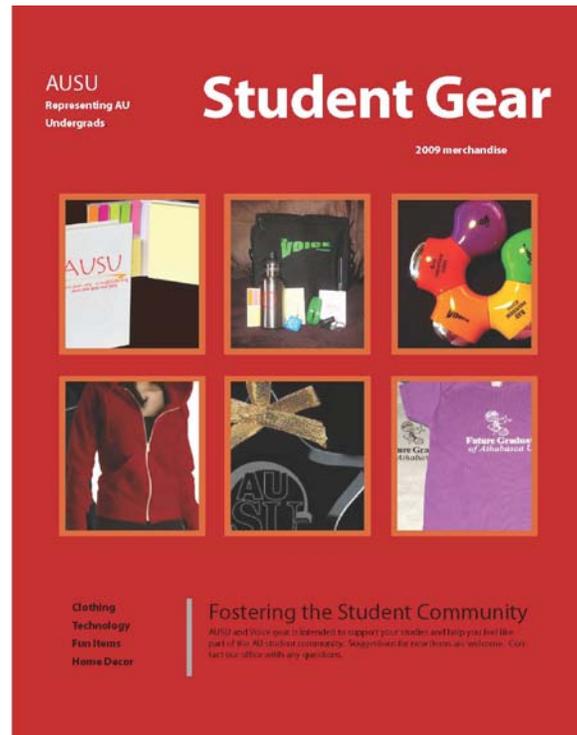
AUSU has made some adjustments to the timeline of the elections. Last year we had a number of complaints that the election period was just too long. People lost interest between when it started and when the voting period rolled around. The new policy shortens the timelines for nomination and campaigning considerably, although we have left intact the four-day voting period to be sure that all members have an opportunity to make their voices heard. Full details on the changes will be released on the AUSU website shortly, and Council has set the date of this upcoming election to March 7, 2010. Voting will be until March 11, 2010, with more details as to how you can participate to be available shortly on the AUSU website.

AUSU Scheduling Meeting with Tutors' Union

By far the most common complaint we hear from members is that some tutors take far too long to respond and that there is too little communication between certain tutors and students. With more studies emerging that show the likelihood of students completing a distance-based course can be directly related to the amount of contact they have with their instructor, AUSU views these complaints as particularly grievous. To attempt to address this, AUSU is seeking a meeting with the tutors' union to try to discuss some ways that the Students' Union and Tutors' Union can work together to ensure that both tutors and students get the support they need to make sure students get the contact they need to get them through their courses.

AUSU Thanks Minister Horner—With Odd Results

AUSU took the opportunity earlier last month to write a letter to Alberta Advanced Education Minister Doug Horner to thank him for holding firm to the regulated limits on undergraduate tuition, even though the government is under increasing budgetary pressure. Unfortunately, shortly after the letter was sent, Minister Horner announced that they were considering changing the regulation to allow significant increases to tuition beyond the regulated amounts.



INTERNATIONAL NEWS DESK



At Home: Blind sled dog ready to retire

It's not unusual that Isobel, a husky-cross sled dog, is ready for retirement. She's nine years old, a standard age for sled-dog retirement. What is unusual is that Isobel is blind—and she's been running that way for the past five years.

As the [CBC](#) reports, Isobel “staggered to a halt in the middle of a sled run” one day. Vets told her owners that Isobel's retinas were detached and advised that her days as a sled dog were over. Her owners took that advice but Isobel soon lost her spirit, refusing to eat or drink.

A visit from one of Isobel's former sled mates brought a noticeable difference in the husky cross and her owners made the reluctant decision to try putting Isobel back in harness. She quickly responded.

“The first couple of steps she stumbled a little bit, and after that it was straight on down the trail and she never looked back,” her owner Gerald Azure told reporters.

Her appetite returned and, according to Azure, Isobel handled being in harness just as well as she had before. To compensate for her blindness, she relies on human commands and the position of her sled mates, as well as her other senses. She's even “helped beat other dog teams in head-to-head competitions.”

Isobel's story attracted the attention of NBC and the network visited Churchill, Manitoba, to film a feature on her. Isobel won't be spending her retirement in Churchill, though. Instead, she'll move to Alberta to take up residence with the veterinarian eye specialist who initially treated her condition.

In Foreign News: Camden plans ‘naked’ streets to reduce accidents

There's been a lot of attention paid to driver distraction inside vehicles recently. But the city of Camden, in North London, has a plan to reduce distraction *outside* vehicles—and potentially reduce accidents. As the [Times Online](#) reports, a 380-metre stretch of Camden's High Street “is to become the city's only ‘naked’ street.”

The average city street is loaded with signs, recycling and garbage bins, bollards, and other visual distractions. Planners believe that by de-cluttering the street, drivers will become more aware of the “6,000 pedestrians who use the street every hour at its busiest times.” The idea is already in use in the Netherlands.

The street has had 27 accidents involving pedestrians and cyclists in the past three years, an “unusually high number.” Along with removing visual distractions, the plan calls for sidewalks to be widened by up to 2.5 metres, which will reduce the road to a “single-file carriageway.” A lack of formal pedestrian crossings will mean that pedestrians are free to cross where they choose. They are, however, advised to “make eye contact with drivers to establish the right of way.”

CLASSIFIEDS

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THE VOICE

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www.voicemagazine.org

The Voice is published every Friday in html and pdf format

Contact *The Voice* at voice@voicemagazine.org

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Special thanks to Athabasca University's *The Insider* for its contributions