

THE VOICE

MAGAZINE

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In Conversation

Suzie LeBlanc, Part I

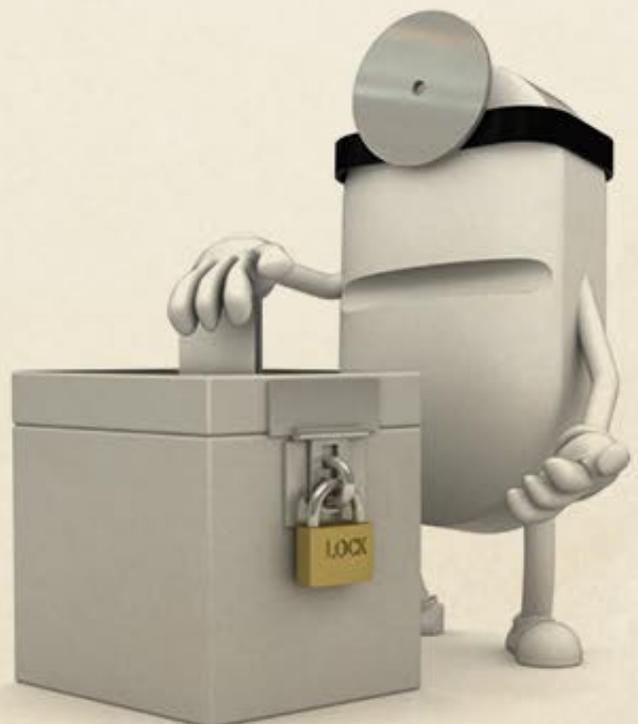
Learning from Lynda

Better Yourself

AUSU Health Plan

Finally one designed for us

*Plus:
From Where I Sit
Writer's Toolbox
and much more!*



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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.

EDITORIAL**Karl Low****Refer & um...**

If you haven't read it in the AUSU newsletter already, the new AUSU Health Care plan is starting to be rolled out to students. The details of the plan have been hammered out by AUSU and the plan developer Gallivan & Associates, but before it can be put into place, AUSU wants to make sure that you, the members, are on board.

No matter which post-secondary school you go to, chances are that you will be signed up for a health care plan, it's generally a great deal for insurers as they get guaranteed sign-ups from a large population of young, healthy students who have little to no say as to whether they actually need the health care. However, until now, AU has been decidedly different. Since our students are all over the country, and have a much greater number of older, part-time, and already working people as students, we were never really a sweet-spot demographic for insurers. Not only are we statistically more likely to actually use the insurance we paid for as we're older, but many of us already have coverage through our employers or main school, and would be unhappy if they were forced to take on secondary coverage that literally could not be used because of their other provider.

If you've been around a while, you may remember that AUSU was offering an opt-in plan at one point, but really this was more like a small discount program on top of the insurance provider's normal offering. The plan with Gallivan & Associates looks to be of a different nature, and my kudos go out to them for having the courage to put together something which, so far as I can tell, is unique in the industry.

One of the primary differences between this plan and what you'll find at any other post-secondary institution or employer is that most group plans require proof of alternative coverage to opt-out. With the current plan on offer from AUSU, opting out will be, I'm told, as simple as a button click. But better than that, Gallivan & Associates has made sure that their plan is able to be put in place on top of any coverage you may already have. So, while many student plans only cover a portion of the costs, by "topping up" with the AUSU plan that pain in your teeth, or your back, or where-ever, doesn't need to transfer down to your wallet at all.

Of course, many students at AU only take a single course as they fill out their requirements for their degree at their regular school, so a plan that started as soon as you signed onto an AU course would have made AU seem more expensive and a less attractive option. Yet we know that once students have taken one course, they find they like the freedom it gives and so start taking more of their degree here. AUSU and Gallivan & Associates have acknowledged this by making sure that the plan doesn't start until you register for your second course.

So with all these benefits, why is AUSU even bothering to ask if we want the plan put in place, especially if opting-out will be as easy as they say it is?

The reason is because, like any student plan, it still isn't free. Unlike the previous discount plan AUSU was offering, however, this one really is on-par with other student plans in terms of fees and coverage. When you register for your second course in a given year, an additional fee of \$325 will be applied unless you immediately choose to opt out. However, for this \$325, you get up to \$500 in dental coverage (including

preventative), up to \$300 in physician services (including those not typically covered by provincial health care plans such as naturopaths or physiotherapists), and, amazingly, up to \$2000 for private tutorial services if you're confined to your home or a hospital for 15 days.

Let me spell that last one out again, because that's just insane if you ask me. If something happens that confines you to hospital or home for 15 days, you can get coverage of 80% of the costs, up to \$15/hr, to a total of \$2000 for private tutorial services, in exchange for your payment of \$325 starting at your second course in a year.

But in order for us to get this, we need to pass this vote during the election, and ideally pass it resoundingly. So if you're a regular student, please vote in this election and be sure to vote in the referendum. Even if you don't want the coverage yourself, you'll be able to opt out and your vote will enable those who need it to get it. If you're a visiting student, or just taking a single course to round out your degree, first, thanks for reading the Voice, but second, also, please take the time to vote in the referendum from February 19 to February 22nd. While the plan itself won't affect you at all, many of the students around you might really need this kind of assistance.

If I sound excited about this, it's because I am. I was on Council for a time, myself, and finding any insurance provider who was even interested in the AU student body, never mind willing to make the kind of concessions that would make a plan truly beneficial for AU students, was a difficult task. Personally, I want to see Gallivan & Associates rewarded for their bravery in offering this type of plan, and hope they make a lot of money at it while at the same time giving AU and distance students' benefits that we need. My hope is that if the response to this plan is enthusiastic enough, Gallivan might consider rolling it out for other distance based learning programs, and AU and AUSU will have been the catalyst to help all distance students.

So remember, on Feb 19-22, don't just vote for your new Council, but vote in the referendum, where we can send a message to insurance providers that people taking distance education are a worthwhile market to pursue.

Aside from that, I hope you enjoy this issue, our feature is an interview with Suzie LeBlanc, but we also have our regular columns, including the return of Hazel Anaka in this weeks' "From Where I Sit" where she takes us on a whirlwind tour of the Magic Kingdom.

As always, if you have any comments or criticisms about the issue, I'm happy to hear them and you can e-mail them to me at voice@voicemagazine.org. In the next issue, I hope to have a lot of coverage of the candidates for the AUSU election, and an update on the winner of the Voice Reader Survey. (That's right, I still haven't handed out the prize, as the winner isn't answering either phone or email messages. So next week, hopefully we'll announce the new winner!)

Until then.



In Conversation with Suzie LeBlanc, Part I

Wanda Waterman



Soprano Suzie LeBlanc and violinist David Greenberg share a talent for using written music as a vocabulary for improvisation ... Following the goings on with the ear, however, was, like LeBlanc's voice, a pure and translucent delight. The audience reaction at the end of the concert rang the rafters.
- Stephen Pedersen, *The Chronicle Herald*, 2011

Suzie Leblanc is an internationally acclaimed Canadian soprano. Her most recent project was the album I Am in Need of Music, a group of 11 songs whose settings she commissioned from six prominent Canadian composers and

whose lyrics were based on the poems of Elizabeth Bishop, a new England poet who spent her formative years in Canada's Maritime provinces (read the [Voice review here](#)). In order to prepare to sing these poems for the album, as well as for sheer love of Bishop's poetry, Suzie and artist Linda Rae Dornan retraced the steps of a hike Bishop took through Newfoundland in 1932 (this is documented in the video "Walking with EB"). Recently she took the time to answer Wanda Waterman's questions about her Acadian childhood, her musical education, and her favourite mentors.

Bugs, plants, and encyclopedia bedtimes

My childhood was both active and quiet. I was interested in sports (gymnastics, swimming, and dancing), and I spent a lot of time conversing with bugs and plants and reading the encyclopedia in my bed at night, especially articles about animals—the stranger the better.

Some happy moments I remember were walking in the woods with my father. He was supposedly hunting but never shot an animal in my presence. He knew the names of every bird and would teach me to recognize them.

I also spent hours chatting with my father's decoys, which I remember as highly entertaining. I wonder what we talked about!

School phobia

I had fun playing school with my sisters but happiness went out the window when I began going to a school far away from home. I had school phobia and hated having to get on the bus.

I grew up in Edmundston, New Brunswick. We moved to Montreal for two years when I was five and this was where I started school. Then we moved back to New Brunswick (Moncton) where I stayed until I turned 16.

The joy of choir

I was very fortunate to have grown up in the Maritimes where there have always been many wonderful choirs. I began singing with “Les Jeunes Chanteurs d’Acadie” when I was seven or eight, and it was then that I discovered my love of music, words, pronunciation, discipline, and ensemble music-making. The conductor was Lorette Gallant (then a nun), a passionate woman with a great love of music. She taught us to give our best. I also took flute lessons and taught recorder to the kids in my class who had trouble with it.

Transfixing moments

The strongest musical element, though, was no doubt my mother, who had been a professional singer, winning the CBC contest “The Singing Stars of Tomorrow” when she was 17. She sang opera, gave recitals, and studied for two years with Elizabeth Schumann in New York. At home she sang little, but once in while she would escape in song and it was exhilarating, if a bit frightening, to watch her transform.

I also remember lying under the piano bench while my sister practiced Debussy’s “La Cathédrale Engloutie” and Bach’s chorale “Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland.” I stayed there for hours, listening, watching her feet move the pedals.

Falling in love with early music

When I was 15 or 16 I went to Barbados with my family and fell in love with Italian 17th century music. How? The apartment we rented had one classical music recording: vocal music by Monteverdi that included the wonderful “Lamento della Ninfa.”

This piece affected me deeply and I sang it for hours while walking on the beach or swimming, creating my own variations on the famous ground bass. Later on, I heard the same composer in a concert by the Studio de Musique Ancienne de Montreal, and decided on the spot that this music would be my life's music.

As a singer and lover of Early Music, my first and largest influence was Emma Kirkby. I had all her recordings and taught myself how to sing by listening and trying to imitate her phrasing, ease, and virtuosity.

It’s not a surprise that a few years later I was chosen to sing in her place in the “Concert of Musicke” for eight months while she gave birth to her first child, Nicholas. This was one of the strongest educational experiences of my life—a crash-course in pulling my weight in one of the best European vocal groups, learning new repertoire quickly, and singing performance after performance with a team of excellent musicians around me. There was no better (or quicker) school of learning!

Other mentors have been people I’ve worked with: John Toll, Rachel Podger, Stephen Stubbs, Erin Headley, Alexander Weimann, Richard Egarr, Jaap ter Linden, Charles Daniels, Marco Beasley, Bruce Dicky, Robert Kortgaard, Yannick Nezet-Seguin, and Julius Drake.

(to be continued next week)



No Small Feat

After an absence of about thirty years, we found ourselves heading back to the "happiest place on earth" during a recent vacation in southern California. As with many things, the impetus for a trip to Disneyland was a four-year-old grandson.

It was *déjà vu* all over again. Our only previous trip was when Greg was about the same age. That time we were naïve enough to go at Christmas, when the lineups for everything from amusement rides, to food, to washrooms were a mile long. This was technically the slow season so wait times were reasonable. As I recall, Greg needed to be carried a fair bit when he powered out. Grady was more of a trooper and didn't wilt until after the daily parade.

So what in the world has changed over the past three decades? Everything—and nothing. The same friendliness and cleanliness the park built its reputation on is still there. Now there is an entirely new complex called Disney's California Adventure. It seemed to have more restrooms and better signage but I suppose that is to be expected. A one-day adult admission of \$137 allowed for park hopping between the old and new, and a sixteen-dollar parking fee several blocks away gave us shuttle service to and from the parks.

There were disappointments when some of the most popular rides (Radiator Springs Racers and Splash Mountain) were closed for refurbishment. As someone whose head and gut couldn't tolerate the Scrambler even when I was a teen, I was shocked that Grady and Aunt Hilary went on the large Ferris wheel and the Matterhorn. I got an instant headache after one round on Mater's Junkyard Jamboree. But I handled Heimlich's Chew Chew Train in 'a bugs land,' I'm happy to report.

Some of the cooler things were on the Adventure side: Buzz Lightyear Astro Blasters ride (did that one twice) and a virtual 'suing up' as Ironman. The Pirates of the Caribbean and Haunted Mansion tours were also geared for those of us likely to vomit on any ride too spinny, bumpy, fast, or curvy.

I loved seeing the place over-run with tiny princesses. I'd heard about this beforehand: where little girls could get their hair and makeup done and be outfitted in a gown. Precious, precious, precious.

Our lunch at Taste Pilots' Grill was good and the prices comparable to elsewhere: a veggie burger and fries for ten bucks. Contrary to what their website says, off-site food and beverages were allowed and openly consumed. Having Disney staff become 'Food Nazis' would ruin their rep, I guess.

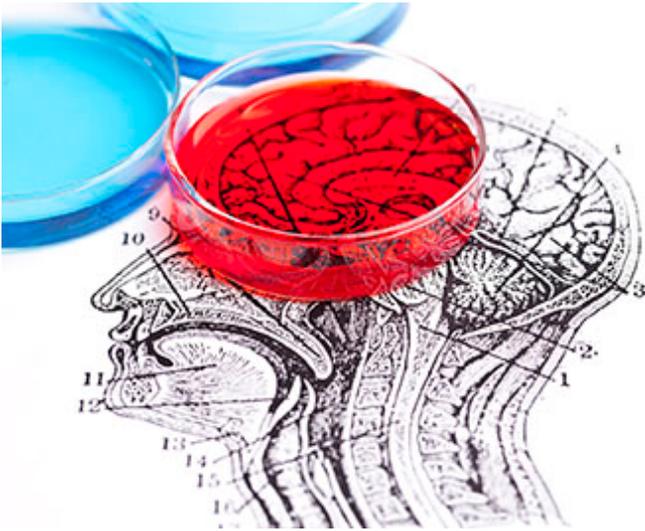
The whole place runs like a well-oiled machine, which isn't surprising, I suppose, since the original park opened in 1955. They've had a few years to get things right. There were 'guests' of every age from a few weeks old to seniors in wheelchairs and motorized chairs.

To create something that appeals to all sixteen million annual visitors and has stood the test of time is no small feat, from where I sit.

Hazel Anaka's first novel is *Lucky Dog*. Visit her [website](#) for more information or follow her on Twitter @anakawrites.

Primal Numbers

S.D. Livingston



Drone Photo Op

Drones are big news these days. The military spies with them, environmental agencies track floods with them, and a microbrewery got in trouble for delivering beer with them. And now there's a personal drone in the works that you can control with your smart phone. But I'm not sure that the idea of personal drones is one that will take flight.

In theory, the concept is pretty cool. A company called AirDroids has created The Pocket Drone, "the world's first multicopter that's powerful enough to carry a high quality action camera and folds up smaller than a 7 in

tablet." They're not the only ones working on this type of tech, but their Kickstarter [campaign](#) page shows that they've done their homework—including safety considerations like a retracting/breakaway propeller design.

And personal drones have remarkable potential for both amateur and professional photographers. Whether you want to record a day out on your windsurfer or the joy at an outdoor wedding, a camera mounted on a personal drone can capture some truly unique footage.

The problem, then, isn't with the technology itself, or even the people who would use it responsibly and safely. But there are plenty of other factors that could ground this technology before it gets popular, and we're not just talking about irritating your neighbours with the constant buzz as you record your skateboard tricks over and over.

To start, there are questions about privacy. It's one thing if you're out in a public space and happen to be part of the general crowd in someone's photo or video. But what about being filmed by someone's drone as it passes over your property? Is it okay if we have the ability to capture photos or videos of people when they think they're in a private setting—say, sunbathing behind the fence in their own backyard? What happens if that footage is posted online?

That's the kind of thing that could easily happen even with the best of intentions. Then there are the scenarios to consider when someone's intentions aren't so good. Think it's okay to leave your bedroom curtains open in your condo just because it doesn't face another tall building? If personal camera-bearing drones become common, you might want to think again. Never mind how this kind of tech could be used to invade the privacy of public figures.

Then there are safety issues. Sure, a car or a person might withstand the impact pretty well if your drone and camera spin out of control and strike them. Especially with a lightweight unit like the Pocket Drone that weighs in at only one pound plus a half-pound maximum payload. But a baseball doesn't weigh much either, and anyone who's ever been smacked with one at a softball game knows how much they can hurt.

Speed and distance play a factor in potential collisions, too. Hydro lines, TV cables, and antennae are sources for accidents. Even birds and planes could collide with a personal drone. For instance, the Pocket Drone "can fly over 5,000 feet from where the pilot is standing, and theoretically can fly up to approximately 11,000 feet."

It can also reach a maximum speed of 35–40 miles per] hour. Another personal drone, the Phantom 2 Vision, weighs just over 2.5 pounds and can fly at a maximum of 15 metres per second (though the website cautions against it).

It's bad enough that pilots have to worry about things like bird strikes and idiots with lasers. We need to give some serious thought to whether we should add personal drones to that list.

Are personal photo drones a good idea? In theory, yes. But there are still a lot of practical issues to consider before they take to the skies.

S.D. Livingston is the author and creator of the Madeline M. Mystery Series for kids, as well as several books for older readers. Visit her website for information on her writing.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS DESK



At Home: Taxes for Tuition? Nova Scotians agree.

In Nova Scotia, a poll from the Nova Scotia Post-Secondary Education Coalition show that nearly 71% of people making between \$40,000 and \$70,000 are willing to pay higher taxes if they knew it would go toward lowering tuition in Nova Scotia universities and colleges.

With recent reports showing tuition rising above \$6,000, David Etherington from the Canadian Federation of Students, says that this isn't surprising as tuition is starting to push middle-income students out of university, reports the Metronews in Halifax.

Around the World: Sweden Wants more non-EU students.

Have you been wanting to study abroad? Perhaps in what the *Economist* has declared "the best governed country in the world"? In that case, there is some good news for you as PIE News is reporting that the heads of Gothenburg University and KTH Royal Institute of Technology, along with representatives from Swedish commercial power-houses such as Ericsson and AB Volvo, have written an opinion editorial. This editorial calls on the government to introduce scholarships directed toward non-EU students in an effort to shore up their declining international student numbers.

These numbers, which dropped from 8,000 to 1,400 upon Sweden's introduction of tuition fees, give "the wrong picture of Sweden as an international player," say those calling on the government. They propose that the scholarships would be funded by income tax revenue from those non-EU students who choose to stay and work in Sweden after graduation. While this is currently only about 17% of the non-EU students who graduate from Swedish institutions, up to 85% of the non-EU students who are there say they would like to stay in the country if they are able to. Accordingly, the writers of the editorial also call for reforms to the Visa regulations in Sweden which currently require non-Swedish students to leave within 10 days of the end of their course.

Writer's Toolbox

Christina M. Frey



Not Literally the Most Important Article You'll Ever Read

This article is not literally the most important article you'll ever read.

Wait, you say. Shouldn't that be "quite literally"?

No, it shouldn't—and this week's Toolbox will show you why.

Literally, defined

Literally is one of the most misunderstood words in the English language. In fact, misuse is so common—even among highly educated individuals—that a recent edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* acknowledged the improper usage (raising a huge outcry from editors and English teachers).

And there is a correct usage. Although it's often used for general emphasis, *literally* really means "actually" or "physically"; in other words, a phrase used literally means exactly what the words say.

Literally vs. figuratively

The opposite of speaking literally is speaking figuratively, or speaking in figures of speech or comparisons to create effect. There are many figures of speech, but two of the most common are similes and metaphors. Similes are direct comparisons created using words like *as* or *like*:

Example A: After only 15 minutes outdoors, I felt like an icicle. Here, the simile—"like an icicle"—describes just how cold the speaker was. No reader or listener would think that the speaker had actually turned into an icicle, though. It's obvious that a figure of speech is being employed.

Metaphors also express comparisons, but indirectly; in some situations this can make the comparison more vivid. The following is a metaphor, and its physical impossibility suggests that the speaker is exaggerating for effect:

Example B: After only 15 minutes outdoors, I had turned into an icicle. That's pretty expressive, isn't it? But many speakers want to make it still more expressive, and they do that by adding *literally*. This is an error.

Exactly the opposite

The problem with adding *literally* to similes and metaphors is that you are creating the opposite effect of what you're intending. The thing that similes and metaphors have in common is that they are figurative rather than actual; they paint a picture with comparisons rather than offering an actual, scientific, verifiable—in other words, literal—description. Sticking *literally* next to figurative speech actually cancels out your figurative language because it alerts the listener or reader that you're speaking in absolutes.

Example C: After only 15 minutes outdoors, I had literally turned into an icicle. On its face, this means that the speaker had actually, physically turned into an icicle. Is that what s/he meant to say? Well, no—most likely the expression was intended to be figurative.

Remember: when speaking figuratively, don't use *literally*.

Example D: After only 15 minutes outside, I literally had trouble breathing. This is saying that the speaker actually, physically had trouble breathing. Proper use of *literally*? It depends, but if the speaker did have trouble breathing, then *literally* would be correct.

General rule

When in doubt, substitute *actually*. If *actually* makes sense, then go ahead and use *literally*. If not, then leave your figurative language as-is or substitute a different word to create the effect you're going for.

So is this article literally the most important one you'll ever read? No. You might read something more important someday, like how to spot the signs of a heart attack—or how to meditate—or how to ace your midterms. Importance is relative, so I can't use *literally* unless I'm absolutely sure that this is actually the most important article you'll ever read. And as much as I love correct usage, I'm unable to make that claim, so *literally* has no place in my statement.

Misuse of *literally* is so prevalent that it's a hard habit to correct; even I have to stop myself sometimes when I'm about to let an improper *literally* slip out. It's true that misuse of the word isn't the end of the world—whether literally or figuratively. But correct use will allow you to speak more precisely and accurately, and in the end that's what good communication is all about.

Christina M. Frey is a book editor and a lover of great writing. Chat with her on Twitter about all things literary @turntopage2.

DID YOU KNOW?



AUSU Health Care Plan

During the Election, AUSU will be holding a vote to approve the implementation of a new Health Care Plan. This plan will cost \$325 per year, however students can opt out of the plan before the fees are applied. Those who do not, however, will receive benefits of up to \$500 in dental (including preventative work), \$300 in physician care (including chiropractors, naturopaths, and physiotherapists), 80% coverage of prescription drugs, and up to \$2000 coverage of private tutorial service if they've been hospitalized, and this coverage is in addition to any other plans they might already have.

However, before these benefits can be offered, students need to vote for the plan alongside the AUSU Election from Feb 19-22. Even if you do not want the plan personally, your vote could enable some other student who needs it to take advantage of it.

Learning From Lynda

Barbara Lehtiniemi



If I had a personal motto, it would be "never turn down the opportunity to learn something new." Learning opportunities are occasions for growth. Everything I learn expands my horizon and increases my potential.

Balancing studies with work, family, and the myriad other commitments and activities that round out our lives, there is a risk of developing tunnel vision. Focusing on the road ahead, we may only learn the things that are put in our way. While those things are valuable, we could be missing even more value from the learning opportunities outside our line of vision. It's a good idea to step outside the tunnel, escape the flow, and discover what else is out there that will offer the potential for growth.

Being a student, acquiring new knowledge is a given. However, sometimes the acquisition of knowledge itself requires knowledge or skills I don't already possess. Perhaps I need to learn new software or improve my note-taking skills. It's almost a given that I should overcome procrastination and improve my time-management skills. And anything that fuels creativity will surely translate into better grades on essays and assignments.

I recently checked out lynda.com, the video training website accessible to AU students through the AU Student Union. AUSU announced this service in April 2013 and will provide access to lynda.com for three years. Students can register to receive one year's free access during that period. The training videos are available whenever you are, and can be accessed from your computer, tablet, or smart phone. See AUSU's [website](#) for details.

Having navigated the registration process, my first task is to browse through the course list. Since there are over 2300 courses, I begin with the subject list (you can also search the list by software or keyword.) The variety of subjects is extensive and intriguing: architecture, cloud computing, data analysis, leadership, music notation, pre-visualization, student tools, and web conferencing are among the almost 200 subject categories. There appears to be a heavy focus on computers and creativity.

The courses are video-based with an accompanying transcript. Some courses, like those in the "Monday Productivity Pointers" series are less than five minutes long. Others are hours in length such as, ironically, "Time Management Fundamentals" at two and three-quarter hours. Most are broken up into manageable segments, which allow the viewer to easily exit a session and continue another time.

A great feature is the accompanying transcript, which scrolls just below the video. The video's current dialogue is highlighted, and you can navigate instantly to anywhere in the video by clicking on the relevant place in the transcript. Another feature on the video is the "rewind 10 seconds" button that gives you a second chance to catch the point you just missed.

I began my lynda.com journey with the easily digested "Monday Productivity Pointers." Each week a new quick tip is posted and you can access all the previous tips. After watching a light but fascinating tip on finding eBay deals

through misspelled listings, I searched to find something more academic. I found productivity pointer treasure with "Taking Screenshots From a PC." That was four minutes well-spent. And now I know how to use the "Snipping Tool" on my PC to take effective screenshots.

In the coming weeks, I'll be diving in deeper with "Public Speaking Fundamentals," "Managing Your Time," and perhaps "Overcoming Procrastination." I'll also review some of the more than 200 Microsoft courses to discover what I don't know about the software I'm already using. And, finally, I'll take a look at "The lynda.com Story" to find out how this service came to be.

If you are an AU student enrolled in an AU undergraduate course for credit, you can access lynda.com and its extensive library of training videos. From the AUSU [website](#), click on services, then lynda.com, or click [here](#). Be sure to read the registration instructions carefully. Once registered, remember to access lynda.com through the AUSU website on subsequent visits.

Don't turn down the opportunity to learn something new.

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

Click of the Wrist

Stressed out? Of course you are! But if it's our hectic modern lifestyle that generates much of our stress, it's also thanks to modern technology and knowledge that we can calm ourselves down. This week's links examine some ways science and technology can help us reduce stress and increase our personal sense of peace.

TechnoCalm

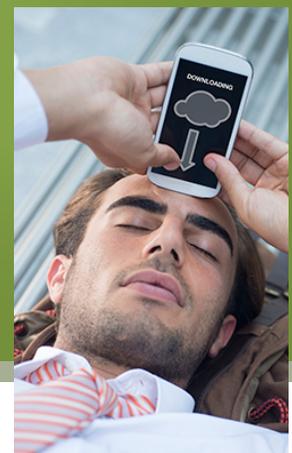
Need to de-stress? There's an app for that! No, really—there is. These 10 "digital meditation tools" range from guided meditations to [Donothingfor2minutes.com](#), "a full-screen video of waves crashing at sunset with a timer counting down for two minutes." Download a few and stay grounded throughout your hectic day.

Ask the Scientist

Not all stress-busting techniques are high-tech—but that doesn't mean they're old wives' tales, either. This *Huffington Post* article offers 20 de-stressing techniques that are backed up by scientific studies, and some of them will surprise you. Taking a walk in nature is obviously relaxing, but did you know that chewing gum helps you deal with anxiety?

Whispers

If you surf the web, you've probably come across something called ASMR—autonomous sensory meridian response. These "intimate videos of whispering and tapping fingernails" generate physical sensations like tingling or a sense of relaxation and peace. Next time you feel stressed—or can't sleep—try out a few of these [techniques](#) to calm yourself down.



Mindful Bard Wanda Waterman

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



The Unbearable Beauty of the Open, Hurting Heart

Book: *Letter from Brooklyn*

Author: Jacob Scheier

Publisher: ECW Press

Yes, there is joy, fulfillment and companionship—but the loneliness of the soul in its appalling self-consciousness is horrible and overpowering.

-Sylvia Plath

I don't normally like postmodern confessional free verse, but this tome caught my attention because of the sheer density of its "aha" moments. You know how that feels; it's when you hear something new and you say to yourself, "I never thought of it that way, but now that you mention it, it really is true."

Another remarkable aspect of this work is the story arc behind the poet's voice. Jacob Scheier was born in Canada only because his parents, on returning from an activist mission in Palestine, were not allowed to re-enter the United States. His personal history is rooted in New York, Judaism, his family's radical communism, Eastern Europe, and the tragedy of his mother's early death.

Among many other awards and honours in this country, the now Toronto-based journalist and poet won the Governor General's Award for his first book of poems, ***More To Keep Us Warm.***

A Mild Antipathy to Metaphor . . .

It's hard to justify cynicism in art, especially cynicism about social conscience and metaphor, two of the pillars of the tradition of poetry in the West, not to mention two characteristics of the kind of poetry that usually best fits the Mindful Bard worldview.

It's understandable that Scheier's poetry should exhibit a mild hostility toward social activism but why metaphor? He even seems a little put off by Shakespeare, the master craftsman of metaphor and simile, suggesting in his poem "Explaining Sonnet 73 to the Aliens," that metaphors, rather than rich repositories of meaning, are an effective means of passing on false notions about reality. Who can argue with that?

The tradition of metaphorical verse in English necessarily draws with it the foundations of Western civilization, and thus makes frequent allusions to great works of literature. You won't find much of that in these poems, because they're symptomatic of the "cultural amnesia" (Clive James) that descended on the west after the

brain-searing trauma of the Second World War, whose history and aftermath became part of our culture's new understanding of itself—our new Trojan War.

. . . and Social Activism

His parents' ideological zealotry failed to take root in Scheier's own worldview; in the end the devastation of personal loss trumps the disappointment of a delayed (and perhaps unattainable) revolution. (In "1989" he reminds his father that he'd prophesied economic collapse but hadn't warned him that tumours would fill his mother's body and then kill her.)

He harbours no illusions about changing the world from the outside. "Post-Occupy" describes the elements of the mundane aftermath of a movement which was so sound and so right and, in the end, changed so little. He just can't get excited about changing the world when all he needs to do is find some way to cope with his mother's death. The revolution will not be televised because it is, necessarily, interior.

Honouring the Poverty of the Human Condition

Cynical or not, *Letter from Brooklyn* gains points for being fearlessly honest and for, in the end, purveying the best kind of social consciousness—an embracing of suffering. It gains more points for describing the human condition in imagery that illuminates and honours the poverty of the human condition.

And in spite of the (feigned?) resistance to metaphor, Scheier comes up with some doozies. In "Elegy for Teenage Love" Scheier describes their love as a huge pocket and wonders if it might actually be bigger than both of them or if it had simply been the means by which they'd both grown smaller—an ingenious image that prompts one to immediately divide all love relationships into two groups: those wherein the love is larger than life and those that make us smaller.

Letter from Brooklyn manifests six of the Mindful Bard's criteria for books well worth reading: it is authentic, original, and delightful; it poses and admirably responds to questions that have a direct bearing on my view of existence; it stimulates my mind; it is about attainment of the true self; it displays an engagement with and compassionate response to suffering; and it makes me appreciate that life is a complex and rare phenomena, making living a unique opportunity.



Dear
Barb

Barbara Godin

Dear Barb:

I am a twenty-five year old guy who is sharing an apartment with two other guys. We are all in different stages of our university education. I am in my last year of my undergraduate degree. My roommates are both first year students and this is the first time either of them has lived on their own. The problem is they are both lazy slob who never clean up after themselves. I'm not a neat freak, but the apartment is such a mess that I can barely stand it. I feel embarrassed to bring my girlfriend home. I've tried to talk to them about this but they basically ignore me. Do you have any ideas on how I can get my roommates to help out and pick up after themselves?

Thanks, Mark

Hi Mark, congratulations on almost finishing your degree!

I suspect this is typical behaviour for two guys being out on their own for the first time. You definitely do not want to start picking up after them. That would just perpetuate this behaviour. Perhaps setting up some guidelines would help. I assume the rent is being split three ways and each one of you has your own room. Their room is their private domain, whether they choose to clean up is their business, however the common areas are different. I would suggest each of you choose a chore that will be done each week. For example, one of you could be responsible for the kitchen, the other for the living room and another for the bathroom(s). The problem may simply be that these boys lack initiative and don't know where to start, as mom probably did everything at home. Knowing what is required may be all that is necessary. Hope this helps.

Dear Barb:

My fourteen year old son has been working as a host at a popular roadhouse for the last few months. This is his first job and he's doing really well and getting lots of shifts. Recently my son went in for his shift and apparently too many hosts had been scheduled to work and someone had to go home. One of the other hosts was a twenty year old girl with a child and she has not been getting many shifts. She made my son feel bad as she told him she really needed the money, therefore he offered to go home so she could stay, even though he really didn't want to. As my son was leaving his boss pulled him aside and said he had tried to call the other host to tell her not to come in, but couldn't get hold of her. Clearly, this indicates they would have preferred my son stay. Since my son is so young he gave in to the other hostess even though he would have preferred to work. Not sure how he should handle this situation if it arose again.

Melanie.

Hi Melanie,

your son obviously has a good heart, but he needs to learn that the work world functions a bit differently than everyday life. Without a doubt, I believe this other hostess was taking advantage of your son. She probably feels that since he is young and living at home and she has a child that she needs the work more than him. If this situation arises again your son needs to let the boss make the decision who will go home. If no one volunteers he will have to make a decision based on seniority or whatever criteria they use. This is a good lesson for your son to learn if he is going to survive in the world of work.

Thanks for your question.

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.

Comic

Wanda Waterman

**ANTBOY AND HAPPY RABBIT IN:
REST EASY, PETE**

Antboy, hurry up and get ready—I need you to help me drop off some flowers at the Pete Seeger shrine.

Absolutely not. I refuse to pay my respects to Pete Seeger's memory in the company of someone who can't even sing any of his songs!

I CAN SO SING PETE SEEGER SONGS!

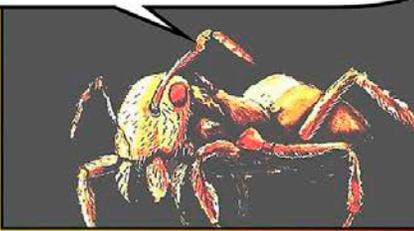
"JUST TAKE THOSE OLD RECORDS OFF THE SHELF! I'LL SIT AND LISTEN TO 'EM BY MY—"

**WHAM!
POW!**

(SIGH) REST EASY, PETE. THE RIVER MAY BE DIRTY NOW, BUT IT'S GETTIN' CLEANER EVERY DAY.

WRITTEN BY WANDA WATERMAN






AUSU UPDATE



Dear Members,

You may have recently seen information on the internet speculating about the future of Athabasca University. These reports suggest that the Alberta government may broker a merger between AU and University of Alberta, and that this may result in drastic changes to the services and programs offered to students AU students.

We want you to know that AUSU is aware of these rumours and is actively investigating the source – we will keep you informed as we know more.

We can tell you that AU is governed via a bicameral structure with two main governing bodies: the General Faculties Council (formerly Academic Council) and the Board of Governors (formerly Governing Council). AUSU has representatives on both of these governing bodies and we can confirm that there has been no formal discussion of a university merger among these groups. The AU president, Frits Pannekoek, has also assured the press that there is no truth to the rumour. On behalf of our members, we are seeking more information from the Board of Governors, the minister, and AU executives.

At this time we simply have no evidence that a merger is being seriously considered by AU, the U of A, or the Alberta government, and we note that among the many committees and working groups of AU, planning and development for the future continues as usual.

We know that our members are worried and want more information. We will update you as soon as we know more. At this time we do not feel there is any reason for students to worry or make changes to their study plans.

Do not hesitate to contact our office if you wish to talk about this or any other issue affecting AU students.

AUSU.

This column is provided by AUSU to facilitate communication with its members. *The Voice* does not write or edit this section; all content has been exclusively and directly provided by AUSU, and any questions or comments about the material should be directed to ausu@ausu.org.

CLASSIFIEDS

Classifieds are free for AU students! Contact voice@voicemagazine.org for more information.

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