



Vol 22 Issue 27 2014-07-11

The Centre of the Universe

Learning to Like it

Photo Feature, III

The Road to Convocation

In Conversation

Michael Gauthier, II

Plus:

*From Where I Sit
The Non-Partisan
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****The Joy of Pet Ownership**

So ask me how my vacation was. Go ahead. Ask.

How was it? Crappy. Literally.

I should explain. We have a cat. To be accurate, we have three cats and a dog, but this is about one specific cat of ours. All of our cats are rescues, and this little guy was originally brought in to the rescue association by a farmer who found the tiny kitten all alone out in the middle of a field, half starved, with no clue how he got there. The poor little thing's face was all scrunched up like a gremlin, and he had a tiny tail that simply hadn't grown out because of malnutrition. A good person with the MEOW society, where we got him from, had been carrying him around to work with her because he'd been so weak and ill.

His first vaccination almost killed him. He spent nearly a full day just curled up in my lap, and the vet told us that we should probably expect not to have him for more than a couple years. But that was over ten years ago. It's amazing what good food and decent care can do for an animal.

Unfortunately, our little Grue (if you ever played the computer game Zork, you'll get the reference) was never quite right. His vocal cords never developed properly (we surmise that he may have been taken by some sort of predator that damaged his throat before losing him in the field) and to this day he can't meow. Oh, he makes the motion, but nothing comes out. The other thing that seems to have been damaged is his digestion.

Normally, it's controlled. He goes to the litter like any other cat, just what comes out of him generally isn't solid. It's not a huge problem thanks to the invention of clumping litter, just a bit disconcerting. We've tried various diets, a battery of vet tests, but it seems that the one time we found a combination that would firm things up for him, it also had the effect of nearly killing him with an abundance of calcium and water retention in his system.

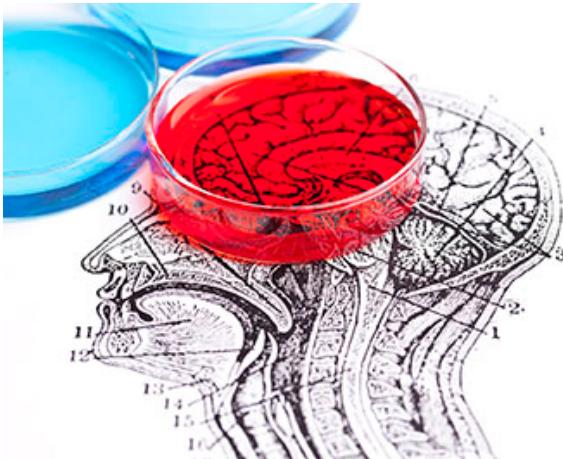
This brings us around to my point. "Normally", as it turns out, isn't the same as "always", and this last week has forced us to break out the carpet steamer and stock up on enzyme cleaner and Febreze. The smell is a mixture of cow-pies and something worse, and while we make jokes about how he could advance chemical warfare techniques, we live in fear that he might slip by us and get on the bed one day. We'd have to burn the mattress. As you can imagine, he's pretty miserable about it as well. My concern is that this isn't just a flare-up, but rather a sign of him having already lived five times beyond what was originally projected for him. We've got some vet solutions that'll hopefully bring the symptoms down, but at a certain point you have to ask yourself if it's more humane to prolong a life of misery.

So. That's been my vacation. On the plus side, the writers for *The Voice Magazine* have been busy putting together a bunch of interesting reads for you this week. In particular, check out Wanda Waterman's "In Conversation," and, of course, the third and concluding part of our photo feature about the events surrounding AU's recent convocation ceremonies.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Karl". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized 'K' at the beginning.

Primal Numbers

Calorie Count



and it will tell you the chemical makeup of any object simply by pointing and clicking.

SCiO's database of recognizable matter is still being expanded, but its inventor, Dror Sharon, hopes to have his gadget available to consumers sometime in 2015—for the remarkably affordable price of \$299.

Obviously, there are plenty of places where SCiO would be invaluable. At airport security, for example, or in hospitals. Engineers or farmers could use it for soil analysis.

But why on earth would the average consumer have any need to carry around a molecular analyzer, even one as small as a data stick? As a matter of fact, there are plenty of very good reasons.

Take your weekly trip to the grocery store, for instance. There's a lot of concern about GMOs these days—genetically modified organisms, which are foods that have had their DNA altered. That could mean anything from a gene-spliced carrot to the GMO wheat used in your favourite cereal. In Canada, there are no laws about labelling GMO foods, so consumers have no way of knowing what they're getting. A SCiO could let you scan that produce and find out whether it's the kind your grandparents ate or a genetically altered hybrid.

Even if you only shop at places with unaltered, organic produce, there's a good chance your apples and grapes are coated with residue from pesticides. As a CBC [report](#) reveals, "nearly half the organic fresh fruits and vegetables tested across Canada in the past two years contained pesticide residue." (That's no reason to stop eating organic though. Pesticides have spread so widely through our environment that they've even shown up in fetal cord blood.) A SCiO would reveal whether you're getting a not-so-healthy serving of pesticides along with those peaches.

Allergies are another good reason for a gadget like SCiO. Think how much easier life would be for parents of kids with severe allergies. Buying food or dining in restaurants would be far less of a worry if you could simply do a quick scan of your child's meal.

You don't have to worry about GMOS or allergies? You could still use a SCiO to protect yourself from the old bait and switch. As this NPR [report](#) explains, there's a one in three chance you're being duped when you order that fish dinner from a restaurant or market.

S.D. Livingston

Calories. We need them to survive, but we hate having to worry about them. Are we eating too many? Are we getting the right kind? So far, the best way to keep track of your calories has been to count them, but a new handheld scanner promises to reveal exactly what your food is made of. Is this a fabulous new idea, or just one more way we're obsessed with tracking every tiny detail of our lives?

The technology itself is impressive. As this *National Post* [article](#) explains, the small gadget is "an infrared spectrometer the size of a thumb drive." It's called SCiO,

A large study across the US analyzed "1,215 seafood samples from 674 retail outlets in 21 states." More than one third were falsely labelled, with stores and restaurants often substituting cheaper seafood for the more expensive names on their menu.

Do we really need all those apps and gadgets to build colourful charts that track how many seconds of sleep we get? Probably not, even though they're fun to use.

The SCiO, on the other hand, has almost unlimited uses, from airport security to grocery shopping. And the best part is, you might even burn a few calories using it.

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 and Abroad



At Home: Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarships Program now Open.

The 2014-2015 Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarships competition has begun. Scholarships worth \$50,000 per year for up to three years are being given out to highly motivated and competitive students who plan on pursuing their doctoral degrees at a Canadian university.

The program is open to Canadian citizens, permanent Canadian residents, and international students, with a deadline of November 5, 2014. More information can be found on the government of Canada [website](#).

Around the Globe: Smart Drug use on the rise in European Students

The New York Times recently [reported](#) on the increased use of "smart drugs," drugs that are thought to increase cognitive and memorization capabilities, across Europe. While no longitudinal surveys have been done,

the anecdotal evidence is that more students are using these types of drugs more often in response to the heavy pressure being put on students to excel at their courses. At the end of 2012, a Swiss study found that one in seven students reported using some sort of enhancer in the months leading up to their exams, while in May of this year, that number had increased to one in five, as found in a national British student newspaper.

Some reasons for the growth in their use include how these drugs are now widely available through the internet., with some students are saying that you almost need to take these drugs simply to be on a level playing field with other students who are already taking them.

Boris Quednow, an assistant professor and psychologist at the Psychiatric Hospital of the University of Zurich also puts some of the blame for the increase in use on the media, which suggests that these drugs are effective for this sort of thing when, in reality, their effectiveness is by no means proven.

However, one first year medical student counters this by pointing out that whether they make you smarter or not, many of the reduce the need for sleep, and the additional time that provides for revision and review has the same effect as if they actually made you smarter when it comes to university testing.

Writer's Toolbox**Time is On Our Side, Part I****Christina M. Frey****Numerals vs. Words**

One of the most frequently asked questions I get, particularly from fiction writers, is whether or not to write out expressions of time instead of using numerals. The answer's pretty typical of editorial answers to anything: sometimes, except when you shouldn't.

Let me clarify.

Numerals or Not?

In AP style, numeral-based time is preferred over writing out the words in long form. But in Chicago style—which covers most fiction writing—the preference is to write out the time if it's in a quarter-hour increment. So instead of writing "1:00," you'd say "one o'clock." "10:30" would be "half past ten" or "ten thirty," and "4:45" would be "a quarter to five" or "a quarter of five" (the *a* is optional).

Example A (Chicago style): I told him I'd be finished by a quarter after three.

Example B (AP style): I told him I'd be finished by 3:15.

Example C (both Chicago and AP styles): I actually finished at 3:14.

Example D (Chicago style): I start work at nine o'clock in the morning.

Example E (AP style): I start work at 9 a.m. Note that AP style leaves off the *00* part of the time if it's right on the hour.

There's one distinct exception to this Chicago rule, though: when you're emphasizing a particular time (the idea of "sharp"—that time and no other), use numerals even when it's in a quarter-hour increment.

Example F (both Chicago and AP styles): The flight leaves at 6:15 a.m.

Example G (both Chicago and AP styles): My boss said I'd better not miss the 9:30 meeting.

On the Twelves

Regardless of which style guide you're using, always use *noon* and *midnight* instead of 12 (or 12:00) a.m. and 12 (or 12:00) p.m. Because there's possibility for confusion, the preference is now to drop the numbers entirely and use the words—even if you're using numerals elsewhere in the sentence.

Example H (AP style): The party will take place from noon until 2:30.

Example I (Chicago style): The party will take place from noon until half past two (or two thirty).

Example J (Chicago and AP styles): The party will take place from noon until 2:20.

Mix and Match

If you are writing out your numbers instead of using numerals, avoid mixing the long-form numbers with abbreviations like *a.m.* An exception, of course, exists when you're using *noon* or *midnight* (see above). The examples below are all in Chicago style.

Incorrect Example K: I'll come over to your house around one thirty p.m.

Corrected Example K: I'll come over to your house around one thirty in the afternoon.

Corrected Example K (assuming it's obvious you mean afternoon): I'll come over to your house around one thirty (or half past one).

But note:

Example L: If you're not here by 1:30 p.m., we're starting without you. Here, when I switched to numerals to emphasize the exact time, I changed "in the afternoon" to the abbreviation *p.m.*

Hyphenation

Expressions like "ten thirty" are usually not hyphenated. There is an exception, though, when the time expression is used to modify, or describe a noun.

Example M: The flight will leave around six thirty.

Example N: He's taking the six-thirty flight.

But don't hyphenate if you're using numerals, *o'clock*, *a.m.*, or *p.m.*:

Example O: He's taking the 6:30 p.m. flight.

Example P: He's taking the six o'clock flight.

But what if you are using numerals instead of writing out the numbers? Next week we'll cover a bit more on time punctuation (including punctuation of the 24-hour clock) and working with time zones. The following week, we'll wrap up this timely series with everything you ever wanted to know about *a.m.* and *p.m.*

Christina M. Frey is a book editor, literary coach, and lover of great writing. For more tips and techniques for your toolbox, follow her on Twitter (@turntopage2) or visit her [blog](#).

Learning to Like the Centre of the Universe

Barbara Lehtiniemi



voted in Rob Ford as their mayor. Toronto is a place to avoid. on the way to somewhere else. It is a place to change planes.

My disdain of Toronto is long-standing and formed over a number of visits through the years. So it was with reluctance I attended a conference there recently. Could a three-day visit change my long-held prejudice? Unlikely. Driving into the heart of the congested city, which I managed to do without getting creamed by a taxi, or running over any pedestrians or cyclists, confirmed my dislike. Toronto, you are oh-so-predictable.

The conference venue was Victoria College at the University of Toronto. The college was a surprisingly calm oasis in the city's centre with venerable stone buildings, ivy-covered walls, and green spaces. Okay, so Toronto has some good points.

One of the first conference attendees I spoke with told me her world ended at the subway line terminus. She never ventured further afield and certainly not outside of Toronto. Aha! Preconceived notions confirmed. Torontonians are inward-looking and snobbish. Over the three days of the conference I spoke with this lady a number of times. She was warm, articulate, and intensely curious and knowledgeable about everything. She was also frustratingly generous and humorous, and it was getting difficult to hold onto my own snobbish disdain.

Most of the conference attendees, who were primarily from Toronto, were similarly friendly and interesting. Ditto for the conference speakers. And the facility staff. Rats. Rob Ford was even out of town (rehab) leaving no-one for me to detest.

During a break in the conference, I ventured off-campus into the city. At the first major street, a large group of protesters drummed and chanted their way through traffic. A flyer was thrust into my hand, which described the group's concerns about humans' consumption of meat. Although I didn't share their beliefs, they were orderly and had, as I learned from a policeman assigned to accompany the group, a permit for their demonstration.

At nearby Queen's Park, I discovered that it actually is a park and not merely a structure housing the troughs of provincial politicians. The large leafy park was another green oasis, this one at the back door of the Ontario

I don't know how the rest of Canada views Ontario, but I have an idea how the rest of Ontario views Toronto. We refer to Toronto as the "Centre of the Universe." This is not meant kindly. Torontonians, to many of those beyond the fringe of the GTA, are self-important and Toronto-centric. The world revolves around Toronto and nothing of any importance happens elsewhere. I exaggerate, of course, but you get the drift.

I've never held any fondness for Toronto. I don't like crowds, aggressive drivers, or shopping and so have no reason to want to go there. I find the traffic mind-numbing, the tall buildings oppressive, and the people, well, come on, they

It is an obstacle to be driven around or through

Legislature. The legislative buildings, blushing with the red of the recent Liberal victory, were stately and quiet on a Saturday afternoon.

Within moments, a different parade of demonstrators arrived. These folks were on bicycles and were promoting the use of pollution-free bikes instead of cars. Each bicyclist wore a helmet and sensible shoes. And nothing else. Hundreds of nude cyclists (mostly, and quite obviously, male) paused at the steps of the legislature during their 10th annual World Naked Bike Ride tour of the city. Bemused tourists stood by and took photos. Is this staid Toronto?

The final blow to my Toronto aversion was delivered along with the conference's keynote speech. An eminent professor from, naturally, the University of Toronto gave a riveting and mind-expanding mini-lecture on psychology. For me, an online student from out in the rural boondocks of the province, attending a lecture in person is a rare treat. The centre of the universe was gaining in appeal.

Fiercely-held opinions are slow to erode—even, and perhaps most especially, uninformed ones. Yet, less than 48 hours after arriving in this once-loathsome city, I was making plans for a return visit.

Toronto isn't the centre of my universe, but I must confess it's a vibrant city with lots to offer. The buildings are tall but many of them are stunningly beautiful. Most residents are genuinely nice. They can't all have voted for Rob Ford, after all, and surely they will do better next time. And, who knows, maybe those naked cyclists will eventually convince enough people to ditch their cars and alleviate the choking traffic.

So, sorry Toronto, for hating you. I still don't want to live there, but Toronto is a nice place to visit.

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

Click of the Wrist

Art Museum

If your summer plans don't include a visit to an art museum, but you'd still like to take in a few masterpieces, check out this week's links. From the Great Masters to independent contemporary artists, there's something for everyone. Best of all, you don't need to leave your comfortable porch chair!

The Women

This beautiful collection of portraits of women—500 years' worth—is sure to inspire and intrigue. It's also fascinating to watch the changes in how artists have portrayed their portrait subjects. What does it say about how we've changed as a society?

The Collection

Google Art Project makes fine art easily accessible to all. Working with museums and archives to create a diverse collection, it takes the reader into galleries all over the world.

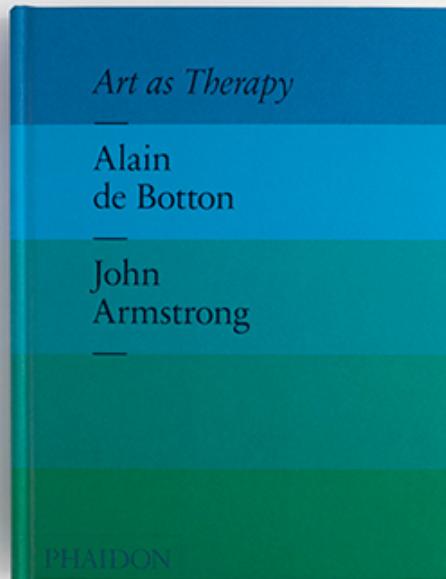
The New and Unknown

Prefer something a little different? deviantART is a social network for independent artists to share their work with the public. Browse through the selection—you might just discover the next great artist.



The Mindful Bard Art as Therapy

Wanda Waterman



Book: *Art as Therapy*

Authors: Alain de Botton and John Armstrong

If This Book Doesn't Make Art Dealers Mad, It Should

"Growth occurs when we discover how to be authentically ourselves in the presence of potentially threatening things."
- Alain de Botton and John Armstrong in *Art as Therapy*

Angelica Kauffmann was the darling of European aristocracy not only because of her gifts as a portraitist, but also because of her charming allegorical depictions of abstract ideas like art and poetry. Today, when so many of us believe that art should be intellectually rigorous, or even unnerving, it's tempting to dismiss her work for its "prettiness." But when we learn that Angelica had been tricked into marriage by a conman claiming to be a count, leading to a very difficult life

for her, it becomes a little harder to look down our noses at someone we assume has lead a pampered life.

Art as Shared Response

Alain de Botton and John Armstrong start out by attempting to determine the function and purpose of art and then try to determine how we should decide what makes good art. From there they move to dealing with more pedestrian but related issues like how art should be made, bought, sold, studied, and displayed.

The book attempts to humanise art not only by sharing anecdotes about artists but also by showing us how art can be a response to human need. The gorgeous prints they've included to illustrate each point don't hurt a bit. Even better, it brings the whole subject of art down to earth by addressing it in straightforward, simple, well-written language, refreshingly free of academic jargon and art-speak.

This may be why they get flak from critics claiming that they talk down to people, treat their readers like simpleminded children, and insult the intelligence of true art lovers. But, contrary to these accusations, Botton and Armstrong are not suggesting that art should make our lives easier or more palatable; they simply acknowledge that our pain is real and that art is uniquely qualified to address it.

Even art lovers, if they are sincere and if they have any social concern at all, can't help but feel a spark of hope at this thesis, seeing its potential to not only democratise art but also to raise the level of personal enjoyment of it. It should also encourage artists, so often accused of being either too shallow or too unfathomable, to be true to their instinct to make art as a generous outpouring of creativity that responds to human needs and desires, rather than as a an intellectual exercise or a second-guessing of market trends.

What Art Can Do For You

So how, precisely, can art satisfy your needs and desires? To start, according to Botton and Armstrong, art can

remind you of what's important in life. Art can give you hope, can give you a safe context in which to come to terms with your sorrow, can balance you out, and can help you to understand yourself better. Art can help you step out of your comfort zone and stop being afraid of the unfamiliar. It can help you love the mundane and see that the homely routines and settings of your everyday life are just as glamourous as the lives of the celebrities you envy. It can help you to accept and transcend your own sadness.

All this is explained and illustrated in a structure built around the answering of questions essentially impossible to answer, but the authors deserve kudos for what they've added to these debates.

Art as Prescription?

The authors insist that art has a purpose quite distinct from its power to generate money and to create a sense of superiority for an elite few. Art addresses and answers specific needs of the psyche— you just have to find out what your peculiar needs are and then seek the art that can satisfy it.

What seems a little preposterous is their proposal that art curators should sell art by getting to know a client's personal inner needs and then trying to provide the art that meets those needs, suggesting that the art dealer or curator become a kind of psychotherapist offering art as prescription. But when you consider how art is sold now—as just another commodity whose value is determined by the whims of critics, moneyed collectors, university art departments, and the world of fashion—their model doesn't seem quite so bizarre.

Mindfulness in the New Romantic Movement

This book is recommended here mainly because of the way it celebrates and encourages mindfulness—the quality that can save our relationships, enhance our joys, and give meaning to our lives. I never would have accepted such a thesis in my cynical youth, but I now see the need for a deeper, more personal, and, yes, more healing role for the arts in general, and what the authors say about the visual arts can easily be extended to all the fine arts.

Quite happily, it looks like the new Romantic Movement isn't all about art for art's sake, but, rather, is focussed more on art that instructs the heart and heals its wounds.

Art As Therapy manifests nine of the Mindful Bard's criteria for books well worth reading.

- It's authentic, original, and delightful.
- It poses and admirably responds to questions that have a direct bearing on my view of existence.
- It provides respite from a sick and cruel world, a respite enabling me to renew myself for a return to mindful artistic endeavor.
- It's about attainment of the true self.
- It inspires an awareness of the sanctity of creation.
- It displays an engagement with and compassionate response to suffering.
- It gives me artistic tools.
- It makes me want to be a better artist.
- It makes me appreciate that life is a complex and rare phenomena, making living a unique opportunity.

Wanda also penned the poems for the artist book They Tell My Tale to Children Now to Help Them to be Good, a collection of meditations on fairy tales, illustrated by artist Susan Malmstrom.

In Conversation With Michael Gauthier, Part II

Wanda Waterman



Learning the *Third Man* Theme on One String

Michael Gauthier is a Montreal-based musician who teaches jazz guitar at the University of Montreal and at McGill University. A long-time fixture of the Montreal jazz scene, his memory houses a vast and irreplaceable knowledge of the history of jazz in Montreal since the sixties. Recently he took the time to answer Wanda Waterman's questions about his childhood, his choice of instrument, and his early attempt to play by ear on a two-stringed guitar.

So, tell me about your childhood.

I come from Drummondville. Luckily, for some reason unknown to me, it was a basin for music—there was a lot of music going on in that region of the province. As a teenager, I remember a lot of rock bands and all sorts of stuff like that being there.

My father first got me interested in music; he was a harmonica player, and there was always music and dancing and singing going on at home. He didn't necessarily encourage me to play, but he definitely opened the door to the whole idea.

One of my earliest memories was a trip to Bermuda together when I was about seven or eight. He brought back some 78 rpms of island music. We had a little record player back then, and I remember playing those records over and over again because I just loved that kind of music. I liked the rhythm.

I eventually also grew to love the music of Jimi Hendrix. It almost didn't even dawn on me at first that he was black; he was just Hendrix to me, another guitar player whom I happened to love. I never associated color with music until much later on.

When you made that association, what went through your head?

Well, at first I sort of figured out that I was at the short end of the stick there. I mean, growing up in Drummondville, going to a Catholic Church, having a WASP mother and a half-French Canadian father and all. I never really saw a black person in Drummondville until I was about eighteen years old. In other words, black American culture, black island culture, or black culture *period* was something totally divorced from my reality except for all this listening to and loving black music.

So you thought of it as being "your music." You didn't think of it as being from a culture separate from your own.

Well, in an intellectual sense, yes, I realized it. I wasn't born in Alabama. I'm not a black guy. I didn't go to the sanctified church and praise the Lord on Sunday morning.

I asked myself, at times, "Do I have a right to play this music?" because of this. I don't know, and you know what? I don't care. That's the secret—it doesn't matter.

Hit by a Bomb

Now, getting back to my childhood for just a second, I can remember something that really marked me a lot. For some reason, when I was about twelve years old, my father figured that the family (including him) needed some culture, so he took us to Montreal to hear Van Cliburn—a great classical piano player—play Chopin. I can remember the last two pieces he played; it was like being hit by a bomb. To this day I remember how electrified I felt by it.

Why guitar?

I started to play guitar in the early sixties because the Beatles and the Rolling Stones came out then. As a young teenager it wasn't cool to play a trombone or the French horn because the Rolling Stones didn't play those instruments.

I started to love the blues before even realizing that it was the blues. The guitar is the main blues instrument, and because of that, it became the number one instrument in rock and roll.

When I was fourteen, I had a neighbour my age who'd gotten a guitar, and I became envious of him. There was a guitar kicking around my place when I was a real little kid, but it had only two strings. Even as a little kid I remember picking it up and doing any stupid thing I felt like doing with it, but I remember that the first tune I ever learned, I learned on that little two-stringed guitar.

There was a TV show a long time ago called *The Third Man*. The theme song from it is the tune I learned. The music was kind of like Greek zither music. I can remember the melody. I remember learning that on one string. No big deal, but I was really proud of myself to be able to play what I heard on TV.

(to be continued)

DID YOU KNOW?



UK Student Mobility Tracker

The United Kingdom takes its international students very seriously. Recently they released a [mobility tracker](#) that you can use to see how their international student levels have changed over the years.

It's a fun toy to use for a few minutes to see how many Canadian students have gone to the UK each year, and also how many UK students have come to Canada.

Using it, however, shows something disturbing. Canada was slowly climbing the ranks in the popular destinations for UK students studying abroad until 2010. As of 2011, however, Canada has dropped right off the chart. It is not currently known whether this change is due to some change in the policies of Canada or the UK.

Photo Feature**The Road to Convocation**

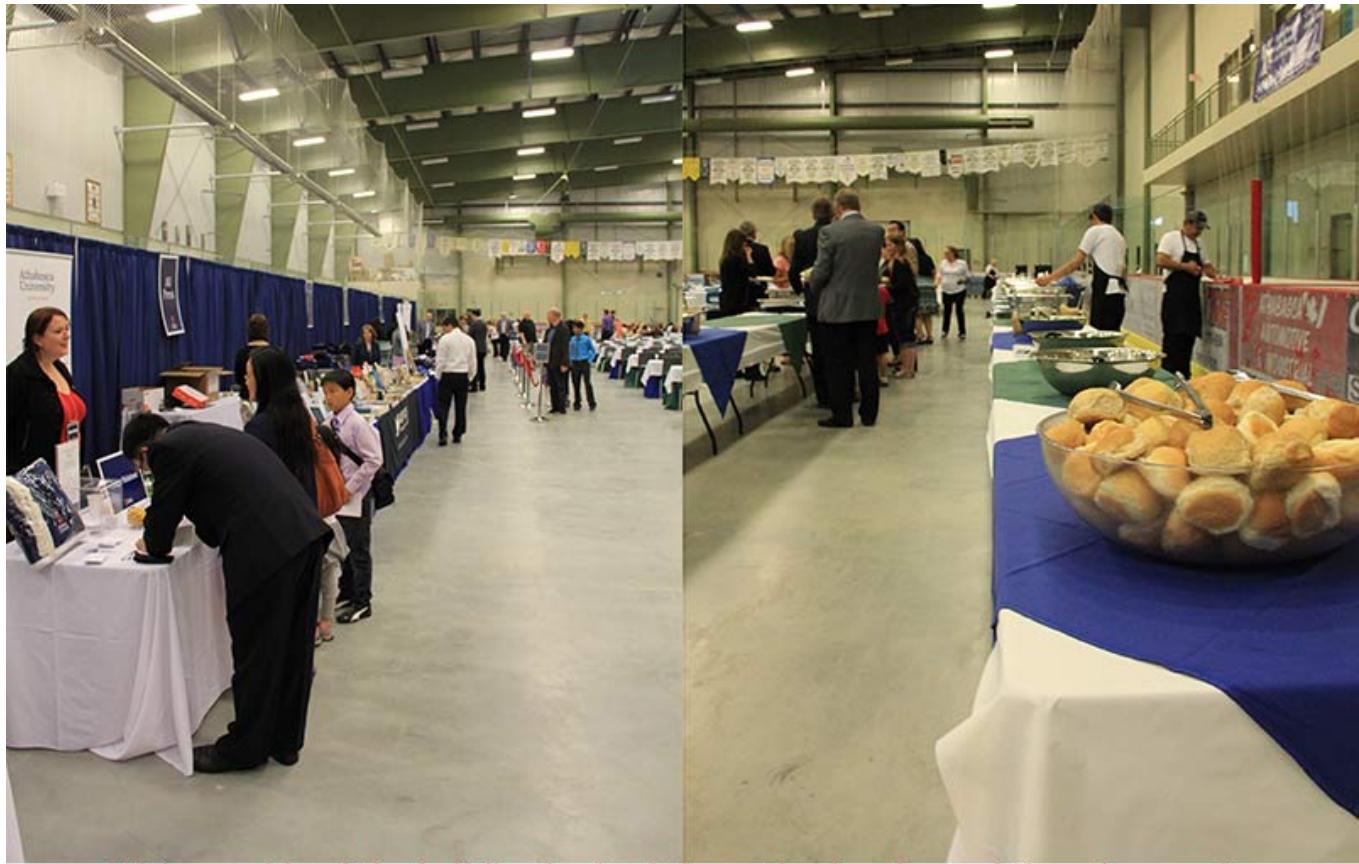
After the ceremony, you might want to take a walk through Athabasca/Multiplex grounds.



Perhaps to check out the AU Geophysical Observatory, where they get some amazing pictures and data about our universe.



But back at the Multiplex, some sweet treats have been available.



With one side of the building having informative booths, and the other serving lunch, guests are kept occupied and entertained.



AUSU was present. The little guy above was helping them get organized. They brought some swag to sell so grads could proudly display their alma mater.



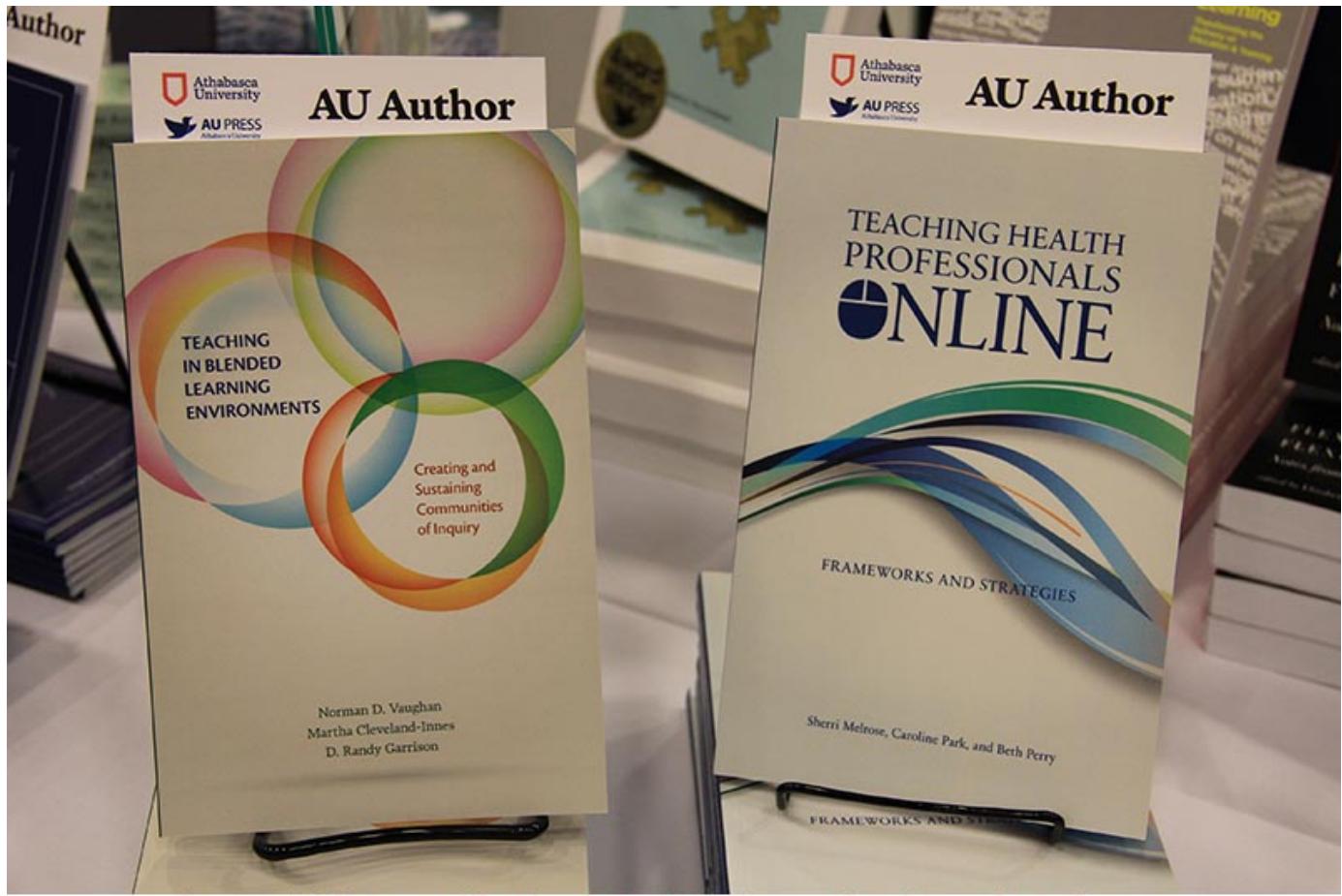
And some proudly displayed banners for both The Voice Magazine and AUSU serve to add a little extra colour to the place.



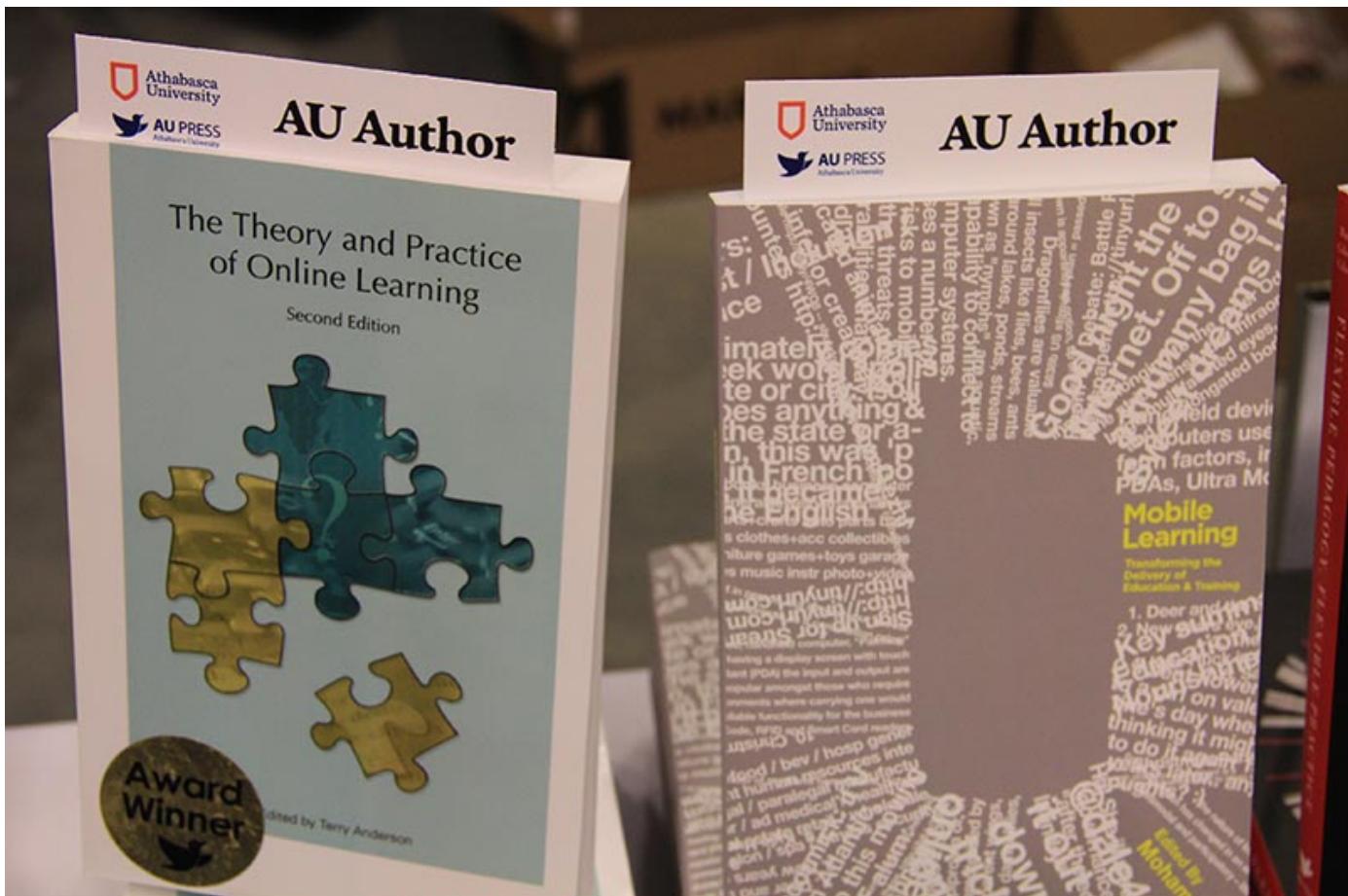
*The Grad Student Association was also there..
..at least some of the time.*



AU was also present and selling their merchandise.



As was AU Press, selling books written by our faculty and teachers.



More books, these ones in AU's area of expertise.



It's hard to remember sometimes that this is all set in a small town in the wilderness of Northern Alberta. Until you get outside to head back home.



But the memories of their graduation will continue to shine for them and their families.



*From
Where
I Sit*

Hazel Anaka

Gotta Reconcile This

When I don't celebrate a statutory holiday like Canada Day or Boxing Day I feel vaguely cheated. When I don't have big plans for the May (or any other) long weekend I feel disappointed.

It's one thing not to have elaborate plans for rest and relaxation; that can be forgiven. It's quite another to always find yourself working. That reality needs my attention.

As a self-employed person who earns her income from taking on odd or contract positions, and I know I'm different from the average 9 to 5 office drone or career professional. And every day I'm grateful for that fact. I don't punch a clock, answer to a supervisor, or have to book my two or three weeks of vacation months in advance.

This square peg doesn't fit the standard round hole. I've come to accept and celebrate that realization. My way is no better or worse than what you may have chosen, but it is the only way I can thrive.

Ever since technology made it possible for some to work from home all sorts of people have studied the phenomenon. Lifestyle magazines, sociologists, cartoonists, stand-up comics, medical experts, and others have an opinion on whether or not this is a good thing.

And, like with most things under the sun, there is no one right answer. On the plus side the home office concept allows flexibility in the work day/week; saves money on fuel, lunches, and wardrobes; saves the company paying employee benefits; and gives the worker control over their day. On the downside, the over-zealous (pick me) drone keeps working longer than reasonable or healthy because, like most things under the sun, the job is never truly done. There is always one more call to make, one more email to send, one more file to update, one more innovation to research.

From the employer perspective if they've contracted an undisciplined or unethical lightweight, they may see missed deadlines or incomplete projects coming from the homebound worker.

Working from home requires incredible discipline, strong time management skills, reliability, and pride of accomplishment. Having a routine start and end time and laser-like focus would serve both boss and employee well. Work would get done without abusing the worker's rights. Being able to power off the computer and close the door on unfinished work would save the life and marriage of people like me. I honestly don't think this could work with children at home regardless of their ages.

In this I talk the talk but am stumbling with the walk. Maybe I'm being overly harsh with myself; it's been known to happen. I have refused to check email (even on my phone) in the late evening. I have stayed strong on the odd Sunday. Yet, if the need arises, because of irresistible opportunity or impending deadline, I err on the side of working. I don't know that it's recognized or appreciated or making a huge difference. I've gotta reconcile this. Apparently martyrdom doesn't pay, from where I sit.

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



Dear Barb
Barbara Godin

Under Pressure

Dear Barb:

I have been dating my boyfriend for almost three years. He really wants me to move in with him, but I know my parents don't want me to and I don't want to upset them. My parents really like Mark, but they want me to finish school before we move in together. We get along great and I definitely see a future with Mark and don't want to lose him. How can I make everybody happy?

Tracy

Hi Tracy:

You can never make everyone happy, that's impossible. You need to make yourself happy, while still considering the feelings of the important people in your life. The fact that you are writing into this column indicates that perhaps you are having second thoughts about moving in with your boyfriend. If your relationship is solid, your boyfriend will wait until you finish school and not pressure you to move in with him. If he is giving you an ultimatum, that's not a healthy way to begin a life together. When you and your boyfriend decide to move in together it should be a mutual decision, not one person pressuring the other. Don't rush into anything.

Dear Barb:

I have been dating a wonderful girl for the last six months. The problem is that when we get into a disagreement she closes down and refuses to discuss the issue. I feel like we don't ever resolve anything. It just gets swept under the rug and then after a few days Kim carries on like everything is fine. If I try to bring the issue up again she gets angry and closes down yet again. I am so frustrated, I really don't know what to do. Even when I tell her how frustrated I am she dismisses my feelings. We have a lot of fun together and our relationship is really good between these episodes. Not sure if I should call it quits and move on, or try to get Kim to go to counseling, which could be very challenging to do.

Frustrated Frank in Kelowna

Hey Frank:

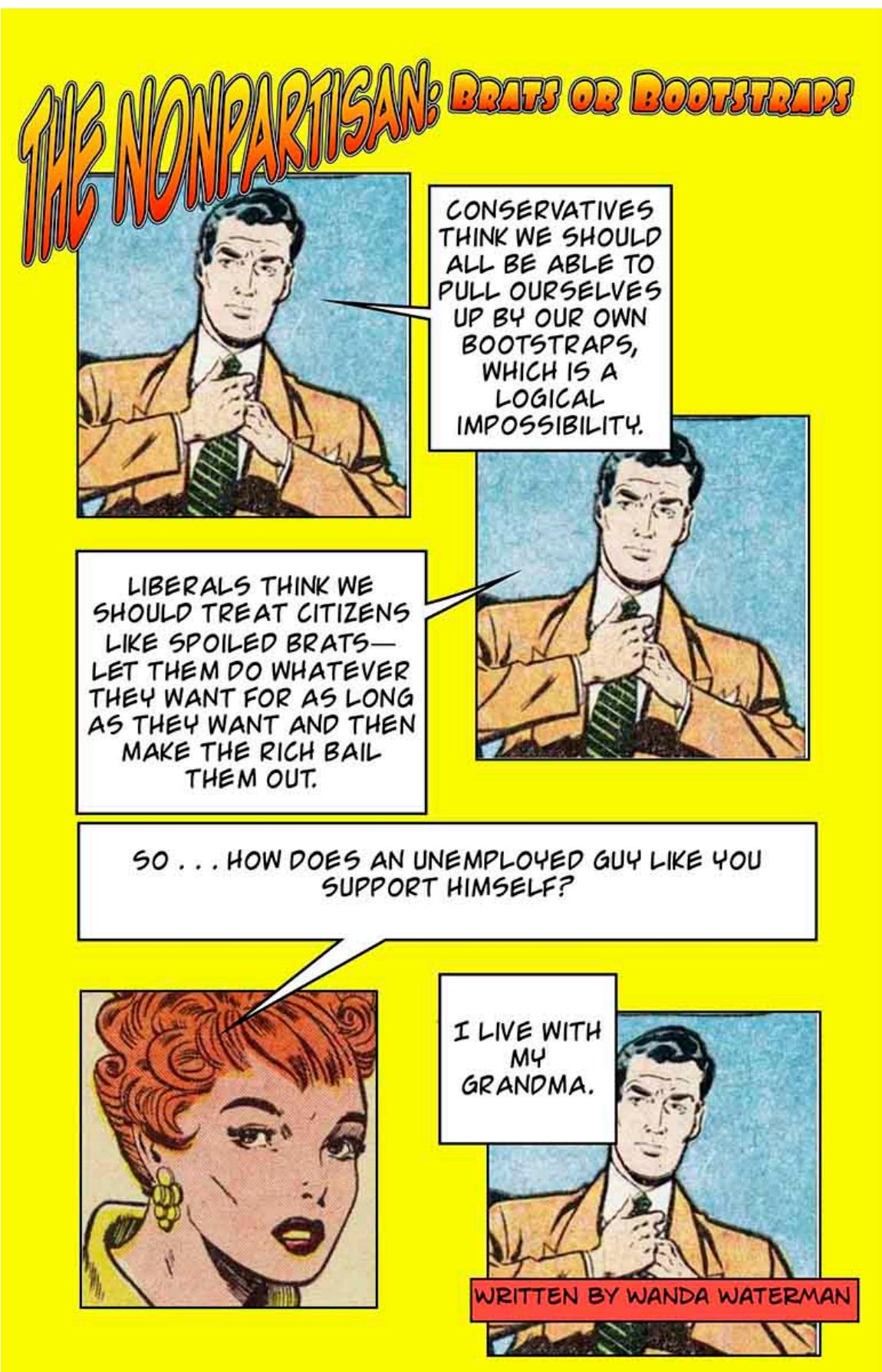
I can understand your frustration. You cannot have a normal healthy relationship if you can't resolve your issues to each party's satisfaction. Your frustration will turn to resentment and the happy times in your relationship will be overshadowed by these negative feelings. It seems that, possibly, your girlfriend has grown up in a home where communication was not practiced and she does not know how to resolve conflict. There are a lot of good books on effective communication that would be helpful, but couple's counseling may be more beneficial, as you will have someone facilitating your interactions with each other. I think you should try to work on the relationship rather than give it up, as you say you do have good times together. Communication is a very common difficulty in relationships, but not insurmountable.

Good luck!

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.

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Wanda Waterman



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