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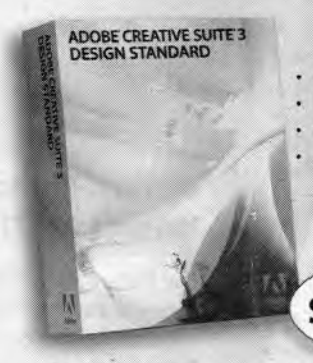

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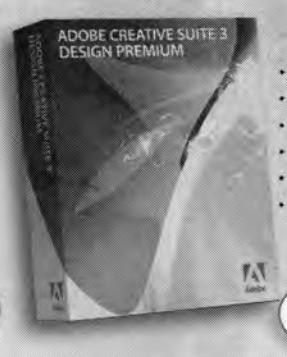

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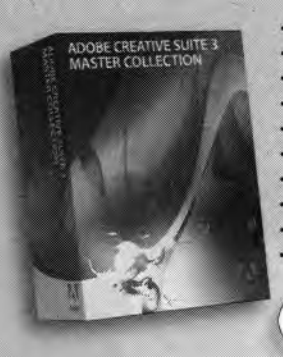

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Smoke and Mirrors

WHY THE LOBBY GROUPS SHOULD BUTT OUT

Tim Phelan
rebelmusic99@yahoo.ca

We live in a world where dangers abound in even the tiniest of spaces.

The invisible killer is the scariest of all, for one never really knows when her venomous fangs of sickness and death may strike.

Unfortunately, dangerous chemicals are a necessary cost to the comforts we demand in our hyper-industrialized society. Though we can't always see them, they spew from the factories that feed our economy, from the vehicles that carry us to work, and from the fatty foods we often choose to eat.

But a certain type of dangerous chemical (or 250-types to be more specific) is causing more hysteria than any other these days. Cigarette smoke, if you haven't heard, is really bad for you.

To take it a step further, it's bad for everyone, as second-hand smoke just might kill the person standing innocently in your proximity.

Because second hand smoke is bad for you, no one should ever have to be exposed to it in a public place, or so the logic goes.

When the NDP government passed the provincial smoking ban on Oct. 1, 2004, spurred on by anti-tobacco lobby groups such as the Canadian Cancer Society, they were hailed as saviours by the non-smoking majority.

The Canadian Cancer Society (CCS) claims that over a thousand Canadians die each year from second hand smoke, though the science behind these numbers is fuzzy. How can you narrow it down to just one cause?

This trend of clamping down on the rights of smokers has created a significant list of unhealthy by-products of its own.

Interestingly, there has been a paradigm shift in the government's approach to tackling the issue of smoking. Through the media, special interest groups such as the CCS have managed to convince the public that smokers are a nuisance, and they're killing us all. This message has served to further isolate and vilify the law-abiding smoker.

The corporate world has already begun to act in a parental role over the lifestyle habits of their puffing employees. Several high profile companies in the US, such as Weyco Inc. have introduced employment standards where you could be fired merely for lighting up in your own home.

It becomes even more dangerous—for everyone that is—when the state begins to intrude into the private lives of citizens to protect them from themselves.

Banning smoking in vehicles where minors are present is the hot topic of the day. In the US, several states have already adopted such parental policies.

But where does it end? When the government acts as a nanny to its citizens, dictating how they choose to live, the freedoms we claim to hold so dear get lost.

Education is a much better option to state enforcement when it comes to public health policy. And it's the only option that preserves any real definition of personal freedom.

It's no secret that video games, television, and chocolate bars contribute to North America's appalling obesity rates. According to Statistics Canada, over four million Canadians fall into that category.

It's well documented that not getting enough sleep improves your child's chances of getting an array of potentially fatal health conditions.

Vehicle exhaust from your car, sulfuric acid from your lawn fertilizer, the bleach in your kitchen cabinet, these could in theory all kill your children too.

But smokers are a trendy and easy scapegoat for the lobby groups, an active and influential minority.

It's easy to castigate smokers and deny them their rights because they are outnumbered. And, who can deny that smoking is bad for you?

But it simply can't stop there, by that logic. There are too many things we enjoy in this world—though individual tastes may vary—that are bad for us.

When the state decides what you can and cannot do in your own house, apartment, or car, we inhale something far more dangerous than any one of the chemicals found in second-hand smoke.

International News Briefs

Compiled by Chris Webb
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KENYAN ELECTION VIOLENCE PLANNED

Human Rights Watch says it has evidence that opposition party officials and local leaders in western Kenya planned the recent post-election violence. The New York-based organisation describes how Orange Democratic Movement activists incited followers to attack members of other ethnic groups. It is calling on the opposition leader Raila Odinga to stop his party supporters from committing further attacks which target mostly Kikuyu and Kisii people. Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan is holding talks with President Kibaki and Raila Odinga in a bid to resolve the dispute over December's election.

NO MEN ALLOWED

Mexico City officials have launched "ladies only" buses. The buses have been introduced to tackle harassment against women. Being groped and verbally harassed is common for women who use public transport in the city where around 22 million passengers commute daily.

INTERFAITH DELEGATION CALLS FOR RETURN OF IMPRISONED MONTREAL BUSINESSMAN

An interfaith delegation of religious leaders from Montreal will meet with Indian and Canadian government officials in Ottawa to press for the immediate return to Canada of Montreal businessman Saul Itzhayek. Itzhayek, 42, has been languishing in a jail in northeast India for eight months, serving a three-year sentence for entering the country on an expired visa. Itzhayek's sister Sylvia said that those efforts have been far too timid. "I know they've raised the issue, but that is not good enough," Sylvia Itzhayek told the Montreal Gazette. "I want to see him come home. Every day is an eternity." Her brother told her by telephone last month that he is sleeping in a rat-and scorpion-infested jail and has lost 65 pounds because of illness and lack of food.

TENS OF THOUSANDS BID FAREWELL TO INDONESIA'S SUHARTO

Tens of thousands of people jammed Jakarta's streets Monday, Jan. 28 to say a final farewell to Indonesia's former president Suharto as his casket was borne in a hearse toward his last resting place. Suharto, who died Sunday aged 86, ruled Indonesia with a vice-like grip for more than three decades, putting political stability and economic growth above all else, until he was forced to step down in 1998. His death marks the passing of yet another of the authoritarian and mostly pro-Western strongmen who dominated this region of Asia for much of the late 20th century. Suharto's rule was marked by repression, from the killings of at least half a million communists and sympathisers following an abortive coup that saw him seize power in 1966, to invading East Timor and quashing separatist movements in Aceh and Papua.

Sources: Toronto Star, Interworld Radio, Agence France-Presse, Montreal Gazette

Red River College

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Up Coming Events

Feb 4 - Feb 19

Class Rep Meeting
Date : TBA (moved due to Business Conference)
Location: Green Lecture Theatre - NDC

FEB. 6 AND FEB. 7
CHINESE NEW YEAR
LION DANCES

Find us on FACEBOOK "Red River College Students' Association"

CHECK OUT THE SA WEBSITE @ WWW.RRCSA.COM

Message from the Executive

We had another successful Meltdown week which had events such as the poker tournament, floor hockey tournament, XXX Hypnotist Show and Kegger and ended it off with the Kickin' it Ol'Skool Party and Pubcrawl. If you want to find out about more events throughout the year, you can always come down to the SA office to find out about the upcoming events or you can contact our Programming Director, Karyn Stone at saevents@rrc.mb.ca.

We also want to remind that the Students' Association will be holding its Elections soon so if you are interested in running for any of the Executive positions, come down to the SA offices to find out more or you can contact the VP Academic and Elections Chair, Dean Mary to

Elections 2008

Nominations open February 4th for the Students' Association Executive Positions

PRESIDENT
VP, ACADEMIC
VP, SUPPORT SERVICES
VP, PRINCESS STREET

Students interested in running for Executive Positions in the 2008 Election can visit the Student Association Offices for more information.

If you have any questions please contact VP Academic, Dean Mary.

Class Rep Meeting

Notre Dame Campus
Date: TBA (moved due to Business Conference)
Location: Green Lecture Theatre
Time: Noon

Notre Dame Campus
CM20 - 2055 Notre Dame Avenue
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Princess Street Campus
P110-160 Princess Street
Winnipeg, Manitoba

New Water Park to Spring Up ... or Not?

NEW PARK WILL FUEL BUSINESS INTERESTS, NOT THE COMMUNITY

Sara Atnikov
artsprojector@gmail.com

So we could be getting an indoor water park. Hooray! Or not.

The only people who seem to be really excited and behind this idea are Sam Katz, Leo Ledohowski, and Jim Ludlow.

Who are they, you ask? Well, Sam Katz is our fair city's mayor, Ledohowski is the mogul behind the Canad Inns chain of hotels and bars, and Ludlow is the president of True North, the company that brought us the MTS Centre.

Why are they all revved up at the idea of a 60,000 square foot building that will house, according to the expression of interest document, a wave pool no greater than 5,000 square feet, three to five water slides, something called a "master blaster" water coaster, and a kids activity area/play zone?

Why is that the people who would benefit from this endeavour, those in the private sector who would get $7 million of the city's money to help take the sting off the estimated $25 to $35 million it will take to build this thing, are the strongest voices in favour of the water park?

It's simple; they will make money from it. To businessmen like these, money is a good enough reason to do anything.

To many in the city, though, it doesn't sound like a good idea. In fact, it sounds like a giant waste of money, money that could be put toward activities that would better serve the people of the city – activities that would benefit the community as a whole, and improve quality of life for those living in the downtown area, the same area in which the proposed park is slated to be built.

"I bet the city could restructure their whole rec programming and provide good programming all over the inner city for that much," says Jamil Mahmood, Youth Coordinator for the Spence Neighbourhood Association (SNA). The SNA provides community based programs for people living in the inner city. According to Mahmood, they run all their programs on less than $70,000 a year.

If $7 million would cover the cost of programming that benefits the inner city community, the community the water park will inhabit, why not spend the money on that instead of a building that really benefits no one other than the businessmen investing in it. It makes sense to me, but then again I look at the city as a community, not a series of large businesses out to make a buck off people's backs.

In an interview with the Free Press, Intergovernmental Affairs Minister Steve Ashton said "Any major facility would be a key thing for the downtown. Maybe it's the -30 weather this week, but we're reminded of the need to do things during the winter. This is Manitoba. We need to focus on winter recreation."

The logic behind building this thing downtown because Winnipeg is cold in the winter and we Winnipeggers need to focus on winter recreation is bogus. This is Winnipeg. Everyone who lives here knows its cold outside. Bundle up, take the kids to the park to go tobogganing. Go cross-country skiing. Make a snowman. Go for a walk. We have winter recreational activities, many of which are free. Didn't we just win the battle with Ottawa for the longest skating rink? Festival du Voyageur offers a week of outdoor fun for the whole family. To me, winter recreation means doing things outdoors. It does not mean packing up the kids in the mini van, driving in from the suburbs, trying to find a place to park, spending the day in a heated water park, only to emerge hours later to pack the kids back up and drive back to the suburbs.

People who come to events downtown, like concerts, or, if it goes through, the water park, don't spend time downtown. They arrive in time for their event, and leave when it is done. The majority of people don't go to the restaurants, and they don't go shopping. McNally Robinson, a key store in Portage Place mall is leaving for greener pastures of the sprawling uber mall that is Polo Park in the spring.

Revitalization comes from community involvement in a myriad of activities, events and businesses, rather than a monolithic facility that offers a narrow scope of activities for a specific type of person. Activities that would benefit from $7 million.

Skyrocketing CEO Salaries Increase Economic Gap

Aaron Zeghers
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By the end of February, Canada's top-earning 100 CEOs will make 36 times more than the average Canadian makes in an entire year.

While the average Canadian makes a yearly wage of $38,998, a new study says the average of the top-100 CEOs will make 218 times more than that—over $8 million.

In contrast, Canadians working at minimum wage will make only $16,620.

"What are the implications of this growing gap on Canadian society? What does it mean for our belief in equality of opportunity when the rich are soaring even further out of reach?" writes Hugh Mackenzie in his Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives report that was released on Jan. 2.

The report, titled, "The Great CEO Pay Race" found that the average salary for Canada's top-100 CEOs has more than doubled since 1998. Meanwhile, average weekly wages have only increased by 18 per cent.

"In fact," said the report, "the best-paid 100 CEOs earn more in a single year than all the residents of many small and medium-sized cities in Canada."

For example, the 64 top CEOs rake in more than the entire population of Brandon, Manitoba combined (population 41,511).

Jim Carr, CEO of the Business Council of Manitoba, a group of CEOs from companies around the province, said that CEOs are responsible to higher-ups just like anyone else. "The CEO is accountable to the board of directors, who are accountable to the shareholders," he said. "The shareholders and directors are responsible with assessing the value of the CEO."

The lowest-paid CEO in the top 100 made just over $3 million, while the highest-paid pocketed $54,709,465. Ray McFeetors, CEO of Great-West Lifeco, is the only Manitoban CEO to make the Canadian top 100.

A Statistics Canada study released in September 2007, corroborates the rich-getting-richer story told by the CCPA's report. The study found that Canadians in the top 20 per cent (based on income) saw a raise in income, with the gains being larger for those more wealthy.

"However, individuals in the rest of the population generally saw little improvement," said the study. The study also found that nearly half of the top five per cent of wealthiest Canadians lived in Ontario, and 75 per cent are male.

To see how your salary stacks up against Canadian CEOs, visit www.growinggap.ca/ceocalculator.

Students at RRC Princess Street Campus get Tim Hortons express service

Dan Vadeboncoeur
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If you are a student at the Red River College Princess St. campus who enjoys Tim Hortons, say goodbye to those long lineups that stretch the entire length of the cafeteria every morning. That particular Tim's has opened a "student only" express line during peak times to help alleviate one of their most common complaints and to help students get to class on time.

"We've been looking at this for a long time," said Tim Hortons Manager Shaban Tariq as he observed the new line in action. "We wanted to focus on the fact that we are here primarily for the students."

The popular coffee shop gets a high amount of traffic in the morning from off-campus workplaces, most notably the public safety building across the street. It has been a point of contention among students, many of whom simply skip their morning double-double when they see the long line up.

"A lot of students complained that they didn't have time to wait for coffee because they had to get to class," said Tariq, who began taking customer feedback through a simple survey form a few weeks ago. The survey asks customers which of the two Princess St. Aramark-run food service facilities they use and why or why not. It also offers a comments section for people to voice their opinion.

So far, the students approve of the innovative idea. "It's a good thing," said second year Business Administration student Mike Mclenehan, after receiving his coffee in record time, "before it would take way too long to get through the line."

The student express lane is open from 8:30 – 10:30 every morning. Students do not need to show any special identification to make use of the service.

Diamonds: Maybe Not A Girl's Best Friend?

Nisha Tuli
editorprojector@gmail.com

As we head into another year, and more importantly towards another Feb. 14, men will be scrambling to bestow lavish gifts on their lady loves.

For some, those gifts will come in the form of tiny velvet boxes, but those diamonds inside that sparkle so beautifully in the light may have come with a bigger price tag than you think.

According to Adria Vasil, author of Ecoholic, diamonds are an ecological and social nightmare.

Vasil states that open-pit diamond mines involve large blasting areas, which strip the land of trees and vegetation, leaving it severely degraded.

"On average, 250 tons of ore have to be dug up and processed to carve up a single carat," said Vasil. "And after all that digging, only 20 per cent of the raw gems are considered good enough to wear."

Vasil added that one in five diamonds, called alluvial diamonds, are vacuumed up from riverbeds, destroying the ecosystem, and

another chunk of the world's diamonds are mined from the ocean floor.

However, the ecological impact of diamond mining is just one side of these potentially devastating gems.

The term blood diamond has become more widespread in the past few years thanks in part to a recent Hollywood movie of the same name, which starred Leonardo DiCaprio.

Blood diamonds (also known as conflict diamonds), according to Vasil, are those that are part of a trade that is "run by gun-toting rebels financing vicious armed conflicts."

These diamonds typically come from places like Angola, Sierra Leone, Liberia and more recently Cote d'Ivoire.

Vasil adds that the industry claims only a small percentage of the world's diamonds come from these areas.

However, Amnesty International estimates that 10 per cent of diamonds are tied to groups that are believed to be involved "in all sorts of human rights abuses from rape to child soldiering, as well as the forced relocation of millions."

To combat this, the Kimberley Process was created by South Africa in 2000. It is a certification system, which is intended to prevent conflict diamonds from entering markets in places like Canada.

But unfortunately, this isn't foolproof either. Some nations such as Brazil have been accused of shipping out diamonds with forged papers.

According to Natural Resources Canada, the government has been an active participant in stemming the flow of blood diamonds around the world.

And Canada is exactly where the next part of the diamond puzzles comes in.

Canadian diamonds, also known as Polar Bear diamonds, have become the alternative to blood diamonds. Considered conflict free, the Canadian diamond industry employs about 4000 people with 30 to 40 per cent of those being aboriginal.

Natural Resources Canada says our diamonds typically cost between 10 to 15 per cent more than other diamonds, because workers are paid higher wages than in other parts of the world.

However, while buyers of Canadian diamonds can be assured that child soldiers aren't dying so they can have something shiny to wear on their finger, the ecological impacts, while regulated better than in places such as Africa, are still having a significant impact.

According to Vasil, many eco-groups say the current federal regulations are failing to protect the water from mine toxins and that 20 lakes have been completely drained.

She adds, "The industrial boom around mines has doubled carbon monoxide emissions in the Northwest Territories."

There is also opposition to the claim that Canadian diamonds are conflict-free.

Just last December, an Ontario First Nations group campaigned against Canadian diamonds.

The Epoch Times, an independently owned newspaper from New York, reported that, "De Beers Canada plans to develop massive open pit diamond mining projects on their traditional lands without honouring treaty rights or undertaking consultations."

De Beers Canada states that they try to work with communities and ensure they meet the needs of those whose land they work on.

Kathleen Manning received her diamond ring from her husband, Jim, two years ago. She said she had heard of conflict diamonds and was glad to know her three stones are Canadian diamonds, but said she didn't know as much about the environmental impacts.

"I have seen a great deal in the media about conflict diamonds, but much less so about environmental issues," she said, adding the next time she buys a diamond she would do a lot more research.

Jen Zurowski received her diamond ring over five years ago when conflict diamonds were less in the spotlight.

"When I look at my hand now, I do wonder what that stone went through to get here," she said. "But every day when I put on my ring I think about my husband. I enjoy having that symbol of our love and relationship on my hand every day."

Zurowski also said that if she were to purchase diamonds in the future, she would want to know more about how and where it was mined.

But, fortunately there some are alternatives to natural diamonds.

Lab-grown diamonds have entered the market and are a viable option. Although the process can't produce white diamonds like those found in nature, it can produce pink, blue or yellow stones of varying intensity. Other alternatives include cubic zirconia or moissanite, man made gems created from silicon carbide.

But while these may be a possible alternative, for some, nothing beats the real thing.

Zurowski said she would prefer a natural diamond to a man made one.

"To me, you buy jewelery for emotional reasons and buying something fabricated in a lab takes the magic out of it," she said. "I often find myself in a quiet moment examining my diamond, awed that something so beautiful can be created by nature."

Manning agreed she isn't interested in lab-created diamonds.

"I'm sure that it's partly due to the marketing of natural diamonds as compared to lab-grown. If you can buy a lab-grown diamond for $30 on eBay, it loses some of its appeal," she said, but added, "certainly natural diamonds are not so important that I would buy them if people, or the planet, had to die in order for me to do so."

Getting to Know Canada's Youngest MP

Kiera Fogg
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What does it take to be the youngest female MP in Canada? You could ask Ruby Dhalla, but she probably wouldn't tell you.

At age 33, Dhalla is a Member of Parliament for Brampton-Springdale in Ontario, and the Liberal critic for social development. She is also currently the youngest female member in Parliament, and one of the first Sikh women to hold a seat.

Dhalla was born in Winnipeg, Manitoba, to East-Indian parents. She became a member of Young Liberals at age 12 and has since risen through the ranks of politics and achieved success in other career pursuits. Dhalla is a licensed chiropractor and co-owns a chain of clinics in Ontario with her brother, Neil. She also played the leading role in a Bollywood inspired film Kyon? Kis Liye? (Why? For What?), and has appeared on Flare's list of "Top Style Makers", as well as in Chatelaine's first edition of Desi Life.

So what kind of personality does it take to succeed in both politics and entertainment, two career paths which don't often mesh? Sitting at Winnipeg's Fort Garry Hotel donning a Chanel inspired tweed suit, Dhalla spoke of the importance of being educated, developing Canada's youth, the need for positive female role-models, and going for your dreams. "I just think if you want something, you should go out and get it. I just never say 'what if'," Dhalla says.

Dhalla has been speaking before audiences for many years, and her nerves must have been shaken speaking before seasoned political big shots? Dhalla shrugs this off.

Dhalla's strategically crafted responses seemed to ring of corporate PR, and it was difficult to discover her true nature. Her apparent lack of candour was explained by Professor Shannon Sampert, who specializes in Canadian politics and gender at the University of Winnipeg.

"Women have a lot of difficulty getting elected and put into positions of authority. When they do, they become sacrificial lambs being given the jobs that men don't want. Then if they obtain a position of power, they are damned if they do and damned if they don't. Ruby is going into election mode, which is why she is perhaps being a little more tight-lipped," she says.

When I asked Sampert to comment on Dhalla's willingness to grace the pages of Canada's top fashion magazines, she says, "If I were her, I would do it. I mean, why the heck not!"

A MESSAGE FROM RED RIVER COLLEGE PARKING SERVICES

Did you know...?

R.R.C. Parking Services routinely tows vehicles?

It's unfortunate, but sometimes necessary to tow a vehicle off of Red River College property. Towing offences range from unpaid parking tickets to forged or altered parking passes and dispenser tickets.

Please don't risk it.

Pay for your parking and if you do get a ticket, do yourself a favor and pay it in the first 15 days. After that they can go up to as much as 3 times the amount.

Aching Apologies

CANADA STRIKES US AND ISRAEL FROM TORTURE LIST

Chris Webb
newsprojector@gmail.com

"He tore off his shirt revealing extensive scarring on the upper torso and a cluster of smaller ones on the upper left side of his body and on the back of his left shoulder." These are details from a 2003 CSIS report on Canadian citizen Omar Khadr, the only Canadian in Guantanamo prison. As of last week, however, Canada doesn't recognize Kadhr's scars as torture.

Foreign ambassadors and Canadian politicians were left choking at a manual provided to Amnesty International for a court case involving Canada's treatment of prisoners in Afghanistan. It listed the U.S. and Israel alongside countries like China and Syria as countries likely to use torture.

U.S. ambassador David Wilkins said he was "shocked and offended" by the manual, claiming it was "absurd" to list the U.S. next to clear offenders like Iran. But what is truly shocking and offensive to victims of torture and those who oppose it, is the fact that as soon as Washington raised its voice, apologies aplenty floated south. Foreign minister Maxime Bernier said the list was erroneous and "wrongly accused some of our closest allies."

In reality, the list could be the most truthful foreign-policy document we've seen for a long time. Listing the U.S. and Israel as nations that not only condone but regularly practice torture should have been a step toward condemnation by Canada; instead it has only bolstered support for war and occupation.

In the case of the U.S., more evidence of the appalling torture of detainees in Guantanamo Bay and Iraq emerges every day. According to Human Rights Watch, US forces have used hooding, stripping, extreme heat and cold, sleep deprivation, beatings, sexual assault and near drowning—all in violation of the Geneva conventions. One soldier's account of the abuses in Iraqi jails recorded by HRW is evidence enough: "He was stripped naked, put in the mud and sprayed with very cold hoses. They sprayed the cold hose and he was completely naked in the mud, you know, and everything. (Then) he was taken out of the mud and put next to an air conditioner... he was put back in the mud and sprayed. This happened all night." Shocking? Well, considering the US is involved in a war that has been declared illegal by numerous world courts and resulted in close to 100,000 civilian deaths, perhaps not.

The U.S. has embraced torture for decades as an essential aspect of foreign wars. From 1946 to 1984, the School of The Americas in Panama pioneered the "coercive interrogation" techniques which—according to CIA documents—are now used at Guantanamo. Not to mention that graduates of the school went on to commit some of the continent's greatest atrocities, including the slaughter of thousands of civilians in El Salvador.

But what this apology says about Canadian foreign policy is more revealing. To defend countries that regularly use torture is to condone it. Canada's complicity in torture in Afghanistan and the coup-d'état in Haiti should outrage most of us, but to defend on the grounds of error what has been condemned by nations and organizations too numerous to mention is shameful.

When Harper defended Israel's bombing of Lebanon two years ago as a "measured response," it also gave us a clear insight into the future of Canada's Middle East policy. Harper's pro-Israel stance was just brought into sharper relief by striking Israel from this list.

In a 1998 letter to the UN Committee Against Torture, Amnesty International described how Israel continues to use torture: "Israel continues to use interrogation methods in defiance of international human rights law. Such methods include forcing detainees to remain in painful positions, sleep deprivation, hooding, death threats and violent shaking which can cause death." According to Israeli human right's organization B'TSelem "over 105 torture techniques have been used during interrogations," and Palestinian rights group Al-Haq reported over 700 cases of torture between 1988 and 1992.

Despite the government's claims that the manual is not a policy document, Canada should condemn torture unconditionally and not base its decision on nationalist alliances.

I Write What I Like

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Bono Ruined My Night

For those of you who have been following this column—there are some out there right?—you'll know that I usually focus on serious political and social issues. Well, this time I've decided to do something completely different and write about a rock star.

Now, I don't want to offend any music sensibilities here, but I think I can safely say that Bono is a joke. Not his band—although they haven't had a good album since 1983—but his absurd political ideas. And I don't want to dismiss him with one sweeping statement, because I think his ideas about saving the world deserve a critical eye.

Bono's unwavering and unquestioning support for African aid propagates certain myths about Africa and how its problems can be solved by the charity of the west. Africa's immense debt is a result of many things: restructuring by the IMF and World Bank, foreign direct investment, and immense corruption. But benefit concerts and a clothing line—one that uses exploited labour and then gives small returns to charities—is not the way to solve the continent's deep rooted problems. It's not that Bono doesn't care about these people, but he seems unable to make the connections between the business and government leaders he hangs with and globalization gone wild. The idea that Africa is a place plagued by violence, disease and tin pot dictators that can only be saved by western powers—in this case an ageing rock star—is not only damaging and misleading, it is dangerous to the extreme.

Why then does Bono hold the position of moral spokesperson for the Africa? Well, perhaps the lack of political initiative taken on important issues, like debt relief in Africa and global warming, by most politicians creates the Bonos and Angelinas of the world?

But a revealing aspect of Bono is the company he keeps. One week he's at the G8 summit or the World Economic Forum hugging world leaders asking them to help out the countries they're busy exploiting and bombing, and the next week he's in Sudan hugging babies.

Now, while Bono has spent his wealth trying to help people instead of buying a theme park and touching small children, it all seems to fall by the wayside when he does things like fund a videogame that removes "a power hungry tyrant" who has "seized control of Venezuela and her oil supply."

Yes, the 2006 Mercenaries 2: World in Flames simulates an invasion of Venezuela in 2007 and was partly financed by the company Elevation Partners that Bono created to exploit marketing opportunities between U2 and its fans. The release of the game caused an uproar in Venezuela, and rightly so.

But Bono's strange antics—besides wearing sunglasses indoors—don't end there. After Madonna adopted a Malawian child last year amidst outcries from human right's groups who accused her of using her wealth and power to "buy" the child, Bono jumped on the bandwagon as Mr. Africa praising her for pulling a child from the depths of poverty.

What happened to rock stars with good politics? I don't think we've had one since Joe Strummer, and I don't see Beyoncé shaking her bootay against imperialism anytime soon.

UW Conference Connects Video Games and the Classroom

Chris Moskowec
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From Jan. 24-25 the University of Winnipeg held workshops and lectures about digital media and learning. The conference was hosted in part by the MacArthur Foundation, a Chicago based institution that has invested $50 million US over five years to research the role of video games in the classroom. The Thursday evening conference, webcast in real time from the 127-year-old convocation hall, featured speakers presenting their research in the field of digital media and its uses in the classroom setting.

The audience, which was made up largely of aging teachers—and at least one young boy who played his Nintendo DS the whole time—were presented with a series of dialogues and demos showcasing the latest efforts of using digital media for education.

With over 74 per cent of American students online, and 80 per cent of those interacting with digital games and social networks, researcher Sasha Barab explained that the need to adapt classroom teaching to these new mediums is more important than ever.

"We are letting literacy be taught by Sony, by Facebook, by Electronic Arts," says Barab, who has created the virtual project "Quest Atlantis" to help teach students ages 9-12. "We now need something more than the textbook to learn about science and language arts."

Video games and new media in the classroom is by no means a new idea. Games like "Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego?" and "The Oregon Trail" have long made it to retirement from classrooms. And with commercial games like Halo 3 making over $170 million alone in its first day available, can MacArthur's $50 million create a significant alternative to the normal distraction most youth usually find through technology?

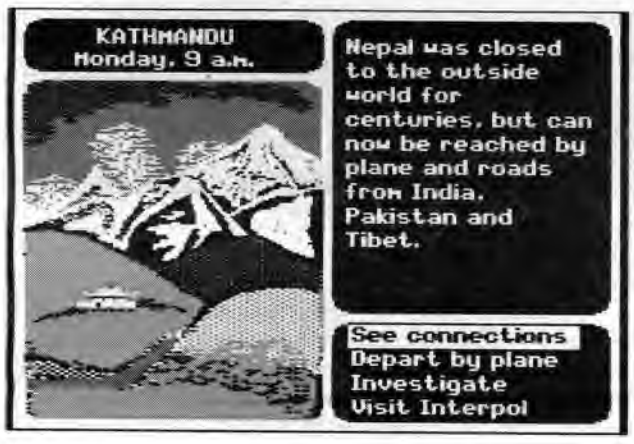
Nichol Pinkard, the Director of Design and Research at the Center for Urban School Improvement in Chicago, argued that it is not a matter of rivalling commercial media, but having youth learn how to better interact with it. Using programming software, her students are doing everything from writing hip hop music to crafting the narrative vision of video games.

"By creating games they learn how to critique other games, and other media as well. They learn how to be more observant and better consumers of media."

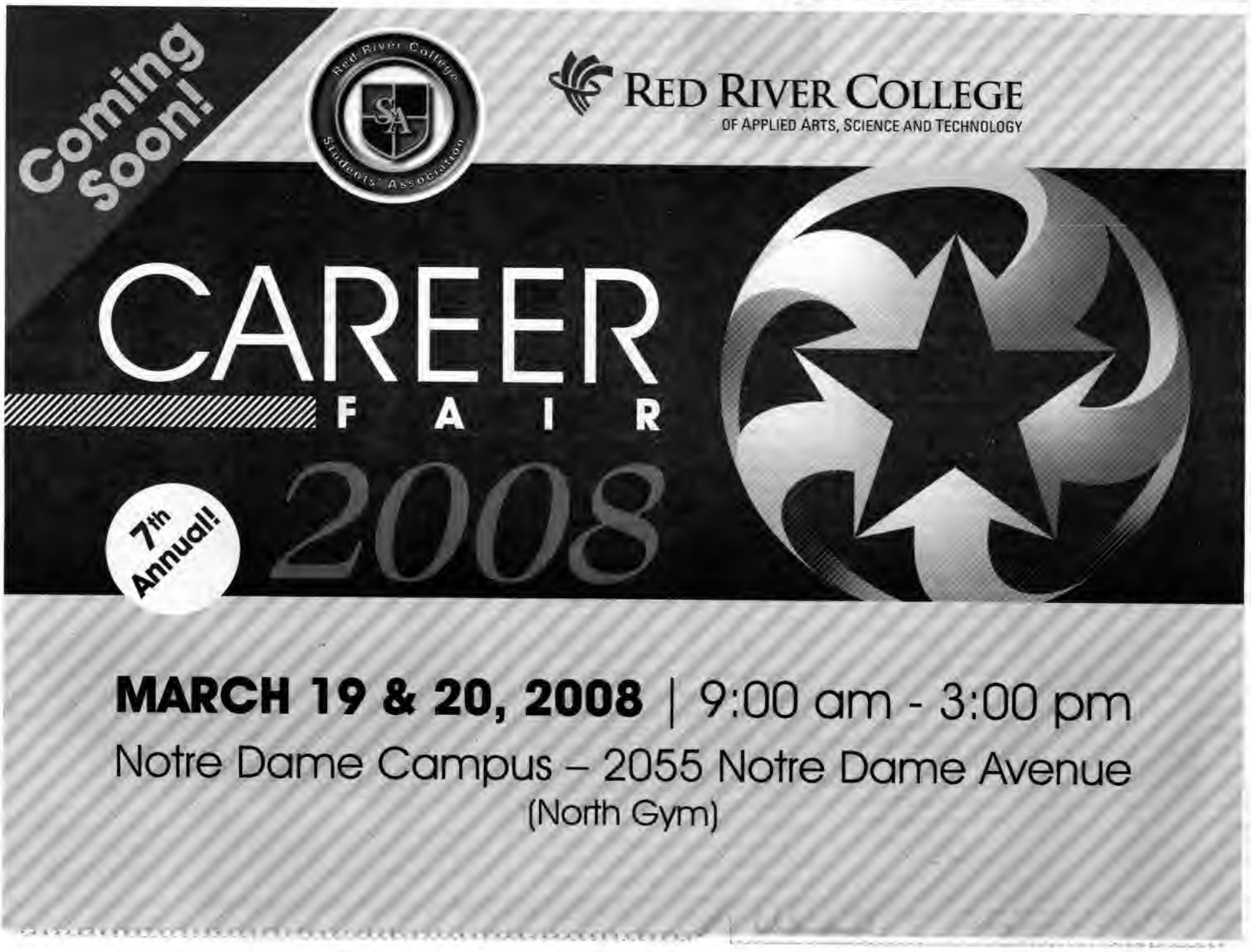
Pinkard says.

Pinkard presented results that many students who until now have been thought to be below-average or special needs are performing at equivalent levels as others within three weeks of using the software. She says that the role of digital media in classrooms is a crucial step in levelling out the learning field.

"Knowing how to read and write is no longer going to mean what it used to," says Pinkard. "To get ideas out now comes from other things than text."



Games like *Oregon Trail* (right) and *Where In The World Is Carmen Sandiego?* (left) have long been retired from the classroom. But can new educational game developers stand up to the high-tech, big budget games of this generation, like the multi-million dollar *Halo 3* (top right)?



Victim of Circumstance

goatsong@rocketmail.com

Time to dip into the ol' mail bag.

A.P. writes: "Dear Trevor, I love your column and read it all the time. In fact, I'm reading it right now as I type this letter. My problem is that people are worrying about me because I am insanely obsessed with your column. It has gotten to the point where I use your columns as wallpaper. Not only in my room, but in every room I set foot into. I need your words surrounding me at all times. This makes it a little difficult to go outside; heck I've even tried to wallpaper my boyfriend with your articles! Am I crazy? Do you have any suggestions or words of support for me?"

Dear A.P.: You are not crazy. As for suggestions, fill in any holes or dings with spackling and allow it to dry before applying. And try not to overlap any of my columns when you paste them. Keep on reading!

H.S. writes: "Dear Trevor, I love your column. My turtle, Sussudio, died and I don't know how I'm going to go on without her. I cry myself to sleep every night because I miss her so much. She was everything to me and now I feel so lost and lonely. Part of me feels like going with her to the big toilet bowl in the sky. I don't know who I am or what to do anymore. You're my last hope."

Dear H.S.: I once had a turtle named Barbara and was completely heartbroken when she ran away. I kept calling for her to come back to me, but she never did. She got run over by a truck. I think it was Karma's way of getting back at me for saying to the squeegee kid that I didn't have any change, when I totally did. Sussudio died because you are a bad person. But keep on reading!

S.C. writes: "Dear Trevor, I love your column, but isn't it true that you plagiarize all of your material from a Polish kid's blog that you translate on Babel Fish? You've never had one original thought in your head, have you?"

Dear S.C.: You've never had an original thought in your head. But keep on reading!

And finally, D.J. writes: "Dear Trevor, I love your column. My girlfriend reads it to me each night before she tucks me into bed. How can I be a writer like you when I grow up?"

Dear D.J.: The short answer: You'll never be a writer like me. The long answer: You will never be a writer like me. Keep on reading!

Racist graffitti targets black students at York

Renata Valz
Excalibur (York University)

TORONTO (CUP) -- Less than 12 hours after Martin Luther King Jr. Day, York University was shocked to discover racist graffiti targeting black students in the student centre.

Nana Serwah, a York University Black Students' Association (YUBSA) member, was one of the first students at the scene.

"I came in after my class and I found 'niggas go back to Africa' on the door to the YUBSA office. Then another person informed me that there was a second sign in the washroom saying, 'all niggers must die,'" said Serwah.

"I was upset, not at the fact of what was written, because I know people feel that way around the world, but I think it's the ignorance, especially at a campus like this, a community where we have a diverse mosaic of people," said Marcus Hagley, a third-year law and communications double major. "It is a reflection of the underlying tones of what people feel but don't express."

The Student Centre is typically viewed as a safe space for students, but that is beginning to be questioned.

Sandra Pierre, York alumna and former students' union vice-president equity, spoke openly about her fears.

"Right now, our safe space has been violated and as a student, as a woman, I am scared to be at York at night. Now, as a black woman, I'm scared to be around the YUBSA office because I don't know who it is, or their level of hate for black people. I don't know what they are capable of doing," she said.

York university responded by sending Security and representatives from the Office of the Ombudsperson and Centre for Human Rights to the scene, but students were still unhappy with how the situation was handled.

"Security came and took a few pictures. Someone from the ombudsperson's office came and gave us a few cards. What's that supposed to do?" asked a frustrated Serwah. "Right now, I'm hoping that we'll take further action into our own hands and call whoever we need to call to make sure that this is taken seriously as a hate crime."

Selwyn McSween, interim ombudsperson and director of human rights at York, said he understood why students would feel that way.

"What they have gone through has insulted their dignity. I don't expect them to be satisfied with a mere handing out of cards," McSween said.

McSween sent an advisor over to view the graffiti.

"I hope I will be able to meet with them and discuss this matter when I have the report from our advisor," he said. "Our response is not to be minimalist; that is just a preliminary approach. It is proper for me to have someone verify, then in my capacity take the next step."

Rob Castle, executive director of the Student Centre, said that the university is looking at a number of measures to make the building safer, although he did admit there are limitations.

"Some things we can do quickly, other things will take much more time. We're doing all that we can. The important thing is that people see that security has gotten involved. We have also given consideration to installing CCTV (closed-circuit television) cameras," said Castle.

Gilary Massa, vice-president equity at the York University students' union, felt that it was "absolutely unacceptable for something like this to be happening, not only on our campus but also in general."

Massa added that the incident showed the importance of community services like YUBSA "to bring education and awareness, and also provide support for black students on this campus."

On Jan. 22, the Toronto police also responded to the incident. An officer spoke to YUBSA and took photos as evidence, but was unable to release an official comment to the press.

McSween thought the act was deliberately committed "at the time when North America and probably most of the world is celebrating the birth date of Martin Luther King."

"It's ironic and doubly insulting [. . .] to have them create such an insulting act on a day like this, after what Martin Luther has stood for in the world," he added.

In the wake of the events, students on campus are calling for an independent safety audit of the entire campus.

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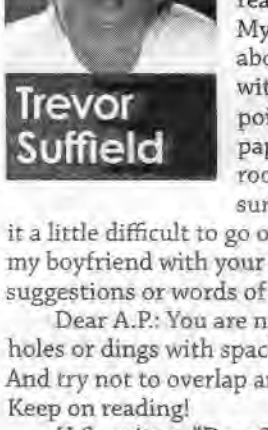

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Heath Ledger in one of his final roles, as music legend Bob Dylan.

Brad Renfro, star of such films as Apt Pupil, Ghost World, and The Jacket.

Superficial Rantings of a Celebrity Gossip Junkie

Andrea Danelak
healthprojector@gmail.com

With the exception of the shocking and tragic deaths of actors Heath Ledger and Brad Renfro, celebrity gossip has hit a lull in the past few weeks, making my job just a teensy bit harder (not that it was ever really hard in the first place). You know there's not much happening when Heidi and Spencer from The Hills dominate tabloid covers and magazines start speculating whether a celeb is preggers ("She's gained two pounds! She must be knocked up!").

Tom Cruise garnered some attention when celeb biographer Andrew Morton wrote some pretty interesting things in his new unauthorized biography of the onetime sex symbol. Morton alleges that Cruise holds the second-most powerful position in the church of Scientology and that baby Suri is actually the product of Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard's frozen sperm. Ew.

Morton claims that upon Hubbard's death in 1986, his followers vowed that the leader would rise again in 20 years – coincidentally, when Katie (excuse me, Kate) Holmes was pregnant. Whatevs, I don't buy it. If you look at Suri, she's the splitting image of Katie and Tom. But on the other hand, Tom is pretty crazy (hello, Oprah couch-jumping).

There's talk of another Angelina Jolie pregnancy, with the aforementioned weight gain causing one gossip rag to proclaim (on its cover, no less) that Jolie is having another baby with beau Brad Pitt. I don't know – she still looks pretty skinny to me. Considering her weight reportedly fell below 100 pounds a few months ago, maybe her "fuller" figure can be attributed to her eating a grape or something.

A few mags are also claiming that singers Avril Lavigne and Gwen Stefani are knocked up. Stefani and hubby Gavin Rossdale seem to be good parents, so if there's another one on the way, all the more power to them. But some people just shouldn't be allowed to procreate – Lavigne, to name one. Spitting on and flipping off the paparazzi, cussing rudely at interviewers and being an all-around bitch? Not qualities that bode well for parenthood.

Reese Witherspoon is apparently clashing with jokester Vince Vaughn on the set of their new movie. Witherspoon, an admitted control freak, hates that Vaughn strolls onto the set whenever he feels like it, refuses to rehearse his lines and is just an all-around buffoon. Meow!

And finally, some sad news for all of you who fell in love with hottie Channing Tatum in the dance flick Step Up: he and his co-star from the same movie, Jenna Dewan, are reportedly engaged after dating for a few years. Sigh. Guess I'll have to settle for Johnny Depp.

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The Biblio File
"Writers' Strike, Schmriters' Strike"

Jennifer Ryan
jryan11@hotmail.com

I've been telling people for a year that I've drastically cut back my TV viewing, but it's time to fess up. I still watch a lot of TV; I admit it! But now, instead of religiously watching several shows weekly, I can bop in and out. If I have a spare hour here and there, I will inevitably end up watching some crime drama or a sitcom (who doesn't love Two and a Half Men?). But I'm not devastated if I miss half a dozen episodes. It's a healthy relationship – I'm not dependent on any one show, and I have a wide, if shallow, knowledge of current television. But lately, current television isn't all that current. The writers' strike has changed the television landscape. Reruns reign, and reality shows are popping up as quickly as producers can think of copycat concepts of all the popular ones. I'm sure there is a fan base out there for those shows, but mostly, people are being turned off – and in turn, turning off their televisions. I know too many people whose happiness depends on the outcome of the ongoing writers' strike. So here, I offer my remedy to the writers' strike: books.

You may have a list of books you've been wanting to read, and now is the time to get caught up. But you don't have to turn your back on popular television entirely. Some of the writers have turned to writing books. And if you can't wait for them to be published, there are lots of books that provide all the humour and drama of television.

If high-society intrigue is what you crave in an hour-long drama, I would strongly recommend Academy X by Andrew Trees, which bears remarkable similarities to the CW drama, Gossip Girls. A teacher struggles to remain objective as his students and their parents manipulate, pressure, and seduce him in an effort to gain entry to the best Ivy League schools. Written from the point-of-view of the woebegone teacher, it's a fun look at the scandalous lengths to which the wealthy will go to get what they want.

The New York Times Books Update recently featured two books that instantly call to mind the medical dramedy Grey's Anatomy. The first, The Anatomist by Bill Hayes, is a biography of the elusive writer of the text book, and the second, Remembering the Bones by Frances Itani, is a novel about a woman who struggles to stay alive after a car accident by losing herself in memories of the med school text book.

The next book I would like to recommend is a great one, but I do so with some trepidation. It's a grammar book. But hear me out! It's short, and it's funny – surprisingly funny, given the subject matter. Eats Shoots and Leaves by Lynne Truss is a lovely little book that all writers should have on their bookshelves.

Even if people don't appreciate Truss's dry tone that is so clearly British even though you can't hear her – I fancied myself ending sentences in full stops instead of periods for days afterward – perhaps she can still teach everyone where to put the apostrophe in "writers' strike."

U2 is Ideological without Oprah in U2 3D

Jolene Bergen
Jolene@mts.net

U2 came to Winnipeg and played a 90 minute set of their most popular and politically motivated songs...all at the IMAX.

"Lights go down, it's dark...Your eyes are wide" - Vertigo (the opening song)

Using 3D technology (and some funny-looking glasses), guests remain in their seats while Bono, the Edge, Adam Clayton, and Larry Mullen Jr. appear larger-than-life-size on the eight-foot IMAX screen, providing an intimate peek into the different perspectives of a U2 concert.

The camera floats over the crowd, past the stage and between the performers, pointing out the orange refreshment on Mullen's drum stand, the glistening sweat beading down Bono's neck, and a strumming Adam Clayton thrusting his bass so near to the crowd it makes the women blush.

"I can't close my eyes and make it go away" – Sunday Bloody Sunday

But sometimes there can be too much of a good thing. An up-close and personal look at an ageing rock band, even one as charismatic as U2, can leave the impression of grown men trying to be teenage rock stars. It does point to the reason the stage is typically kept at a distance from the crowd, gyrating at 48-years-old isn't always a pretty sight, even when you have the voice of a rock god.

"The difficulties of our past will not prevent us from making a better future, we must work together. Uno, uno, uno." – the only words Bono spoke during the show.

In essence, U2 3D is the bands political manifesto, their ideological statement of how the world ought to be. The oversized towering backdrops that frame the odd, runway inspired stage repeat their message, coexist, be one, in different forms, images, and languages.

As a camera scans the crowd, we become the women on her partners shoulders, the man crying out the lyrics to "In the Name of Love," or the groupies desperately reaching out for a chance to touch their favourite rock stars.

As the perspective returns to that of the band, we are now a singer, a guitar player or a lonely drummer stuck at the back of the stage. At times, we can take many forms at the same time as the hologram images overlap one another, becoming one. We're everyone, everywhere, at the same time; the theme resounds.

We're one, but we're not the same - One

U2 3D doesn't feel like a concert or movie, it's an experience somewhere in between. It's a solid look into a performance by one of the world's greatest bands. And it's maybe the closest U2 comes to Winnipeg for some-time.

U2 3D is playing at IMAX until the end of April.

Dealing with your Facebook addiction

Danielle Pope
The Martlet (University of Victoria)

VICTORIA (CUP) -- Facebook has become an indispensable way to find old friends, schedule events, play games and even send "gifts." But if you're doing more living online than off, it might be time to reassess. Many students are now seeing Facebook more as an addiction than a networking tool, and psychologists are starting to agree.

Are personal relationships taking a backseat to Facebook? Do you think about Facebook even when you're offline? Do you use Facebook to escape problems or homework? Do you stay on Facebook longer than intended? Have you ever concealed Facebook use?

If you answered yes to any, you might be a borderline addict — no joke.

Frequent Facebook visits actually cause something psychologists refer to as "intermittent reinforcement." Notifications, messages and invites reward you with an unpredictable high, much like gambling. That anticipation can get dangerously addictive.

Rob Bedi, a registered psychologist and assistant professor at the University of Victoria, said that Internet addictions are common on university campuses, often helped by free Internet access, web-based assignments and unstructured blocks of time.

Bedi said there's a difference between procrastination and addiction. If you're losing assignment time to Facebook, though, that's a problem.

The key may be as simple as diagnosing your triggers and changing your habits.

"Find out what's missing from your life," said Bedi. "Whether it's having too much free time, not knowing anyone or just escaping, think about what made you resort to [Facebook], and what you could be doing instead."

Bedi suggests keeping a log to track your Facebook usage. If you're shocked by what you see, try the following: List your Facebook goals. Why did you originally sign up? Record what you actually do on Facebook. Make a Facebook schedule. Limit time to maintaining your original goals. Update your e-mail addresses to avoid relying on Facebook messages.

Bedi also suggested changing your password to something unfamiliar with numbers, writing it on a piece of paper and placing it out of reach to make checking Facebook a chore. Repeat if necessary to curb your behaviour.

"This is not something you can quit cold turkey," said Bedi. "While a cocaine addict can put down his drug and an alcoholic his drink, you can't preach abstinence to a student society that functions on Internet usage. What you can do is practice control." For some people, talking with someone might be the answer. Many universities offer addiction counseling through student services.

If you're not quite ready for that, you could join one of the 155 Facebook Addicts Anonymous groups on Facebook itself — but that might defeat the purpose.

It's pARTy time

Sara Atnikov
artsprojector@gmail.com

On Feb. 9 there's a pARTy . There might be an emphasis on art in the title, but this isn't your regular art show. There will be fire dancers, graffiti, hula hooping, break dancing, music, and fine art all showcased in a two-room gallery.

The show is billed as an "on the wall, off the wall" theme, which is unique.

"The on the wall, off the wall theme came from the sheer mix of talent we are showcasing," says Niki Trosky, one half of the curatorial team behind pARTy. "We have two separate rooms to play with. One is for artists 'on the wall' and includes everything from graffiti to fine art. The other room is for the 'off the wall' performers to bring art into action and turn observers into participators. The idea is to mix things up and just have a good time," she adds.

Trosky and her partner, Melissa Trainor, are always looking for new and fun places to hold events. They came upon the Cre8ery Gallery on Adelaid, and fell in love with the space. From there pARTy was born.

The sheer mix of different kinds of artists, some showing their works on the gallery walls while others perform their art in the open space, is quite a different offering for a show. This is quintessential Winnipeg says Trosky.

"The range of artists varies because that is Winnipeg in a nutshell. We have so much talent in this city and I love the idea of mixing things up and bringing people together. It will be a fantastic crowd of people to mingle and play with."

Trosky and Trainor handpicked most of the artists showcased at pARTy. A few managed to find them, and those that did were a perfect fit.

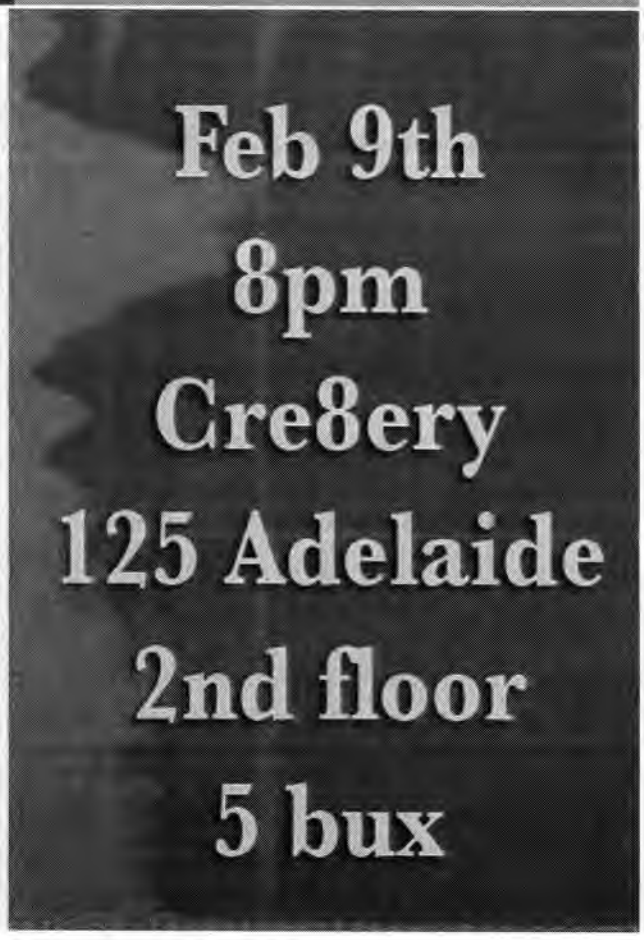
This is the pair's first curatorial experience, but so far so good.

"The best part about the experience is pooling all of these random people into one event. I like the idea of curating an atmosphere and creating a vibe."

Trosky sees the pair's inexperience as a bonus.

"Sometimes when things happen out of inexperience, new ideas and ways of doing things are created. This particular art show is focused on creating an experience. One that is bound to be original and intended to be fun."

pARTy happens on Feb. 9 at 8 pm at the Cre8ery, 125 William and Adelaid. Admission is $5.



Study the Suds:
Beer 101 at King's College, Halifax

Richard Bracken
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There's a new course being offered at the University of King's College in Halifax, Nova Scotia, that's garnering media attention across Canada. Brewing Science: The history, culture and science of beer, or 'Beer 101' as it is more commonly referred, is being offered to students who are specializing in the history of modern technology and science.

But it seems as though the name 'Beer 101' is attracting more attention than the course's instructor, Dr. Gordon McOuat, originally expected. "Students and the media have been calling to find out what the course is all about", says McOuat, whose research interests include the social and cultural place of science and technology. "The course outline is different than what they originally thought."

The outline for the course, located on the college's website, gives the following description: "The development of the modern world, with its emphasis on measurement and calculation, sanitation, tax reforms, bacteriology, and experiment on life, culminating on 19th century thermodynamic theory, is intimately connected to brewing interests."

It sounds complicated, especially to the average student who may just want to learn more about beer, but McOuat described the senior seminar special topics class in simpler terms. "This course will demonstrate how the development of modern science is related to the brewing process," he says. "It is definitely not a taste-testing course."

Students enrolled in the course will research early brewing methods by recreating the experiments themselves, and then demonstrating how they relate to the development of the modern world. "An example of this relation between brewing beer and the development of the modern world is the rise of calculus," says McOuat. "Early forms of calculus were found in the standardised measurements of beer and wine barrels."

Students will also participate in field trips, visiting local micro breweries and the Alexander Keith's Nova Scotia Brewery. This gives the students the opportunity to view modern brewing methods, and compare them to the older methods they will study in their research projects. Steven Beland, a former Red River College student, said he would be interested in taking a course like this one. "I would be more interested to find out the process of making beer," says Beland.

This course is definitely aimed at students interested in science. "It's a very serious and very difficult course," says McOuat— warning to those who think of replacing their textbooks with tankards.

The Great White North

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Ever buy a case of beer, open it up and pull out a t-shirt, toque, or cedar barbeque plank and wonder, "What kind of person collects this stuff?" Well, I do.

Since I developed a taste for beer at the tender age of 16 while living overseas in England, I've been fascinated by the collectable items that come with the purchase of beer. Whether it was a beer glass, t-shirt, coaster or bottle opener, I had to have it.

My passion for beer and its various collectables led me to the Flatlander's Beer Festival at the Convention centre in September 2006. There I met Wayne Leaf, a member of the Great White North Beer Club, based here in Manitoba. He explained how the club was made up of members who collected and traded beer paraphernalia from all over the world. Without giving it a second thought, I gave him my contact info and was soon a new member of the club.

The Great White North Beer Club was founded in 1989 by Wayne and three other friends in his garage. It now has more than 25 members and meets monthly at various locations around Winnipeg, including the Fort Garry Brewery.

Wayne, like most members of the group, collects all sorts of beer related items, but specializes in beer cans. His spare bedroom in his basement is dedicated to his collection, containing shelves filled with beer cans of all sorts.

"I've been collecting since 1978," said Wayne, 50. "It all started with a souvenir beer can from a trip to Italy, and it's continued ever since."

Among his collection are cans dating back to the early '50s, and cans from as far away as Japan and Australia. All are organized and displayed with their appropriate set.

"At one point I had about 1800 cans," said Wayne. "I sold quite a few though in the past few years." Wayne explained that beer cans sell on eBay for as little as one dollar, or as high as fifteen thousand dollars, but he adds that beer cans rarely sell for prices that high.

Standing in the room feels like standing in a time portal, as beer cans of all different shapes and sizes from several decades stand at attention on the shelves. Wayne also showed me a book for beer can collectors, containing a price guide for all beer cans from all over the world.

"It's great to know the prices that some of these cans can fetch," said Wayne with a smile. "But I prefer the idea of collecting beer cans that can't be found in Canadian stores, just so I can have a collection that is more unique."

Here's to beer!

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Yes, we all like beer. Drinking a beer is a sure-fire way to impress anybody. If God got thirsty, he'd probably reach for a beer. And as long as you're smart and responsible, there is no downside.

But there's another bonus: beer may actually be better for you than you thought.

According to the Brewers' Association of Canada, beer is a source of vitamins and proteins. Countless studies (or hundreds, if you can count that high) from numerous countries have shown that drinking moderately can reduce the risk of serious heart disease. Scientists have published articles that have made some pretty amazing claims about drinking beer. Scientists are reputable people – we should believe them.

In 2002, a group of researchers studied men with coronary artery disease. They found that moderate beer drinking could reduce LDL cholesterol (bad cholesterol!) and fibrinogen in the blood, and raise the levels of HDL cholesterol (that's the good one).

LDL cholesterol is bad because it can't be dissolved in the blood. It can build up on the walls of your arteries. If a blood clot were to come along and get caught up on some narrowed arteries, you could have a heart attack or a stroke. Fibrinogen is a protein that causes blood to clot. HDL cholesterol, on the other hand, has been shown to protect against heart disease.

Studies have also shown that moderate consumption can reduce the risk of developing type-2 diabetes by nearly one third, prevent stomach ulcers, lower the risk of gallstones and reduce the risk of rheumatoid arthritis in women. In 1994, the American Medical Association speculated that 81,000 deaths by heart disease would have been prevented if those people had just been moderate drinkers of alcohol.

Some have suggested that red wine is better than beer in terms of health benefits, but those people are snobs. No scientist has been able to prove that. I only believe scientists.

But what's all this talk about moderation? Well, remember that part at the beginning of the article where I wrote about being smart and responsible? I was talking about moderation.

All these glorious health benefits are undone if you drink too much. Also, if you drink too much, you usually act like a bit of a dink, trying to massage just about anybody you can get your hands on and whatnot. Moderate drinking is usually considered to be one to three drinks per day.

Also, if you're pregnant, don't drink. If you're going to be getting behind the wheel of a car, don't drink. If you're pregnant and going to be driving, especially don't drink.

Subconscious City, Spectacular Art

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Around 700,000 people live in Winnipeg, despite its deteriorating city centre, terrible weather, sprawling suburbs, bad transit system, and a cultural divide that's unavoidable.

"Every time you travel to Toronto or Montreal, you always have to justify living here," says Shawna Dempsey, co-curator of Subconscious City. "The difficulties of Winnipeg make it more interesting. Like there are grocery stores in the north end that haven't been touched since our parents went shopping there."

Twenty-seven Winnipeg artists will depict their relationships with the city through painting, sculpture, film and other media for Subconscious City. Though the exhibit opens on February 8 at the Winnipeg Art Gallery, co-curators Shawna Dempsey and Lorrie Millan chose Valentine's Day for the public opening. "We chose that day because we love our city," says Dempsey, "and because Valentine's is such a sucky day."

Winnipeg couple John K. Samson and Christine Fellows will be celebrating the sucky holiday together at the WAG, performing songs at the opening.

Samson and the Weakerthans are responsible for one of Winnipeggers' favourite songs, "One Great City," with the refrain of "I hate Winnipeg." The song seems to contradict the Winnipeg love fest that Subconscious City is striving for, but Dempsey says the love-hate attitude in the song shows exactly the kind of relationship that Winnipeggers have with their city. "In Winnipeg, there's a lot of heartbreak. You see your friends move away, you see shops close down, you see politicians making mistakes that other cities have made 20 or 30 years ago."

Kristin Nelson, one of the artists in the exhibit, isn't from Winnipeg, but has moved here because she feels a sense of community. But she still has an opinion on Winnipeg. "Coming from another city, there are lots of things that are weird. You'd be hard pressed to find a telephone booth in Vancouver." She is making that observation the focus of her paintings, which are of payphones around the West End, where she lives. Nelson says that she moved to Winnipeg because the art scene is so progressive, and that it is unique because it is small enough to join. And after living in Korea, Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, and California, Nelson says that she's "here to stay."

So Winnipeg must be appealing somehow, to someone.

Subconscious City will be running from February 8 to May 11 at the Winnipeg Art Gallery.

UW Theatre Department presents controversial playwright

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Violence. Rage. Family dysfunction.

This is the way the University of Winnipeg Theatre Department is launching their 2008 season with the staging of Neil LaBute's "The Distance From Here." The controversial playwright's work takes an unflinching look at the conflicts that exist between people and the ugly consequences that result from them. In this play, he explores the lives of aimless and neglected teenagers

The third-year Honours Acting class will be performing the play for course credit.

Shelagh Carter, a University of Winnipeg theatre department professor and the director of "The Distance From Here," hopes that the play will make audiences think.

"You watch the news and some child has either been lost or abandoned, or some teenager has ended up making poor choices because there has been nobody there to care for them," says Carter. "The issue the play is dealing with is the energy of young people who are on the loose, that have no direction. I think we have to take responsibility for what's happening [to these youth]."

Carter chose the play with her students in mind. She says that when she has a sense of who is in the class she searches for a play that will suit the class's dynamic.

"I felt that this play would give them a challenge," says Carter.

Almost all the roles in the play are double-cast, meaning that there are two students playing a single part. Each student in a doubly-cast role will perform four times. There are two students that will be on stage every night, and four students who play two parts each.

"It's all very student-organized and run," says Carter. "It's a real hands-on, practical experience for them."

The play also involves students in behind-the-scenes jobs. Students are working with Jason Robbins, a professional set and costume designer to design the sets, and under Charles Porter, a University of Winnipeg theatre instructor, to construct the sets.

All the lighting and props are done for credit by the Production II class, says Sheena Sanderson, the play's stage manager. Sanderson is also a student at the University of Winnipeg, but is not doing the play for course credit.

"It's a lot of work," says Sanderson. "But it has been good to work with new students."

"The Distance From Here" is playing Feb 5-9 at 8 p.m. and Feb 10 at 1 p.m. at the Gas Station Theatre, located at 445 River Ave. Admission is free, but reservations are recommended. Make reservations at 786-9152 or www.theatre.uwinnipeg.ca.

Are you sold?

A review of "Glengarry Glen Ross"

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"Always be closing."

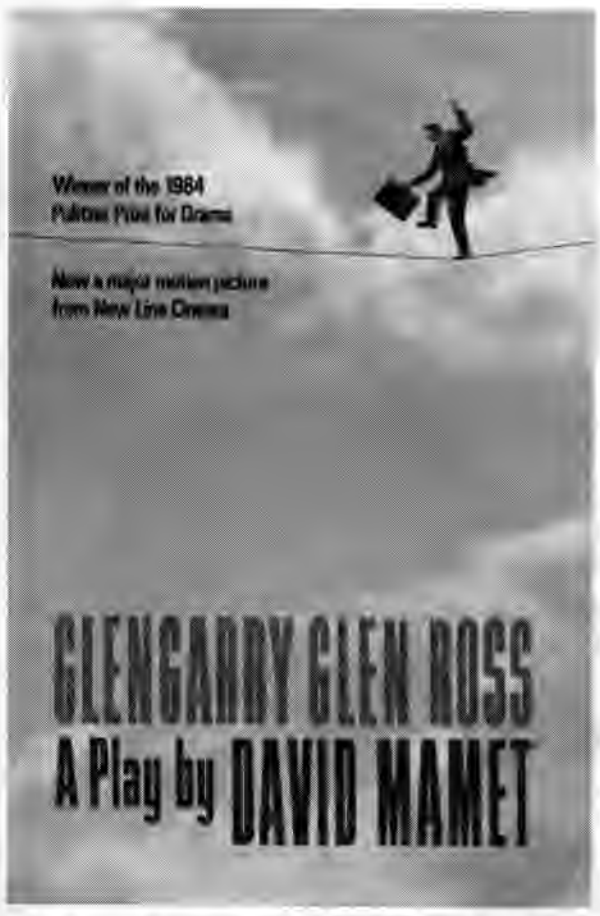
That's the way a sale should be made, say the salesmen in David Mamet's play Glengarry Glen Ross, but I wasn't completely sold on the performance presented by the MTC Warehouse on Friday, Jan 25.

Glengarry Glen Ross is about a group of real estate salesmen in a contest to see who can make the most sales. The winner will be awarded a Cadillac; the loser will be fired. Shelly Levene (Harry Nelken) is a veteran at the office on a bad "streak." Fast-talking Richard Roma (Omar Khan) is clearly the star salesman at the company. Criminally-minded Dave Moss (Mike Bell) and conscience-stricken George Aaronow (Steven Ratzlaff), round out the sales staff.

They all butt heads with office manager John Williamson (Graham Ashmore), a man unversed in the salesman way. But because of his job as the stand-in for unseen management Mitch and Murray, the salesmen unwillingly defer to him.

The three scenes in Act 1 each involve two characters: the salesman and the "customer." Each scene's dialogue is a sales pitch, meant to disorient the customer and disable his defences until he is drawn in and the sale is closed. But the varying degrees of success each salesman has in engaging the customer (and the audience) is a perfect indication of the salesman's current success at his job. For example, Levene's pitch is full of sales jargon, which is discouraging and even a little boring. Yet it effectively foreshadows what is to come, and the pay-off is felt later on.

Act 2 has more action, and it is more entertaining. The sales crew is fleshed out as they are each interrogated by police about a robbery at the office. (The sets are great, by the way – the office is decorated in an early 1980s colour scheme, and detailed right down to the faded spots on the wall where the stolen phones used to be). When Shelly shares a "war story" with Richard and works with him to close a deal, we see the respect and admiration they have for each other.



Nelken performs very well, but it is Khan's Richard who steals the show. However, by the end it seems that the focus of the play should have been on Nelken's Shelly, making Khan's excellent performance seem like a distraction in the whole scheme of things. The competition between Shelly and Richard's stories, along with Ashmore's stiff performance as John Williamson (which sucks out a lot of potential tension between him and the salesmen), make the play uneven and the ending indecisive.

Glengarry Glen Ross runs until Feb 9 at the MTC Warehouse, 140 Rupert Avenue.

The Wretched Hive of Scum and Villainy

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Juno is Overrated

There, I said it. The movie that everybody loves, in this honest critic's opinion, is overrated. Now I'm not saying that I hated Juno, I'm just calling it overrated and a tad mediocre. And this is unusual, as I usually love eccentric and clever indie films like Little Miss Sunshine or Ghost World.

But there's something about Juno that rubbed me the wrong way. I loved elements of the story, the performances by Jason Bateman, Allison Janney and J.K. Simmons, and I even laughed a few times. So it's tough for me to call this film overrated, but the certain something that didn't sit right, as film critic Gina Carbone described it, was a "forced cleverness" within the film. Carbone wrote in her Seacoast Online Dec. 31 review that "the most overrated film of the year isn't bad, it's just trying too hard. The music, the clothes, the dialogue: All beating me over the head with affected quirkiness."

Not all the critics loved Juno either. And I'm aware of the hype and praise. Juno has already grossed over $87 million, scored an IMDB rating of 8.4 out of 10 (good for 119th overall), and captured 2008 Oscar nods for best picture, best director (Jason Reitman), best screenplay (Diablo Cody), and best leading actress (Ellen Page).

The problem I have with this film might be with the protagonist Juno, played by Halifax native Page.

The character of Juno is a way too clever comedian doing a comedy routine the entire movie. It's like a young female Kevin Smith shooting a clever remark every five seconds when dealt with adversity.

Maybe I'm just way too old and jaded, but no 16-year-old kid out there knows the battle cry of Thundercats, let alone would scream it out during labour contractions. Maybe if she had quoted Invader Zim, I would have believed this film. Juno is way too made shades of a contrived geeky hipster.

"Juno is frequently funny, often winsome and way off-beat. Being the hipster film of the year, though, presents a couple of problems," said Kyle Smith said in his Nov. 19 review in his film blog. "One is that hipsters are a pretty demanding group...(and) hipsters are kind of annoying, particularly over time. Juno seemed brilliant to me for its first ten minutes, but at 90 minutes it amounts to the world's longest Belle and Sebastian or Ben Folds song."

Michael Cera really needs to stop playing George Michael of Arrested Development in every film, too.

Hell, if you haven't seen Juno, I suggest you do. It's worth your eight bucks, but it ain't worth the Oscar. Can you really compare this film to the Departed?

In Search of a Canadian Voice:

The WSO's New Music Festival takes audience on quest

Christine Mazur
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"I'd say it was the New Music Festival that puts the WSO on the map in the world," says Vincent Ho, composer-in-residence at the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra. As a young composer in the mid 90s he considered it the "Holy Grail" of new music festivals. Now, together with music director Alexander Mickelthwate, he's had the opportunity to help program the orchestra's 2008 IMRIS New Music Festival, running February 2 to 8 at the Centennial Concert Hall.

This year, the festival will take audience members on a quest for Canada's musical voice, and give them a rare chance to see living composers collaborating with the musicians performing their works.

Ho and Mickelthwate arrived at this year's festival theme, "discovering Canada's musical voice," after pondering the question, "What is the Canadian sound? What is Canadian in Canadian music?" says Ho, a Calgary native whose award-winning orchestral work Dragon Realms was performed in 2004 at the festival.

"For example," he says, "in America they have their own unique American sound through musical heroes like Aaron Copeland, [George] Gershwin, [Leonard] Bernstein."

Mickelthwate, being from Germany, which has its own "musical heroes" such as Beethoven and Wagner, asked Ho what the Canadian sound was. "I was actually trumped because I couldn't give him a satisfying answer," says Ho.

After pouring over scores and listening to hours of recordings of Canadian music, Ho and Mickelthwate realized they had to share their experiences with the public. "We decided wouldn't it be great if we created a program that reflected the same musical journey that we're going through right now so that way the audience can decide for themselves what the Canadian sound is."

Audience members can ponder the question of a Canadian musical voice during the Tuesday, Feb. 5 presentation of Guy Maddin's newest film, Brand Upon the Brain. While he is Canadian, Maddin commissioned the soundtrack from American composer Jason Staczek, says Rei Hotoda, assistant conductor of the WSO. Hotoda will conduct the live performance of soundtrack, complete with sound effects. International film star Isabella Rossellini will narrate the film.

"His [Staczek's] voice is really universal," she says, having already performed the piano part for the soundtrack four times last summer in Chicago. "A lot of people know him in Europe and down in the states."

As to the question of whether or not this American composer's voice stands out from the Canadian voices being performed during the New Music Festival, Hotoda says it will be up to the audience to decide. Maddin's voice is Canadian, she says, and the music was specifically written to describe the film.

"He [Maddin] asked for a score that sounds like this to match the feeling of this film," Hotoda explains. "It really does pertain to the film, so one can't go without the other. It's not like a piece on its own."

One remarkable feature about the New Music Festival is the opportunity for orchestra and composer to work together. "That's what's so great about new music," says Hotoda. "You have a resource. It's not like Beethoven where he's no longer around to tell us how he wants the music to sound."

As a composer, Ho says, "The process of creating a piece does not end until you've actually heard it."

However, from the conductor's point of view, Hotoda says, "In the long run a composer composes a piece and he has to let go because he's not doing it anymore. Once he's finished, once the ink has dried, it's up to the interpreter."

Still, both Hotoda and Ho appreciate the collaboration a new music festival allows. If a conductor does something he doesn't agree with, Ho would mention it.

"If the conductor's a great artist they would understand that it's a collaboration, that we're trying to create beauty together," he says.

Audience members will get a chance to witness frank discussion of new music with the composers at the Monday, Feb. 4 concert "And you call THIS Music?" Journalists Tamara Bernstein from the Globe and Mail, and Bartley Kives from the Winnipeg Free Press will face off with Canadian composers Paul Steenhuisen, Trevor Grahl, and Ho, in an on-stage discussion of what is Canadian music.

"Now we're not expecting to have any firm answers," says Ho. "The whole point is to raise the issue to give people a means or outlet to actually talk about it because it warrants further discussion."

Hotoda hopes the audience comes to the festival with open ears. Just because it's modern music, she says, doesn't mean it shouldn't be played outside the boundaries of the festival. For example, in January she conducted a piece by living Canadian composer Chan Ka Nin in a regular WSO season concert that included a Tchaikovsky symphony. "I believe that's where new music belongs," she says. "It's wonderful to have this week-long festival but after that fact, to bring the music into the mainstream repertoire is my goal and it should be happening more."

IMRIS NEW MUSIC FESTIVAL LINE-UP:

R. Murray Schafer's 75th
Saturday, February 2, 7:30 p.m.
Centennial Concert Hall
Featuring all music by the Canadian composer plus a world premier of Glenn Buhr's Symphony No. 3 featuring pop vocalist Sarah Slean.

Rituals
Sunday, February 3, 7:30 p.m.
Westminster Church
Featuring a world premiere by singer Veda Hille backed by local choirs the University of Manitoba Singers, Prairie Voices, and Camerata Nova.

And You Call THIS Music?
Monday, February 4, 7:30 p.m.
Centennial Concert Hall
Guest commentators Tamara Bernstein, Bartley Kives, Paul Steenhuisen, Trevor Grahl, and Vincent Ho discuss what is Canada's musical voice.

Guy Maddin's Brand Upon the Brain
Tuesday, February 5, 7:30 p.m.
Centennial Concert Hall
Guy Maddin's newest film created for performance with live musicians, sound effects, and narrator to be performed by international film star Isabella Rossellini.

Urban Wind
Wednesday, February 6, 7:30 p.m.
Centennial Concert Hall
Featuring the International New Music Youth Wind Orchestra performing works by Trevor Grahl, Henry Kucharzyk, and Michael Colgrass.

Synthesize My Soup
Thursday, February 7, 7:30 p.m.
Centennial Concert Hall
Includes a world premier by Jesse Zubot, perfoming a work for improvised violin, and a work for violin and computer by David Eagle.

Canadian Legends
Friday, February 8, 7:30 p.m. Centennial Concert Hall
Includes works by Canadian composers Michael Colgrass, Jacques Hétu, R. Murray Schafer, and Lloyd Burritt, who will also be in attendance.

For more information, please visit: www.wso.mb.ca/nmf

CRAM NIGHT

FREE COFFEE & DONUTS

Tuesday, February 19th
Library Hallway
Notre Dame Campus
5:30-8:00 PM

Tuesday, February 19th
Atrium Hallway
Princess Street Campus
5:30-8:00 PM

Why yogurt and toilets don't mix

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This is a story about poo. Crap. Shit.

For years I've been plagued with a condition of needing, at what always seems like the most inopportune moment, a bathroom immediately. Anything can set it off. Dairy, meat, anything fried – I have yet to discover any real pattern. And god help me when I travel anywhere. My bag is always stocked full of Imodium and every other diarrhea preventing chemical known to man. For a long time, I didn't know what wrong with me. I figured I just had a "delicate stomach," and I hate the idea of having a "delicate" anything.

But thankfully, medical science and the media eventually discovered a name for my problem. Apparently, I wasn't alone. It's called Irritable Bowel Syndrome or IBS and according to the Canadian Society of Intestinal Research, IBS is the most common form of gastrointestinal diagnosis in the world. In some countries as many as 30 per cent are afflicted with it and in Canada up to 20 per cent of people, mostly women in their 20s and 30s, live with the chronic and often debilitating condition. There is even more than one Facebook group dedicated to the cause.

Suddenly, around 2004, there were IBS cures popping up all over the place. A drug called Zelnorm was heavily marketed in TV commercials with women showing off their supposedly twisted stomachs. CSIR says IBS symptoms include "abdominal pain, bloating, and altered bowel habits such as constipation or diarrhea, or alternating between the two stool consistency extremes."

Although I am not one to take pills to solve problems, around that time I was starting to become desperate for a solution. I was just in pain all the time, and it was beginning to affect my quality of life. I took Zelnorm for one month and it worked. But there were side effects – for me so awful that it was worse than the IBS. I won't go into the gory details, because quite frankly, this is still a family show, but needless to say I stopped. Since then, Zelnorm has been taken off the market to comply with Health Canada's concerns regarding its side effects.

OK, so drugs didn't work. Enter the cavalcade of probiotic miracle foods. It started with Danone and their Activia yogurt that according to their website (which also features a picture of a woman's stomach), "consists of the BL Regularis strain, a friendly bacteria that remains active in the digestive system." In other words, Activia was supposed to contain "probiotics" to aid in digestion and relieve those pesky colon related problems. I tried that too, with a price tag about 30 per cent more than regular yogurt, and guess what? Nothing.

With the introduction of Activia, other food companies started to hop on the bandwagon. Cheeses, milk and other brands of yogurt also introduced probiotics. And recently, I also noticed prebiotics (whatever those are) have also made their way into yogurt advertising.

But of course, Danone, the makers of Activia, weren't going to get away with this forever. Last week, a California consumer filed a class action suit against them for lying about their claims. It's been alleged that none of these supposed health benefits have ever been proven. Along with improving digestion, Danone also claims their patented pro-biotic BL Regularis also improves the body's defenses and boosts the immune system.

Bull crap says the consumer that thinks Danone should have to refund every person who's bought the bogus yogurt and their lies – an amount that could be as much as $300 million.

But I think this is about something more than the runs and dairy products. Why are we so willing to believe in the quick fix all the time? Lululemon fleeced us when they tried to sell us seaweed infused pants that would put us all in a Zen-like state. And billions of dollars are spent each year on a quick-fix diet industry where the majority of people never lose an ounce.

It's been almost eight years now since I started having stomach problems. And after being lulled by the promises of easy solutions, I've discovered the only thing that really works is a healthy diet with lots of fruit, veggies, lean protein, water and regular exercise. Yah it sucks that just living well is the cure for my gaseous troubles.

But I'll gladly take any get rich quick scheme you're selling.

Bibles and Broomsticks

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I can laugh about it now. My Valentine's Day experience last year was far from picture perfect. Dinner was at a diner that had a distinctive geriatric ambiance. While I ate my salad of plain lettuce and tomato, I crinkled my nose every now and then as I got a whiff of the certain hospital-like smell. We didn't stay for dessert.

Every once in a while I catch myself acting in a way toward my boyfriend that can border on meanness. While I expect a lot, I wouldn't go as far as to suggest I am one of those girls who click their heels and demand the world to kiss their feet. But I think sometimes I forget those early days of courtship.

I'm positive that I conjured up a boyfriend. It was one terribly lonely night about five years ago. I had avoided dating and relationships. This was partly because of a crippling shyness, but mostly because I was afraid. So, what's a girl to do? I took a great deal of time to do some soul searching at that point. I asked myself a number of questions as a way of ensuring that I really did understand my person. While some of the answers were surprising, most of them were affirmations. After that, I tried to figure out what I would look for in a partner, and I made a list.

I still have that list. A while ago, I was looking over it. And then I came to a realization: my list of the perfect partner had come to fruition a long time ago. All it took was for me to take the time to ask the universe for exactly what it was I wanted, and, quite frankly, needed. I suppose in the long run, it saved me from dating a lot of men who would inevitably leave me feeling sour, although I'm sure there would have been good times.

But the thing is, after a couple of years together, you start to get too comfortable. You forget about the struggle and the awkward moments that have weaved the initial pathway of the relationship. Right now, my boyfriend and I are at that stage where we often say the same the things at the same time. It kind of reminds me of how pets and their owners often resemble each other. I think it's great to be at that comfortable stage, but it's a horrible thing to take one another for granted. I think that's something to be remembered for the future.

For Valentine's Day this year, I'm trying to make it less about the expectations and more about the simple fun of being together. So far the plan is a pint at the King's Head and a movie at Cinematheque. However, I'll still be bitchy if he ever even thinks about taking me back to that old folks' diner.

RED RIVER CIVIL CLUB EST 2007

The Red River Civil Club Charity of Choice Hockey Tournament

"GET INVOLVED"

Set to take place on February 16th, 2008 at The Forks on the river trail rinks. Registration is $100.00 per team, each team chooses a local charity to play and raise funds for. Closing date for teams is February 15th at noon. There are a limited number of spaces so enter as early as possible. Teams can hand in registration fees to the civil engineering office in AB building. For more information call 679-6770 or email redrivercivilclub@gmail.com.

Details:
- Games will be four on four style (three players and one goalie)
- All players will play with shoes (no skates) and a tennis ball
- Physical contact will not be tolerated, helmets required
- Three, Five minute periods will be played, straight time
- Playoff periods will be same length but with stop time
- Each team is guaranteed three games
- Prizes will be awarded to top teams

For more info there is also an event link
http://www.facebook.com/event.php?d=7894266835

Alternative ways to meet that special someone

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"So, how'd you two meet?"

This popular question has been posed to couples for decades, but within the last 10 years, possible answers have become more diverse. As people become busier and are looking to meet people later in life, combined with the lack of personal interfacing (who meets face-to-face anymore?), more people are relying on dating services as a way to meet potential partners.

1) Meet Market Adventures (www.meetmarketadventures.com):

Jan Cmela runs the Manitoba branch of Meet Market Adventures, an international singles group that plans outings for professional singles to interact with new people.

"The goal is to be a social club," said Cmela. "People hook up for sure. We put people together without actually doing it, without having the responsibility of a dating service."

The Manitoba branch has about 1,200 members, the majority of which are between 30 and 40 years old, which attend a variety of events ranging from bowling, billiards and trivia nights to ice climbing, hang gliding and parachuting for the braver souls. There are generally two or three different activities planned each week, with icebreaker games and activities to encourage interactions.

"The more people you meet, the better chance you have of meeting someone," said Cmela.

An anti-Valentine's Day after-work party is planned for Feb. 14 to combat the loneliness singles can feel that day, explained Cmela. If one needs to get away from the occasion altogether, he/she can hop on the Singles Valentines Escape Cruise that sails off Feb. 10 for a week in the eastern Caribbean.

Membership is free, and prices vary for each event depending on the activities planned.

2) Hitch Parties (www.hitchparties.com):

Rob Anderson and Ron Cantiveros formed Hitch Parties over a year ago as they both were single and looking to expand their social networks. Aimed at professionals over 25 years old, the parties provide an alternative to the bar scene while heightening the odds of finding like-minded singles.

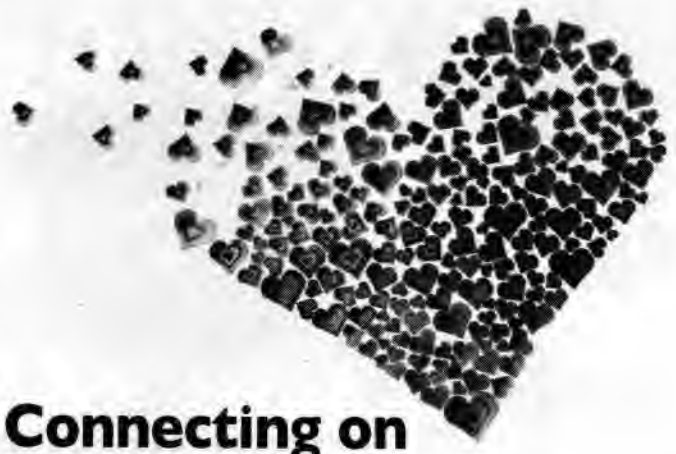
"We increase the percentages because we've brought together people that are single...everyone's in the same boat," said Cantiveros.

Events are held at least once a month and are divided into two age groups, 25-35 and 35-plus, and generally involve ice-breaker games and mix-and-minglers aimed at getting people to interact as much or as little as they like.

"It's less formal than speed dating, and more intimate than internet dating," said Cantiveros.

Attendance continues to grow with an average of 75-150 participants per event. Membership is free and the events range from $10-20 depending on the venue.

And does it work? "Recently, we've heard through the grapevine that one couple is engaged," said Cantiveros excitedly.



Connecting on Campus -

Different Dating Stages

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We all have crushes. How do you know if you should ask them out?

The smartest thing to do when assessing your crush's dating potential is to see if he/she is even ready or worth dating at all, because it's a great idea to know your potential partner's mindset. Be aware of these four different dating stages before letting your crush, um, crush you: waiting, baiting, dating and hating.

Waiting

This is a tough one. Both sexes often use the dating scene as a window-dating experience. You know, look – but don't buy or commit.

If your crush seems to be slightly interested in you, but uses lines like "I'm not sure what I'm up to this weekend," then he or she may be waiting for better dating options or trying to figure out their own lives. Be cautious and don't get too attached.

The term "waiting" is not a negative label, because this person may be sorting out his/her own issues. Don't rush the person out of this stage. Let your crush come out when he/she is ready and you will see how much happier he/she is.

Oh, and don't spend too much effort on a crush who is in the "waiting" stage.

Baiting

Stay away from the "baiting" peeps. Teases are a waste of time and an easy way to get hurt.

Here are some signs to watch out for: they spend a lot more time talking to other men or women in social situations than you, they keep pushing off or rescheduling dates, they don't return text messages or phone calls within one or two days and they aren't forthcoming with information about themselves.

If someone thinks you're cute and they want to hang out with you, they will make the signs pretty obvious. Don't fall for, or be led on by, a person in the "baiting" stage. They are self-absorbed and using you to replenish some of their own much-needed self-confidence.

Dating

Ideally, this is the stage that you want your crush to be in. These people return calls and rarely break plans. They ask questions about you and seem genuinely interested in your happiness.

I know this sounds simple, but it's crucial that you can distinguish between their signs and the "baiting," "waiting" and "hating" signals.

If you are not sure if the person wants to date you – or anyone, for that matter – ask. I know it sounds crazy, but asking, "Are you ready to date someone?" is better than playing the guessing game. Don't do it the first few times you meet someone or with every potential partner. If you ask too soon and too often, you may look desperate.

Hating

This is a horrible stage. Usually, the person in it doesn't even realize that he or she is not ready to date.

These people tend to compare you to their other partners. If you get the feeling these people are trying to get you to prove yourself, then get out. Dating is not a job interview. If you feel like the person is preparing to "hire" you, the job is never worth it.

People in the hating stage can be jaded, controlling, jealous, negative and pessimistic.

Do some digging. Find out what stage your crush may be in before asking him/her out.

Also, before you find out another person's stage, take a look at yourself and figure out which stage you are in. Don't get involved with someone if you are in any stage other than the "dating" stage, or you will hurt yourself and others.

Five calorie-burning date ideas

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When the weather outside is frightful, it's often tempting to stay inside and play couch potato with your significant other. Well, here are a few ways that you can bond with your sweetie and burn calories this Valentine's Day (other than the obvious):

1) Skiing – Be it cross-country or downhill, skiing is great exercise, working muscles you never even knew existed. But skiing also is a great couples sport – think snuggling on the chairlift and falling into a pile of fresh powder together, not to mention cozying up with a nice cup of hot chocolate afterwards.

2) Playing in the snow – Bust out your cutest winter gear and unleash your inner child! Build a snowman, have a snowball fight, make a fort – bond as you make like five-year-olds and burn a few hundred calories in the process.

3) Tobogganing – Thought you'd never use your crazy carpet again? Well, now's your chance! Find your old toboggan, saucer or carpet and head for the hills. Think of the cuddle potential as you go whizzing down the snowy slopes. Bonus: The trek back up the hill strengthens your legs while allowing for great conversation.

4) Biking – Yes, you read right. Take your bicycle out of retirement and go for a ride together to take in Winnipeg's breathtaking winter scenery. Oh, and this goes without saying, but wear a helmet! Nothing ruins a romantic date like a trip to the ER (trust me on this one).

5) Skating – Sharpen your skates and hit the closest rink or river to burn about 400 calories an hour. What better way to bond than to hang onto your sweetie for support as you wobble your way around the ice?

The Sports Story

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According to dictionary.com, the definition of curling is as follows: A game played on ice in which two teams of four players each compete in sliding large stones toward a mark in the center of a circle.

Conversely, almost everyone else defines curling as: An incredibly boring quasi-sport that is comparable in excitement to watching paint dry.

For those of you who have actually watched an entire curling game – all 10 ends without the consumption of alcohol – you know that the second definition is much more accurate than the first.

Now don't get me wrong here, I'm actually a curling fan. By that, I mean I watch my girlfriend curl without complaining, but over the years I've actually come to appreciate the "sport."

In late January, for example, I took in quite a few games at the Scotties Tournament of Hearts Provincial Women's Curling Championships in Gimli, and my appreciation for the strategy and flow of the game was as strong as ever.

A lot like a frigid polar bear swim, curling is not everyone's cup of tea. Many people come to that conclusion without ever actually giving it a chance, and I don't blame them at all, so to make the sport easier to watch and market, I've come up with three ways to remix curling. I'm confident that incorporating these ideas into curling will drastically improve the game.

1. Both teams currently receive 75 minutes to complete a 10 end game. That's 150 minutes between the two teams, roughly the length of Cast Away or Armageddon, both movies you fell asleep during at least once. I say we cut that in half and give each team roughly 40 minutes to complete the game. That's 80 minutes combined, which is more than enough time. No more dilly dallying up and down the ice; time is of the essence.

2. Curling calls are as memorable as they are annoying. "Hurrrrrrrrrryyyyyyyyyyy, hurrrrrrrrrrryyyyyyyyyy haaaaaaa aaaarrrrrrrrrddddddddddd." Once and while it's fine, but when four games are going on at the same time and four skips are belting those screams out like it's mating season and they are trying to attract a mate, it can be a bit much. Why not mix it up and try something new? Maybe teams could come up with code words that would not only get their message across, but also confuse the opposition and give the fans a good laugh. "Take that rhino for a long walk," or "A few dangles on that liquorice will do." Just think of the possibilities...

3. Last but not least, I think players and big games should have nicknames. Instead of Jennifer Jones against Tasha Hunter for the provincial championship, it should be "Jagged Jones versus the Brandon Bomber in the showdown that will stop time." Still not convinced? Then ask yourself this: would the Thrilla in Manila between The Louisville Lip and Smokin' Joe be as memorable if it were Ali against Frazier for the championship?

I'm not a curling hater, far from it, but incorporating my suggestions into the game would make things much more interesting. Heck, curling might even become as popular as Pogs!

Got the flu? Stay home!

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Feeling lethargic? Have a runny or stuffed nose? Got a sore throat? Coughing a lot? Does your body ache?

These some of the symptoms of the flu, which is a respiratory illness.

Having the flu, obviously not a fun time, especially when it does not last a day or two, but instead drags out for much longer.

The cycle of being sick, feeling a little better and getting sick again can last for two or three weeks when a person has the flu according to Red River College Nurse Debbie McFarland.

"You have to rest, you have to get sleep," advises McFarland for anyone feeling the oncoming effects of the flu.

"When you run yourself down that's when you get will get sick."

McFarland says with over 200 viruses causing the common cold it is impractical for a person to stay away from school or work just because of the sniffles, thinking it might develop into a case of the flu.

She acknowledges there is no one single solution a person can do to combat the flu once they have it.

Taking Tylenol, Advil or other similar types of medication together with drinking lots of fluids, such as water or juice, is a good way for a person to combat the flu.

"Don't guzzle the fluids, take sips every 20 minutes," says McFarland.

She adds that taking antibiotics is less effective.

"The flu is a virus and is going to run its course."

According to the website for the Centre for Disease Control there are five steps to take when you have the flu from spreading it to other people.

One, cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and then throw it away.

Two, staying away from people who are also sick.

Three, staying away from work, school and social gatherings.

Four, avoid touching your nose, mouth and eyes.

Five, wash your hands especially after touching your nose, mouth or eyes.

According Health Canada's website the flu season in Canada runs generally from November to April.

Anywhere between a tenth to a quarter of the population will get the flu during that time.

Of those 4,000 to 8,000 will die, usually from pneumonia or other serious complications.

Lastly, McFarland cautions that a person should be careful not to return to work or school too early.

That can result in a person getting sick again.

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