

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

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Sierra Leoneans need the freedom to feed

by Nicole Gifford

The Sierra Leonean proverb, 'where the goat is tied, the goat shall feed' is far from the reality that exists there today. Though rich in diamonds and minerals, it is one of the world's poorest countries. Wealth obtained through international exports is not re-circulated amongst the general population or used to build its failing economic or social systems. Few are lucky enough to escape being tied in a place with nothing to feed on - little to survive on. Saa Andrew Gbongor, a St. Thomas University (STU) student, struggled to be so lucky. To avoid being captured by rebels in Sierra Leone, he traveled barefoot to neighbouring Guinea. He then stayed at a refugee camp until he was granted immigration to Canada. Now begins his mission. "While I'm living here in Can-

ada... I want to use [Canada's] influence to see how best [Canada] can reform Sierra Leone and the entire Africa," said Saa. He plans to attract international attention to the situation in Sierra Leone through music. "The only way that I am able to talk is through music," he said. "When I put it in the form of entertainment, most people like it." Saa's first CD, entitled "Butuneh Banda", which means 'the fighting is over, freedom for life', was produced around this time last year. With the help of a production studio in Guinea and Digital Imaging Services at UNBF, he has since produced 100 copies of the 10-track reggae disc. The album was sold at various local businesses and by Saa himself, almost all of which have been sold. "I don't have [any more] copies; I just have a few more copies that [are] left at Backstreet Records, and I'm going to leave that there so that they can also do business," he said.

Saa is in his second year of the human rights program at STU, and plans to continue selling his first CD, whilst writing and recording tracks for an upcoming release. "Basically, I will have to go back again and do some more duplications [of the first CD]," he said. "At the same time, I'm doing writing. I'm writing more songs that I would like to include in my new CD, [on which] I'm planning to feature different nationalities." Saa has already made arrangements to feature a female Japanese singer and a group of Canadian male artists on the new album, "because I want my CD to be diverse, to the world, you know?" But he plans to maintain his message: "to stop war, bring freedom for life in Africa [and] especially in Sierra Leone, because there's no freedom or any human rights there," he said. Since he left Sierra Leone, little improvement has been made. "You cannot compare the democracy we get in Sierra Leone to the democracy we're experiencing here," said Saa. "If you say anything against the [Sierra Leonean] government, BOOM, the next day, nobody will see you again and nobody can ask for you. They will send special missionaries to come and do you bad."

With the freedom he enjoys in Canada, Saa plans to continue producing music with the hope of someday returning to Sierra Leone backed by Canadian and international leaders and reformists. "We need international people that can teach our leaders down there how to rule, how to govern people," he said. "I need ordinary people themselves to listen to the songs, and also members of the G8 or international boards." He feels that with the help of international governments, policy improvements can be implemented to improve the quality of life for Sierra Leoneans. "So I'm crying out for these countries to... hear my appeal that I'm making, because I know Sierra Leoneans themselves cannot control the war. We have to get foreign people to come and bring some good solutions," explained Saa. Though he has two years left at STU and three years left before he can return to Sierra Leone without jeopardizing his chance at obtaining Canadian citizenship, Saa has already begun to organize a group of artists to visit Sierra Leone alongside a number of Canadian government officials in order to assess the needs of the government there and to spread the message of freedom and democracy. "All I need for people is freedom, rights, and justice. So, the main thing Canada [can] do is to see what is going on in that particular country and to see how best they can transform it through the help of the G8," he said. In particular, Saa would like to see the creation of new medical

facilities and an increase in access to primary education. "We have many young boys and girls that are very talented and that want to go to school, but [drop out] of school because of school fees," he said. "The government can use [their] money... to create a lot of facilities. We are simple Sierra Leonean people who can go and engage themselves to do work that can be very beneficial to people." In other words, rather than participating in a labour force that feeds the wealth of the government and the elite of the country, "they have to do something that Sierra Leoneans will engage themselves in to be able to feed on," said Saa. The proverbial goat is at the risk of starvation. With the help of the international community, and concerned global citizens like Saa, "we're going to reach out a particular message to reform the whole of Africa."



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no more boring lectures from Ms. Grundy, no more indigestible cafeteria food, and no more untimely mischief interventions from Principal Weatherbee. Soon, however, the students become disenchanted with their isolated learning environments - there is no one to pass notes to, and they can't argue with or question their instructors. Disobeying the rules isn't as fun when there's no one around to catch them. They aren't even allowed to take a break to go out and enjoy the first snowfall of the season.

In short, the students find that they are less free within the privacy of their own homes than they were at school because they lack the precious opportunities for social interaction that give meaning and value to their learning. Subsequent to a discussion of the merits of the classroom environment over chocolate malts at Pop Tate's Chocklit Shoppe, Archie and his friends decide to turn in their virtual learning kits and go back to school, where they discover that their teachers have missed teaching just as much as they have missed learning.

The moral of the story for Archie's young readers was supposed to be that there is no substitute for learning that takes place through the direct, face-to-face interaction of student and teacher. At one time, Mark Edmundson, a Professor at the University of Virginia, contributing editor at Harper's, and author of the provocative and potentially controversial new book *Why Read?* might have agreed. Much as Archie and his friends were initially drawn in by the allure of a virtual classroom, though, so too have today's university students and professors fallen prey to the mass media's claims on our attention and lost sight of the original function of higher education, according to Edmundson.

Of students, he asks, what has your education done for you lately? Based on his own experiences in the university classroom, Edmundson fears that a liberal arts and humanities education - in particular the study of the great literary works - has become just another diversion; a form of mild entertainment that does not purport to give students a leg up in the job market after graduation and is therefore valueless to them in the long run.

Before you dismiss Edmundson's concerns, think back to the last time you or someone you know deliberately selected a "bird course" because you needed an easy A to round out your transcript. Chances are your choice began with the letters ANTH, SOCI, ENGL, CLAS, or, for the real go-getters among you, POLS and HIST. I can't claim not to have done the same, but what does it say about us, the gen-

eration that will shape our country in the years to come, when we turn to the liberal arts and social science disciplines as a kind of intellectual coffee break from the "real" education we're receiving in the practical disciplines like engineering and computer science? For those of us who are actually striving for an arts degree, how are we to reconcile our various reasons for doing so with the fact that in our society, a B.A. qualifies us to wash the floors at McDonald's? I can count on one hand the number of engineering students I know who enrolled in the program because they are deeply passionate about math and machines, but at least they'll be able to command a respectable salary after graduation.

The fault for our dismissive view of humanities does not lie with the students, who have been sold information in tidy, colorful half-hour segments since early childhood and have been taught how to criticize and dismiss but not to weigh our own most deeply-held convictions against those of our authors and scholars. Rather, Edmundson lays the blame upon our educators, who he believes have failed to ask their young charges the challenging questions that help us to reflectively and prospectively understand our world and ourselves, imbuing our lives with meaning and purpose.

Edmundson advocates for the assisted development of a student's "Final Narrative," a term he adapted from latter-day philosopher Richard Rorty. The search for a Final Narrative, or a person's "ultimate terms of commitment," requires teachers to ask questions of their students that are embarrassing, awkward, controversial, and above all, difficult to answer; questions like "how do you imagine God?" and "what is truth?" and "how does one lead a good life?"

The answers to these questions cannot be researched in the conventional sense, but exposure to the answers of others - the written experiences, ideas, and beliefs of fifty generations of great minds or more - can assist the open-minded student in the search for their own Final Narrative, and therein lies the crux of *Why Read?* Paraphrasing from Ludwig Wittgenstein, Edmundson says, "a new language, whether we learn it from a historian, a poet, a painter, or a composer of music, is potentially a new way to live," and the more of these languages we can accumulate, the closer we come to deciding for ourselves the best way to live.

Although addressed primarily to university educators, *Why Read?* is a potent tool for students who are concerned about the value of the education they're receiving for their tuition as well, and a challenging but ultimately rewarding book.

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Canada's best beer keeps you warmer this winter

Picaron's brew wins gold medal in Canadian Beer Championships

by Greg LeBlanc

With a history of fine brewing and the medals to prove it, Picaroons has once again outdone itself. With a new look and an improved flavour, the critically acclaimed Winter Warmer beer was honored at the Taproom last Friday evening. The celebration was two fold. First, a new label can now be found adorning bottles of Winter Warmer. Renowned local artist Lloyd Fitzgerald, who has done paintings and prints for most of his life, had his artwork "Winter

Sunset" chosen for the label. "It wasn't [originally] intended for the beer," noted Fitzgerald, who is a long-time fan of the Warmer, "but I did it simply because I love winter scenes." In fact, it was Andrew Hashey, one of the original crafters of Warmer, who noticed the painting, and thought that it would go well with the beer. "That painting conveys everything that the beer is supposed to be," added Sean Dunbar, an owner of the Picaron's label. "Winter Sunset" and other pieces of Fitzgerald's will be displayed at the Taproom for a limited time. The second reason for celebration is the fact that it's a new winter season, and with a new winter comes a new Winter Warmer. A few of the brewers of Picaron's ales were at the Taproom to show-

case both the 2004 and 2005 versions of the Warmer. Dunbar and Hashey were on hand to talk about the Picaron's microbrewery and the new brew. Dunbar, who found out in September about the gold medal win for this year's batch, was humble about Warmer's success: "we just make good beer, get it out to the public and hope people like it." And people do like it. "The best feedback from the community is the fact that...I can't make enough," Dunbar added, "we constantly run out." And no wonder. Within it's first year of being brewed, Winter Warmer won a gold medal in the 1998 World Beer Championships in Chicago. Not bad for a beer brewed in New Brunswick. In fact, to highlight their 2005 version of Warmer, free samples of the new beer were placed along side the 2004 Warmer, so as to let the public decide for themselves. I was more than happy to make many comparisons, and let my tongue swim in the rich flavours of the two brews. Still keeping its full, dark, robust body, and smooth, rich aftertaste, the 2005 Warmer seemed to be a bit lighter, but I had to be sure, so I went up and tried another. Yes, it was definitely less smoky than the 2004, but a bit spicier...and still fueled the furnace...with a blast of...ah...warmth. But thur was still sumthin' I couldn't place, so I got a few more samplers...and then...I figure it out. It's gotta lotta kick, itza damn strong...ah...beererrr...und ya can bar..ly taist tha alcohol init.... "I think one of the most dangerous things about the beer is that



Nash Ingalls/The Brunswickan

Samples flow from the taps to celebrate a warmer winter with Picaron's.

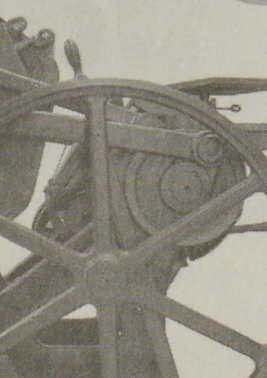
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