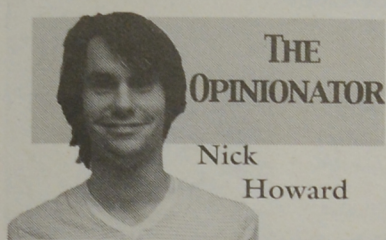


A time-wasting tour of Fredericton



**THE
OPINIONATOR**
**Nick
Howard**

I am a chronic time waster in the eyes of an efficient person. I know I am not alone in my ability to waste time, but I have a bone to pick with this reductionist categorization. Just as there are differences in efficient lifestyles (scheduler versus neat freak, for example) there are differences in time wasting technique. For instance, I find Sudoku and crosswords astoundingly soporific, while a walk in Odell park is endlessly entertaining.

So, what is a waste of time?
Let us, for the purposes of this article with a primarily student

readership, assume that a waste of time is anything which does not yield a tangible and "useful" outcome and which is undertaken when other work vies for one's attention (i.e. homework). Whether this definition is accurate or not, it certainly explains the nagging voice in the back of every student's mind: "shouldn't you be doing that [insert appropriate schoolwork here] that is due next week?"

There is always work to be done and our culture of guilt only exacerbates the issue. In the spirit of time wasting escapism, I offer you my favourite Fredericton time wasters.

Movies, TV and books are the ultimate time wasters. But their universal availability makes them unoriginal and sadly, a little boring. Fredericton has much to offer to the budding (or experienced) time waster, though its bitter winters tend to limit the possibilities by chilling the spirit of outdoor time consumption.

My particular brand of time-wasting is best described as frittering, revolving closely around three pillars of misspent time: drink, food and spacing out for long periods of time. Thankfully, these fundamentals of fritterage are well provided for in Fredericton. For this first part of the two-part time wasting tour, let's begin with coffee.

Compared to my favourite European cities (Vienna and Rome), Fredericton has little in the way of a coffee culture. Completely unfair and biased comparison aside, Fredericton does have a few cafés in the rough.

Read's café is a brilliant, bustling little newsstand-esque café in downtown Fredericton. Comfy chairs decorate a space next to the coffee counter which is otherwise surrounded by magazines, newspapers and books. The entertainment value is high, as there is no rule against flipping while you drink – though I presume the rule "you spill on it, you buy it" applies.

The space-out value is also high: I have yet to be disappointed by conversations overheard at Read's.

Doodles café in the Charlotte Street Arts Centre provides quite the opposite experience. The walls are ideally decorated for hour-long stares and the place is usually quiet. Most of all I like ordering at Doodles. There is no tall, grande whatever; in fact, you ask for a coffee and that is exactly what you get: a good coffee in a nice mug. You don't have to specify quantities, style of topping, nor humidity or temperature to the nearest centigrade. Simple, mindless and perfect.

Coffee is the staple of the time waster's itinerary. It can provide the focus for your frittering: the crema on a freshly poured espresso can become an

art project for a steady hand with a stir stick. Or it can provide the backdrop to a lively conversation. Either way it is an invaluable tool for the enterprising time waster.

To call the experienced time consumer a "time-waster" is to call Bach or the Beatles "noise-makers." I have no doubt that the best ideas are created during periods of wasted time. From Archimedes' bath to Nietzsche's walks we can see that wasting time is a necessary and beautiful part of life. So let's stop wasting time on scheduling efficiency and start wasting time.

Next week's column will continue with more time wasting tips for the fritterer in Fredericton.

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Alcohol: a part of who we are

ISHMAEL N. DARO
THE SHEAF

SASKATOON (CUP) – It is bizarre that so many of us start a new calendar year with hangovers. Instead of renewal and fresh starts, millions wake up on Jan. 1 each year with queasiness and headaches as the last reminders of the previous year.

These last ghosts of the prior calendar are exorcised very painfully sometimes. Liquor can be a harsh mistress, but for all that she hurts us, she comforts us too.

Despite the problems alcohol usage leads to, drinking has been part of humanity for as far back as the time of the ancient Egyptians.

More recently, French champagne, Russian vodka, and Canadian beer have all contributed to national identities. Molson Canadian's long-running advertising campaign said it succinctly with the declaration: "I am Canadian." Presumably, drinking beer and being a citizen of Canada are directly related to one another, according to Molson.

Most people have among and their most interesting stories tales of mad binges, benders, and brannigans. Spring break St. Patrick's Day are mere euphemisms for getting extremely intoxicated, and the legal drinking age is the one law almost everyone has broken with glee.

Though we enter 2009 with gloomy financial outlooks, alcohol sales are better than ever. Because people like to drink when they are happy and because they can't help but drink when they are miserable, alcohol is considered recession-proof. According to the New York Times, even prostitution, the world's oldest profession, has seen a decline in business, but our other oldest vice remains in good health.

Canadians spend \$18 billion per year on alcohol and half of that is beer. As a point of reference, the Canadian military will receive \$19 billion for 2009. Collectively we spend almost as much on getting drunk as the country does on defence.

Our unquenchable thirst for liquor is so strong that even prohibition laws in Canada and the U.S. didn't stop consumption. Throughout the roaring '20s, bootleggers, rum-runners, and

moonshiners supplied Americans with the liquor they so craved, and Canadians played no small part in that illegal trade. Al Capone, tommy guns, and speakeasies are the lasting symbols of Prohibition. The Noble Experiment, as it was called, had failed miserably, and by 1932, Prohibition was repealed.

Perhaps the reason we love to drink is because water just isn't that interesting. Even Jesus found a way to turn water into wine, much to the delight of his followers, one assumes. Obviously, there are certain mood-altering qualities of alcohol that people enjoy, but that alone would not outweigh the many problems alcohol contributes to, such as traffic accidents, violence, and addiction.

The real reason we allow alcohol in our lives is because we are adults and adults are allowed to do what they please to their own bodies. Sure, there are problems with hooch, but think of everything we would lose if we were not close with Jack Daniels, Captain Morgan, and the rest of our watery friends.

Throughout history, alcohol has been both hero and villain to us and many great people have struggled with the bottle. The cultural significance

of alcohol is undeniable. Vincent van Gogh, Ernest Hemingway, and Hunter S. Thompson were great drunks of their time, and even world leaders such as Winston Churchill and our own John A. Macdonald were known for their affinity for Old Lady Whiskey.

In 1737, Benjamin Franklin amassed over 200 words from around Philadelphia that described drunkenness. To say a man "has kill'd his dog" or that he has "been too free with the Creature" were just two of the many confusing ways to say that someone was sloshed, hammered, buzzed, wasted, pissed, tanked, sauced, blitzed, or pie-eyed.

English probably has more words to describe being drunk than any other language around, so it may not be so strange that each year is heralded by hangovers and vomit. Hardly the new beginnings people envision the previous night when setting goals and making resolutions, but new beginnings nonetheless. At the very least, they are renewed commitments to enjoying life a little too much.

To quote the famous drinker Frank Sinatra: "Alcohol may be man's worst enemy, but the Bible says love your enemy."



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