

new. trail



100 JOKES A DAY

Inside the rapid-fire mind of a Simpsons writer

AND

COMING OF AGE

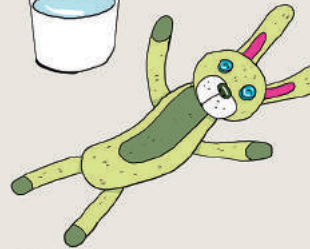
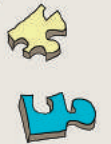
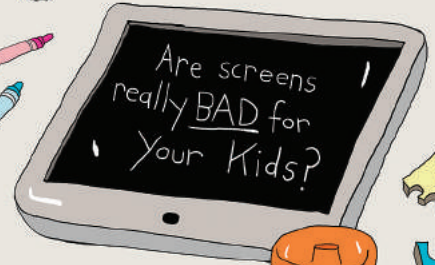
Why sex ed needs to get beyond the plumbing

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
ALUMNI MAGAZINE

Unused Food

Is there a way to get

to hungry families?



Can small towns SURVIVE?

Answers Wanted

How can we protect aging parents?

How we're solving everyday problems together

Where can we go if we can't afford DENTAL CARE?

WHO makes sure RAILWAYS are SAFE?





CAN SMALL TOWNS SURVIVE?

In the past 100 years, Alberta's rural population has changed drastically. In 1901, 75 per cent of Albertans lived in rural areas; in 2011, it was 17 per cent.

The impact has been immense. And the changes are ongoing, says Lars Hallstrom, director of the Alberta Centre for Sustainable Rural Communities at Augustana Campus. Small family farms continue to be replaced by large-scale

farm businesses. Young people are moving to cities for school and jobs, while retirees are moving to rural areas, causing rural communities to age faster. Changes in the commodity-based economy can create short-term fluctuations in population: when oil prices collapse, for example, a lot of unemployed people move back to their small towns. Figuring out how rural communities can adapt and thrive is the motivation behind Sustainability 101, a program for rural leaders at Augustana.

"Adaptation is synonymous

with sustainability. Our job as researchers, and a university, is to help communities become more adaptive," says **John Parkins**, '97 MSc, '04 PhD, a professor in the University of Alberta's Department of Resource Economics and Environmental Sociology. Parkins teaches one of five Sustainability 101 workshops. Each daylong workshop explores an aspect of rural sustainability: governance, economic, social, environmental and cultural.

The workshops bring people together to discuss the obstacles facing rural communities,

businesses and residents. Participants talk about how they can continue to thrive in the face of challenges like depopulation, fewer jobs and the instability of resource-based economies.

That dialogue among community members is invaluable, says Peter Vana, general manager of Development Services in Parkland County, adding he sees his community differently now that he has completed the program. "The courses helped me better understand how the pillars of sustainability work together in a rural context," he says, referring to the five workshops.

He looks forward to applying his ideas and insights to the Parkland County sustainability plan, which is being revamped. "We particularly want to integrate cultural sustainability by recognizing the culture in our community and building on it," he says. The plan is to create tours and geocaching quests to highlight the county's history and culture, which at the same time will promote tourism, recreation, environmental stewardship and economic development.

Vana is happy to see Sustainability 101 opening up conversations about the possibilities for rural areas. "It's a unique course. I can't think of any other place that really talks about it from a rural point of view." ■

Peter Vana of Parkland County finds a geocache in the hamlet of Carvel, Alta. The cache is tucked behind a sign that tells the history of Carvel. Tourists and recreation enthusiasts can learn about history in a fun way by using GPS to find containers of trinkets hidden by other geocachers.



Where Can We Go If We Can't Afford Dental Care?

➔ After Monica Baker lost her job as a veterinary medical assistant, one of her molars started to ache. The constant shooting pain in her jaw was debilitating but she had no dental benefits and couldn't afford dental work.

A friend suggested she look into dental programs run by the U of A, and she found the Student Health Initiative for the Needs of Edmonton, or SHINE. The clinic, run out of the Boyle McCauley Health Centre in downtown Edmonton, offers free basic services such as fillings and extractions to low-income patients of all ages. It's staffed and managed primarily by U of A dental and dental hygiene student volunteers working under experienced dentists from the Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry, also volunteers.

Some of the children who attend the clinic have never seen a dentist, and don't know how to brush or floss their teeth. Volunteers take the opportunity to teach the basics of oral hygiene. For older patients, access to basic dental care can prevent later problems such as painful and dangerous oral infections or diseased teeth that have to be extracted.

Students benefit, too, by getting hands-on experience in performing procedures and running a dental practice, as well as gaining a better understanding of the challenges facing low-income patients. ■

Rural Alberta: Getting Smaller and Aging Faster

Rural Retirement

19 per cent of rural residents are 60 and older, compared with 15.5 per cent in metropolitan areas. And people are still retiring to rural areas.

More Seniors

Westlock, Alta., was among the top 10 towns in Canada in 2006 with the highest proportion of people 65 and older, at 27.1 per cent.

Family Farms

75 per cent of Alberta farms are now operating as large-scale businesses.

Aging Workforce

More than one out of five people in the rural labour force are between 55 and 64. This can create a large gap in available employees when workers retire.

Harvesting Hope

A healthy crop of kale donated by Lady Flower Gardens will provide much-needed nutrients to hungry refugees in Edmonton. Garden manager Kelly Mills (left) and community resource co-ordinator Sandra Ngo harvest kale for the Grocery Run, a food salvage pilot program led by the U of A's Community-University Partnership. (Story on page 20.)



How Can We Protect Aging Parents?

Three out of five Canadians with dementia wander away from their homes. If not found within 24 hours, half will suffer serious injury or die. It's a growing problem: 564,000 Canadians are living with dementia—and that number is expected to grow to 937,000 within 15 years, according to the Alzheimer Society of Canada.

A U of A study found that GPS locators helped keep track of people with dementia in case they wandered, bringing peace of mind to caregivers. The Locator Device Project, led by Lili Liu, chair of the U of A's Department of Occupational Therapy, allowed caregivers in Calgary and Grande Prairie to monitor in real time the whereabouts of home-care clients with dementia. Devices—which can be worn around the neck, as a watch or in a shoe—show a person's location on Google Maps and can send text messages or emails to caregivers if the person leaves a designated safe zone. Liu is now working on an online resource to help consumers compare locator devices and their suitability for different situations. ■



How Can Indigenous Language and Culture Be Preserved?

First Nations girls, some of whom have had little or no contact with their language, are learning traditional Cree knowledge at a U of A summer program.

The Young Indigenous Women's Circle of Leadership immerses girls 10 to 16 years old in a language and culture they may not otherwise have had access to, given the destructive legacy of residential schools. Guided by teachers from Cree communities, the girls learn traditional protocol, dances and prayers, experience traditional arts, talk with elders, attend sweat ceremonies, and pick wild sweetgrass and sage.

"A lot of the work we're doing is simply trying to give these girls access to that information that has been disconnected for well over 100 years," says **Rochelle Starr**, '12MEd, program co-ordinator, who is from Little Pine Cree Nation. Starr hopes to expand the program, founded in 2008 by U of A elementary education professor Heather Blair, to involve more girls and to create a parallel opportunity for boys. Local Indo-Canadian, Muslim and Jewish communities have been working with the program to fundraise and to raise awareness of Indigenous realities within their own communities. ■

Inside the
Animated Mind

of

JOEL
HEN



MATT
GROENING

By **Curtis Gillespie**,
'85 BA(Spec)

Photos by
John Ulan



T

THE FOX STUDIOS COMPOUND IN LOS ANGELES

is a sprawling 10-block mini-city inhabited by faux streetscape exteriors, airy sound stages, chic executive suites, quiet grassy spaces, funky cafeterias and dozens of suites and trailers full of precisely the kind of beautiful and glossy people you'd expect to find on a Hollywood lot. Of course, those people are merely personal assistants to the *seriously* beautiful and glossy stars of the various shows filmed on the lot.

Also interspersed throughout the compound, like weeds growing through cracks in the pavement, is a smattering of rundown '30s-era boarding rooms converted to ratty offices, now mostly occupied by the lowest order on the Hollywood phylum: writers. Not that writers aren't crucial to the process. Just about every funny or smart thing that comes out of Hollywood originated in the head of a writer, but writers are not beautiful or glossy (unless a sheen of flop sweat counts), which means that they are treated as dull and distant moons weakly orbiting the vitalizing power of the true heat sources—studio bosses. Hence the relegation to the old boarding rooms, which is where I meet up with **Joel Cohen**, '88 BSc, one of the head writers for *The Simpsons*. After Cohen shows me the endearingly cluttered cubbyhole he calls an office, we make our way a few hundred metres north to Building 1 for a "table read" of an upcoming script.

Table reads, Cohen tells me, are a big deal. It is not just an informal working meeting to tinker away at a script; table reads are a key moment in the production process, the point along the way where everyone involved in this multibillion-dollar, 28-season, 31-Emmy, seven-foreign-language franchise gets their first group chance to weigh in on whether the writers are earning their keep.

"These are our dress rehearsals," Cohen explains. "Because the show is animated, we rarely get live feedback, so this is our way to get an audience response."

What he fails to mention is that the "audience" usually consists of every star and executive attached to the show: the actors, as well as Matt Groening, the creator of the show; James L. Brooks, the producer of the



"One of the biggest motivations I have in my job and in my work, trust me, is to make the other guys in that writers' room laugh at something."

show; and Al Jean, the "show runner" (who is the person really running the entire circus).

We step into a large conference room, which contains a huge oval table with seats for at least 30 people. Natural light floods the space, giving it the feel of a small church. I take a seat against the side wall along with another couple of dozen invited guests.

The show's power brokers sit around the table. Beside them are various cast members, with some also on speakerphone. Conspicuously, there are about eight chairs lined up precisely against the rear wall, as if welcoming the featured guests at a firing line. This is where the writers sit.

"They always put the writers as far away from the talent as possible," Cohen says. "It's always been that way."

The mood around the table is hard to gauge—expectant and abuzz. A nervous anticipation bounces off the walls. It is the first official "reunion" of the full cast following a protracted and often-acrimonious dispute over salary between Harry Shearer (the voice of Mr. Burns, among many other characters) and the producers of the show.

The table read begins. Jean reads the direction notes and keeps things moving briskly. The A story features Smithers declaring his love for Mr. Burns. The jokes come fast and furious. There are songs. There are laughs. One of the lines that makes me laugh out loud comes when a character mentions something about the food chain and Homer, puzzled but suddenly attentive, says, "Where is this food chain you speak of?"

(This joke was eventually cut from the final script when the episode, "The Burns Cage," screened in spring 2016.)

Many of the cast and executive strata offer up the occasional laugh. The invited guests laugh more often, but not at every joke. But the writers aren't laughing. They are all scribbling notes furiously. Throughout the table read, I don't once see a single writer laugh.

At the completion of the table read, Jean thanks the entire crew and says so long to those on the phone line. People stand. Many mingle. Brooks and Jean leave quickly. There is still a giddy hue to the air, as the writers and a couple of cast members hang around to chat. Nancy Cartwright, the voice actor responsible for Bart Simpson as well as some minor characters, generously makes the rounds, thanking people for coming out to watch and listen, as if we are



Jokes fly fast and furious in the writers' room, where Simpsons writers collaborate on scripts.

the ones who've done her a favour. Cohen is at the back of the room, engaged in an animated discussion with a couple of the other writers. He finishes and comes over and suggests we go off-lot for lunch. When we get to his chosen spot — La Serenata, a Mexican joint on West Pico Boulevard, about 15 minutes from the Fox lot — I mention to him I'd noticed that none of the writers were laughing during the table read.

"Yeah," he says, half-scanning the menu, "but that's because the table read is for us to find out what other people think is funny. We want to hear what jokes are working and what ones aren't. I mean, you have to pay attention to the energy, or when people are confused, or when no one knows why the story took the turn it did. It's a big part of what we base our rewrite on."

He goes on to tell me that perhaps one of the reasons the writers don't laugh at the table read is, one, that it wouldn't be in the original script if they didn't think it was funny and, two, that by the table read stage, a script has already been through as many as a dozen story cycles, during which every one of them has pored over and finessed every joke a hundred times.

"We laugh at all the jokes," he says, grinning. "Of course! And one of the biggest motivations I have in my job and in my work, trust me, is to make the other guys in that writers' room laugh at something. That alone is hugely rewarding, to entertain these super-smart and talented guys."

Don't be falsely modest, I counter, suggesting they must feel the same way about him.

"I hate to disappoint you and the U of A," he says, stopping to wipe some salsa off his mouth. "But I am the dumbest guy in that room! Sorry, U of A! My education prepared me for nothing. Nothing!" He starts to mimic me writing in my notebook what his next words are going to be: *and then he said, Of course I'm just kidding. It was a really important time in my life.*

Except that isn't what Cohen says.

"That'll bum your editor out," he does say, "knowing the magazine completely wasted every dime to send



you down here to talk to me when my education was actually totally wasted on me." He pauses, perhaps to lure me yet again into thinking he was finally about to express something earnest and heartfelt. Nope.

"Man, that has to suck."

● ● ●

100 Jokes a Day

Joel Cohen's life is a joke. Not in the pejorative sense, of course, but in the sense that the engine of his day, every day, all day, is the joke. Well, hundreds of them, actually. They are his oxygen, his nourishment, his job. He can't help but seek — and usually find — the humour in everything, but that doesn't mean he *thinks* everything is a joke. In conversation, he is, in fact, a relentlessly probing and intelligent person. It's just that he also happens to have a sharp and somewhat anarchic sense of humour. He's not a guy who makes irritating wisecracks out of everything anyone



says. Rather, he is an inherently witty person who has been trained relentlessly, every day of his life for the past 15 years, to take the ordinary and find the lunacy underneath it. His humour is more Monty Python than Mel Brooks, full of literary allusions and (sorry, Joel) deep education but always tinged with an edge of satirical probing. Michael Price, another longtime *Simpsons* writer, started on the show around the same time as Cohen. "The first thing anyone notes when they meet Joel is how fast he is, how quick he is. The guy is funny and deadpan and likes to say unserious things in a very serious way."

One can only wonder where that came from, since "comedic hotbed" is not a term you'd immediately attach to Alberta in the 1970s. Cohen was born in Calgary in 1967. Though he has lived in L.A. for two decades now, he still has strong connections to Alberta. He returns a few times a year to Calgary, and his older daughter still attends a summer camp near Canmore that she has been going to for a decade. Both he and his wife, a nutritionist he met in high school, still have friends and family in Calgary. "And I haven't missed a Stampede in ages!" he says.

Cohen's father, who died three years ago, owned and operated the Uptown Bottle Depot for many years in Calgary. Cohen worked there as a teenager and remembers he was very popular with some of the homeless guys, primarily because he'd save them the dregs of the empties. Not the most ennobling job to have as a kid, but it did have its upsides. "I'd be walking downtown with my friends and we'd come across some street guy, and out of the blue, he'd say, 'Hey, Joel, my man!' and it was great!"

Cohen moved to Edmonton for university in the fall of 1985 "and much to the dismay of the U of A, I'm sure, they let me in." He enrolled in pre-med, studying organic chemistry because he thought if he took the hardest course it would give him the most options. "Which only establishes what an idiot I was," he says. "I failed, took it again and still only barely passed. So I left pre-med and took the science courses I was interested in, like zoology, which eventually led to a biology degree."

His years at the University of Alberta, he finally admitted to me, were significant to him. "The U of A gave me a knowledge base I could draw on and I'm thankful for that." He matured in those key years, though he still floated a bit, unsure what he was meant to do or even what his passions were. Not that they were unsatisfying years. "I had a really good time at the U of A. I met a ton of great people, hung out at HUB and the Power Plant, lived in residence, played intramural hockey. After my degree, I took another half year and just took every class that interested me, things like

LESSONS FROM The Simpsons Writers' Room

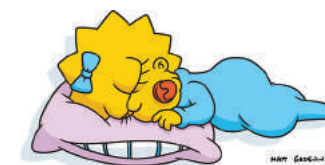
By Stephanie Bailey, '10 BA(Hons)

Diehard fans of *The Simpsons* may be able to rattle off obscure facts like Comic Book Guy's real name or Maggie's first word, but there is one trivia question they'd all be hard-pressed to answer: what is the secret to nearly three decades of success?

"When people talk about *The Simpsons*, they're quick to look at all the obvious stuff," says Joel Cohen, who entertained an audience at Alumni Weekend in September with "The Tao of Homer: Lessons on Creativity and Innovation in *The Simpsons*."

"We have an amazing voice cast, we have talented animators, we have super-ripped, buff, handsome writers, but the success of the show is the environment that it's created in," says Cohen.

He shares six lessons on fuelling creativity.



Lesson

1

CREATE A SANCTUARY FOR CREATIVITY ...

because writers produce their best work when they are given the freedom to do what they do: write. *The Simpsons* writers work within a protective bubble that is largely free from the bureaucratic interference facing other sitcoms. "If we want to do a joke, we do it. If we want to do a storyline, we do it. It's really a creative paradise."

anthropology and computer programming. That allowed me to get a better sense of what I wanted to do with my life.”

After graduating, Cohen took a year off to travel through Europe and Africa, then did what every aspiring comedy writer does ... an MBA at York University. “Honestly,” he laughs, “I have no idea why I did that. I can’t remember a single thing I learned there.” He then moved on to work in Toronto for a now-bankrupt film distribution company in its home video department. He had discovered by that time that he wanted to try his hand at TV writing. Armed with a green card (his father had relocated to the United States in 1987), Cohen moved to Los Angeles in 1997 and got a job selling ads for Turner Broadcasting on CNN Asia and CNN Latin America. Shortly thereafter he met comedian Kathy Griffin, who was starring on a show called *Suddenly Susan*. She got him writing on that show, and his boss there — whose partner is George Meyer, a key player in turning *The Simpsons* from a cartoon short into a full animated series — set up an interview for *The Simpsons*. Cohen pitched a hundred jokes his first day on the job and, 15 years later, he’s still pitching a hundred jokes a day.

• • •

Survival of the Funniest

The day-to-day process of creating the show — meaning the reality of Cohen’s existence — is a combination of ceaseless originality married to inexorable routine. Typically, once a storyline is approved, the lead writer completes the first draft. Then Al Jean makes notes on the script. Everyone else in the writers’ room makes notes on the script (the “writers’ room” being both figurative and literal, in that the writers regularly leave their individual offices to congregate in a single meeting room to



Lesson

2

WELCOME WASTE ...

because the creative process is inherently inefficient. It can take nine months of rewriting to create an episode of *The Simpsons* and as many as 40 hours to perfect a single joke. “I don’t think creativity can be efficient. You know when you’re done, but you don’t know how long it’s going to take.”

bounce ideas off one another, but also in that the writers’ room is a notional space where the team works collaboratively on scripts in various stages of development). Then there are rewrites. Then more notes. Then more rewrites. Then more notes. Then they might finally arrive at a table read, after which there are further rewrites.

“It can be a nine-month process from the script getting handed in, to the show airing,” says Cohen, “and the script might go through as many as 10 drafts, including when we get to animation. By the end of it all, there might be five per cent of the original script left. It can be an annoyingly iterative process, but the final outcome is always better than the first draft. You have to surrender to the collaborative process.”

It’s something of a humour factory, if only because that’s the only possible way to produce a show with that much story, that many jokes, that many characters and that has been running for so long.

“The bottom line is that you just have to keep delivering and keep bringing it,” Cohen says. “Like anyone’s job, you have your small victories and your small defeats every day, but you just keep plowing away.”

“Honestly, there’s no magic in our job, and so much of it is just persistence. Everyone is pitching all the time and, like in baseball, even if you had a .300 batting average, getting three out of 10 jokes in, that’d be phenomenal.”

The scale and volume of jokes being pitched is somewhat dizzying when you think about it. There are 10 to 12 writers in the room on any given day, and when they know they are working on one joke slot — meaning a moment in the show that they all know calls for a joke — they will spend an hour pitching jokes to one another and might come up with a hundred jokes. In one hour. For one single five-second joke slot. And then when they agree on



a joke, it’ll still go through five rewrites. And it still might not survive the table read. If it survives the table read, it’ll still get rewritten another half-dozen times prior to animation and voicing. The ruthlessly Darwinian nature of a single joke’s evolution is staggering to behold. For every joke that makes it on the show, there might have been a few hundred that didn’t.

“That’s not the worst, though,” Cohen says with a laugh. “The worst is when we need a name for a character. It freezes the room. I’m not kidding. *Doug? How about Doug? No, Doug’s not funny anymore. How about Dirk? OK, that’s funny. Let’s go with Dirk. But what about a last name that you can pair up with Dirk?! Seriously, we sit there flipping through the phone book.*”

The only possible way to survive is through collaboration, Cohen says. The writers carry one another along. It’s not competitive in the writers’ room because that’s a sentiment they don’t have time for. It’s so hard

sometimes to come up with a joke that works, says Cohen. “You’re just begging anybody to say something, anything, that’s going to get in. You just surrender to the process because you need a team of people. You’re just throwing man-hours at it.”

Fellow writer Price says Cohen is pitching all the time, “and he was pitching fast the first day I met him 15 years ago. Which is good. When you’re rewriting, you want someone who pitches a lot and who pitches good stuff but someone who also has the confidence to pitch bad stuff, because sometimes it’s the bad stuff that inspires the next good idea or moves the needle in a different direction. There’s no ego around any of that stuff because all we want is to just go home to our families.”

Lesson

3

DON’T GET MARRIED TO AN IDEA ...

if it takes away from the larger story you’re trying to tell. “Even if you have a great idea, it’s sometimes even a better idea not to use it because it hurts the overall picture, the big picture. Don’t fall in love with the little gem; look for the bigger gem.”



Lesson

4

FIGHT YOUR FIRST INSTINCT ...

and push yourself to think more creatively. In the writers’ room, the writers often flip an initial idea and try to think of it from a totally different angle. “The first thought is often not the most creative thought — it’s the most obvious one.”

Cohen likens the process to a rally in volleyball, which he called bump, set, spike. Someone introduces a joke idea—the bump. Someone advances the idea—the set. And then someone finishes the joke off—the spike. The person who spiked it might get the credit for the joke but, as Cohen notes: “Anything creative on the show has multiple parents.”

“But don’t get me wrong,” he insists between mouthfuls of a tortilla, “there might be a lot of repetition to the days, and a lot of joke after joke after joke, and the pressure of always having to find something funnier or better ... but we’re working with something that is just so joyful that it’s always great.”

Perhaps the expression of genuine feeling caught him off guard, or maybe he was just talking with his mouth full, because he appeared to aspirate a black bean or small chunk of chicken. He began to choke, for real, and I momentarily panicked inside. I winched the Heimlich manoeuvre out of my memory. Thankfully, he recovered in short order—and was immediately ready with a joke, though spoken hoarsely. “As you can tell, this is very emotional. It’s going to be very hard for me to get through this interview ... though if I do choke and die, at least you’ll have an audio recording of it.”



A Modest Guy

Cohen loves his work. “I mean, let’s face it, I haven’t had to be out in the real world where I’ve actually had to reinvent myself, like, *Now I’m a drama writer! Now I’m an action writer!* ...”

Yet he knows the day will come when he won’t be part of *The Simpsons*, if only because the show might one day get cancelled.

He has been working on a variety of secondary projects in the last year or two, including online shorts, feature films and other TV shows. He’s also working with a couple of other *Simpsons* writers on an animated film and has tossed around a few projects with his brother Rob, who also works in L.A. and recently made a well-received documentary, *Being Canadian*.

“I’d love to see Joel be a show runner on a show he created,” says Price. “He’d be terrific. The show would be funny, natural, full of smart observational stuff with a silly side.”

“I’m always dabbling,” says Cohen. “I love *The Simpsons* and want to stay as long as I can, but I also feel like I’m ready for the world outside the show whenever that happens. But I think you’ve got to keep fresh, and you’ve got to keep judging yourself against an outside arbiter. I mean there’s a lot of horrible stuff out there ... and I want to write something horrible on my own one day! I need the freedom to fail!”

His sardonic self-deprecation isn’t just for my



Lesson

5

ADMIT IT, SOME IDEAS ARE JUST BAD ...

but there are benefits to bad ideas. When people aren’t mocked for a dumb idea, it helps create a safe environment in which they feel comfortable taking risks. And bad ideas often lead somewhere great. “There might be a nugget in that idea that someone else can hear, pick up on and build upon.”

“Everyone is pitching [jokes] all the time and, like in baseball, even if you had a .300 batting average, getting three out of 10 jokes in, that’d be phenomenal.”

sake. He comes across as a fundamentally modest guy. When he won the award at the 2014 Writers Guild of America for best animation writing, he accepted saying, “I pitched a story idea at our annual writers’ retreat that was so horrible it was immediately rejected and the producers double-checked my contract to see if they could get me off the show. But [*Simpsons* producer] Jim Brooks, in his generosity, gave me this idea, and with everybody’s help I wrote it. So I’d like to dedicate this award to every kid who hopes to be so pathetic that one day an Oscar-winning writer will give him an idea.”

Too soon, Cohen and I finish our lunch. He asks me how it was. “Great,” I reply. Our waitress comes by, picks up our plates and asks how our meals were.

“Delicious,” Cohen says. “Except for my friend here. His was terrible.” He looks at me. “Go on. Tell her. Don’t be shy.”

“He’s kidding,” I tell her. “It was good.”

It’s too late. Left eyebrow hoisted, she backs away, slowly. Cohen allows himself a small grin. It doesn’t occur to me until later that he had bumped and set, but I didn’t have the wherewithal to spike. (“It’s not your fault,” the funnier me would have said to the waitress, “but I’ll let you know what my doctor says.”)

Cohen and I stand and part ways so he can go dig in with his fellow writers on the notes from the morning’s table read. You can tell he’s happily anxious to get back at it. His obvious embrace of the show’s work ethic, even after all these years and all this success, makes me think of the classic mantra of athletic achievement: process, not outcome. Joel Cohen has both surrendered to, and mastered, *The Simpsons’* collaborative process because it perfectly suits his whip-smart but self-effacing personality.

The bonus for the rest of us is that the outcome isn’t half bad, either. ■



Lesson

6

BE HUMBLE ...

when it comes to deciding on the best idea—the idea that will get the biggest laugh or make the greatest impact. “When you’re generating all of these ideas ... somebody has to make the decision, filter them all down and choose one The trick to being a filter is to take yourself out of it, be humble and recognize that the group, frankly, knows better than you do quite often. Surrender to that.”



by LESLEY YOUNG, '94 BA

Azalea Lehdorff, '14 MPH

The founder of the 100 Classrooms Project, future doctor and ultimate doer tells us what it's like to have to fight for an education

Within moments of meeting Azalea Lehdorff, you can tell how the public health grad has managed to raise \$800,000 and build 71 classrooms in Afghanistan over the last six years through her 100 Classrooms Project. Single-minded is an understatement when applied to Lehdorff, a project manager for international development organization A Better World, based in Red Deer, Alta. She speaks passionately about making education accessible to everyone and fully intends to meet her goal of 100 classrooms by 2018. She is also disarmingly candid about why she cares so much—she understands firsthand that education isn't always a given. At 14, Lehdorff had to leave home and her family in order to finish school.

What was your childhood like? Life at home was tough. We were very poor. I grew up in Tennessee, but then we moved 26 times. We learned how to read and do basic math at home, but there wasn't a strong belief in education. I remember reading the story of Abraham Lincoln, who grew up in a one-room cabin. He wanted to change his future, and what made the biggest difference for him was getting an education.

What was it like to be denied an education? Part of it was thinking about my future and asking, "Is this what it's always going to be like?" When I was 14, I found a boarding school

in Syracuse, N.Y., where we were living at the time. I wrote letters to 90 people in my parents' address book asking them to send money to the school so my sister and I could attend. After the first semester, my parents made it clear they did not want us to continue, so we ended up running away from home. A teacher offered for us to stay with her, and I worked part time to help pay my way. The driving force was this far-off idea that someday I would go to medical school.

You graduated from high school and university, then took it upon yourself to give back. Why? I felt a deep sense of gratitude. What seemed impossible for me became possible simply because the opportunity existed—I could go to school and pursue my dreams. I read about the lack of access to education for children in Afghanistan. For a lot of them, they risked their lives to go to school. On one of my first visits there with A Better World, I toured schoolrooms that were riddled with bullet holes. I met one girl about the same age as me who had to study in secret. I could relate to that.

What has been your biggest revelation? It's easy to forget that education is a privilege. When you see how some people live, day to day—they're worried about putting food on the table. Education allows for

self-actualization. It allows you to ask, "What contribution can I make to society and how can I give back?"

How did your U of A experience influence what you're doing now? Studying public health gave me a new perspective and the skills to understand how poverty and education affect health at the population level. I also learned that as much as I want to help as many people as possible, I like helping people one-on-one, too. That's why I'm in medicine now [at the University of Calgary]. I have yet to determine how I'll blend those two desires in the future.

You are one of the most driven people I've ever met. What do you do for fun? I head to the mountains to hike. Oh, and I also ran a marathon in June! I'm not motivated to do something unless I set a goal. I can't even go to the mall and enjoy a leisurely stroll without asking, "Why am I here? I need a reason!" It can be frustrating at times, but in the end it serves me well. ■

This interview has been edited and condensed.

Lehdorff's development work has helped more than 15,000 Afghan children, many of them girls, attend school. In August 2016 she received the Canadian Medical Association National Award for Young Leaders. For more information, check out abwcanada.ca/portfolio/100classrooms/.

PHOTO BY JOHN ULAN

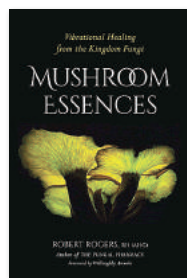
U of A alumni share their new books, including selected writings of Nellie McClung, a collection of recipes from Edmonton's best chefs and the first children's book by New York news anchor Pat Kiernan.

Compiled by **STEPHANIE BAILEY**, '10 BA(Hons)



CHILDREN'S LITERATURE
The Week the Tooth Fairy Got Sick
 by **Trent Gillespie**, '03 BEd, self-published, available on Amazon

Being the Tooth Fairy is a very busy job. When she gets sick, who can cover her work? Find out what happens when the Vegetable Fairy, the Dragon Prince, the Tickle Monster and many more decide to help her out.



HEALTH AND WELL-BEING
Mushroom Essences: Vibrational Healing from the Kingdom Fungi
 by **Robert Rogers**, '71 BSc, North Atlantic Books, northatlanticbooks.com

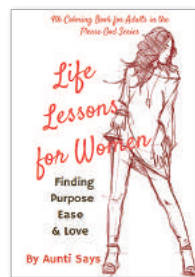
Mushroom Essences explores the use of 48 fungi extracts for physical, emotional and psychological health, including information on how to create each essence, indications for

use and the healing effects the author says users might expect.



HISTORICAL FICTION
De poussière et de vent (From Dust and Wind)
 by **Laurier Gareau**, '74 BA, '87 MFA, Éditions de la nouvelle plume, plume.avoslivres.ca

Fransaskois author Gareau follows the story of Hubert Lupien as he fights to preserve his language and culture during the Great Depression and the Second World War. Written in French.



SELF-HELP
Life Lessons for Women: Finding Purpose, Ease & Love
 by Aunti Says (**Patricia Ogilvie**, '77 BEd), self-published, auntisays.com

The fourth instalment in a series of inspirational colouring books for adults, designed to reduce

stress, *Life Lessons for Women* features 50 motivational sayings accompanied by mandalas and other designs for colouring.



POETRY
Belly Full of Rocks
 by **Tyler B. Perry**, '06 BEd, Oolichan Books, oolichan.com

These poems imagine the fates of fairy-tale characters as their lives unravel after their "happily ever afters," their cautionary endings and their viciously delivered justice.



FICTION
Racing Apollo
 by **Daniel Owen**, '77 BA(Spec), '80 BEd, self-published, available on Amazon

One day, while secretly watching a Spartan general receive a prophecy from his oracle, 14-year-old Dip overhears the Spartan's plan to use this prediction to conquer Athens and the rest of the Greek city-states. Pursued by the Spartans,

Dip races to save his friends, warn the Athenians and fulfil his destiny.



CREATIVE NON-FICTION
Ladder
 by **Brian Hau**, '04 BDes, self-published, brianhau.com

Hau writes a collection of personal essays that explores how we define success and how we learn to recognize and cherish the valuable things in life. Written in traditional Chinese and includes a section in English.



HISTORY/SCIENCE
The Meanings of J. Robert Oppenheimer
 by **Lindsey Michael Banco**, '01 BA(Hons), University of Iowa Press, uiowapress.org

Scientific director of the Manhattan Project, physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer is a controversial (continued on page 53)

PHOTO BY JOHN ULIAN



MEMOIR

Separation Anxiety: A Coming-of-Middle-Age Story
 by **Miji Campbell**, '83 BEd, '03 MA, Writin'erant Press, hgdistribution.com

Miji Campbell grew up in a close-knit family in the 1960s and '70s. Her life proceeds in an orderly fashion—coming-of-age, university, first job, first apartment—and then suddenly, inexplicably, it begins to unravel. In this memoir, Campbell confronts the stigma still surrounding mental illness as she recounts living with, and overcoming, an anxiety disorder.

SHORT FICTION

As If
 by **Alban Goulden**, '64 BA, Anvil Press, anvilpress.com

Set in Vancouver and the Canadian Prairies, Goulden's stories feature characters whose successes and failures are rooted in abrupt changes through their physical world. The way the characters react to those challenges tests their understanding of who and where they are.

LITERARY ANTHOLOGY

Ten Canadian Writers in Context
 Marie Carrière; **Curtis Gillespie**, '85 BA(Spec); **Jason Purcell**, '15 BA (editors), University of Alberta Press, uap.ualberta.ca

The Canadian Literature Centre/Centre de littérature canadienne presents a sampling of the country's most exciting writers of fiction, non-fiction and poetry from Newfoundland to British Columbia. Each piece is introduced by a critical essay, serving as a point of entry into the writer's work.

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Good Morning, City
 by **Pat Kiernan**, '90 BCom, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, us.macmillan.com/fsg

While the baker, the ferry boat captain and the TV anchorman are busy at work, most people are cozily snuggled in bed. Then dawn's first light peeks through the tree branches. Wake up, city! There is much to be done in neighbourhoods all across the metropolis.

FICTION

Evaline: A Feminist's Tale
 by **Sheelagh Whittaker**, '67 BSd(HEc), Departure Bay, available on Amazon

Baby boomer Eva Sadlier is clear-sighted in her pursuit of a good job and a happy home life. Her story is full of struggle and success as she determines whether a work-life balance is a pipe dream or a real possibility.

FOOD AND DRINK

Edmonton Cooks: Signature Recipes from the City's Best Chefs

by **Leanne Brown**, '07 BA, and Tina Faiz, Figure 1 Publishing, figure1pub.com

A celebration of Edmonton's vibrant culinary scene, this compilation of more than 75 classic and contemporary recipes from the city's finest chefs is accompanied by photos and professional tips.