

# Facts & Arguments

**YOUR MORNING SMILE** smile@globeandmail.com  
 A university administrator who has been fired for incompetence could be said to have lost his faculties.  
 - Frederick Sweet, Toronto

THE ESSAY BY JESSICA JONES

submissions: facts@globeandmail.com

LIVES LIVED

submissions:  
 lives@globeandmail.com

## Caught in thesis purgatory

Revise, resubmit, wait for the fireworks. In the meantime I read celebrity gossip and get to know my baristas

For months I have carried a professional-looking leather folder holding a single piece of paper.

My whole life hinges on that page. My job, my partner, our house and our car are inconveniently far away. Four flights far. Brangelina holiday destination far - southern Africa.

Trapping me here in Ottawa is the last step to completing my master's degree in international affairs and development - the public defence.

The page is titled Supervisor's Authorization for Thesis Defence.

After a year and a half of study, my life is on hold as I wait for the final e-mail to alert me, "Jessica, your last draft was perfect. Come into my office and I will sign the form today."

So far, I've been really close. "You are close," reads the first of the close-but-not-quite e-mails. "However, I feel that the transitions between your chapters need to be more fluid."

I revise the paper, resubmit it and wait.

While from the observer's perspective I appear to be on holiday, I am bound by two rules: one, I must always be reachable by e-mail to respond to my supervisor at an enthusiastic pace; and two, I must be within less than a day's commute of his office to attend the paper-signing meeting as soon as is humanly possible.

I thought about getting a job in the meantime, but what kind of job can you do if you're only available for a couple of weeks?

I start reading celebrity gossip. I learn the intimate details of the lives of Lindsay, Paris and Nicole. I watch for baby bumps and scoff at fugly fashions.

I try not to stress out. I make a point of enjoying this time off, refashioning myself Good Times Girl. I accept every invitation for coffee, lunch, dinner, parties and cocktails, available all day, every evening and certainly at night. I make friends with neighbourhood baristas, food servers and bartenders.

I scour vintage stores, something I had enjoyed in my younger days, for patterned polyester and costume jewel-



SYLVIA NICKERSON

lery. Instead I find rows of Gap khakis, Tommy turtle-necks and grey Ralph Lauren suits, the remnants of nineties minimalism.

"You are close. However, wherever you are making a comparison with another country's approach, this needs to be fleshed out in more detail."

Revise. Resubmit. Wait. I figure out how to check e-mail from my cellphone, lengthening my tether to anywhere within digital coverage.

My lease expires. I start to couch hop. Two, three weeks, I promise my closest (most generous and beloved) friends. I think they like having me. Everyone loves a guest, don't they? Someone to cook and clean up for them, help with the groceries, offer a spare hand around the place.

Soon come the one-word responses to my, "How was your day?" and the questions about why it's taking so long to get this signature. "Why don't you just go to his office and start to cry? Look really devastated! You can do it! Yeah, exactly like that face."

Good Times Girl turns into Sad, Last One Left at the Party Girl. I cut back on socializing.

And take up vigorous exercise instead. I start losing weight, just a little, then a little more. Cardio machines, jogging, sit-ups, weight-training. First come the compliments on my sleeker physique. Then family concern. Finally a friendly intervention. "You look like Nicole Richie, after people started saying she looked good and when people were starting to worry about her." I cut back on the exercise.

I sign up as a teacher on a homework assistance website to make some quick cash. High-school and undergraduate students write in with their lesson problems. All of the questions involve math. I can't answer any of them.

"You are close. The sections are all strong, but they should be approximately the same length in each chapter."

Revise. Resubmit. Wait. I may or may not have been fired from my job. No one is replying to my e-mails promising to be back in just two more weeks. My partner thinks I am not finishing my thesis but have broken up with him and am reluctant to let him know.

I move to more couches and alienate more friends. I join Web groups for people in the midst of a thesis crisis.

"You are close. The data in

your tables is excellent, but the significance of the numbers needs to be better explained to the reader."

Revise. Resubmit. Wait. I spend a whole day entering contests online, a graduate student's rock bottom.

Then finally - without the fireworks and cancan dancers I had imagined - it arrived: "Jessica, your last draft was good. Come into my office and I will sign the form. We can schedule your public defence on short notice." Phew.

I would only need a week to prepare for the event and say my goodbyes. I'd been packed for months.

» Jessica Jones lives in Botswana.

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## SOCIAL STUDIES » A DAILY MISCELLANY OF INFORMATION BY MICHAEL KESTERTON

mkesterton@globeandmail.com

### BOOKS: STILL HERE

More books are sold on the Internet than any other product, and the number is increasing, research suggests. Polling company Nielsen Online surveyed 26,312 people in 48 countries; 41 per cent of Internet users had bought books online. Two years ago, 34 per cent of Internet users had done so. The company said much of the increase was in emerging markets, such as South Korea and India. Source: BBC News

### GOT A WHITE TUFT?

"Actor Johnny Depp sports one in the movie *Sweeney Todd*. Blues singer Bonnie Raitt proudly displays hers," writes Jodi Mailander Farrell of McClatchy news service. "We're talking about a white forelock or streak. The medical name

for this natural tuft of white hair is poliosis, from the Greek word - pilios - for grey." She adds: "While the white patch occurs most often along the forehead, poliosis can involve eyebrows, eyelashes or hair anywhere on the body. ... This is not a disease. Most people with poliosis are healthy and experience it only because there is no pigment in the hair and skin in that area. It can be hereditary."

### NEW AGE QUARREL

A geological dispute is brewing as British geoscientists lead a push to establish a new chapter in the history of the Earth - one based on human activity. The Australian reports. The rabble-rousers argue that the changes wrought since the Industrial Revolution 200 years ago are so profound they are visible in the physical and living fabric of the planet. They have called for the creation of a new epoch in the official geological time scale, one they have named the Anthropocene. Detailed scientific arguments for designation of the Anthropocene are expected to be thrashed out in August at the 33rd International Geological Congress meeting in Oslo. One naysayer, Australian geologist

Jim Gehling - who helped establish the Ediacaran period in the geological time scale - said: "This is just the vanity of the human species. ... We don't need a geological epoch to describe a single historical event, however long- or short-lasting it might be."

### ASK A JOURNALIST

For young women:  
 "If a guy gets down on one knee and proposes with a ring, how can I tell on the spot if he is my one true love or is just trying to pull something?" Take the ring and hold it over a newspaper. If you can read the paper through the stone, it's not a real diamond.  
 "My long hair is aglow with silky, shiny radiance. Yet my friends call it 'problem hair.' What gives?" Good-looking hair is being stolen in Brazil, where it can be sold to make wigs. In Aracaju, a woman walking to church was mugged by two men on motorcycle who chopped off her hair with a machete and sped away. A local policeman estimated that a hairpiece made from her tresses could be worth 1,000 reais (\$560). Sources: news services

### SUBPRIME PETS

Pets are becoming the newest vic-

tims of the U.S. mortgage crisis as homeowners leave animals behind when they can no longer afford their property, reports Evelyn Nieves of Associated Press. Farmers are finding dogs dumped on grazing grounds, while house cats are showing up in wild cat colonies, one Humane Society observer said. The first people to enter an abandoned house, such as property inspectors and real estate brokers, have discovered dogs tied to trees, cats in garages, and turtles, rabbits and lizards in children's bedrooms. It's hard to place animals in new homes because the owners don't want the expense of a pet in hard times. Animal shelters can be overwhelmed. Pets "may be euthanized at a shelter," said Stephanie Shain of the Humane Society of the United States. "But they'll be fed and have water and have a humane euthanization, as opposed to spending the last days of their lives eating carpet or wallboard."

### WAXING PAIN

All over Britain, more and more men (gay and straight) are marching into beauty salons and demanding a "Boyzilian," or as one Yorkshire-based salon bills it, "the full Monty," the Guardian reports.

In other words, the complete or near-complete removal of hair in intimate areas using wax. Norwich beautician Amanda Senior, 21, says that men seem better at dealing with the pain. "They are always saying, 'Oh, it doesn't hurt,' but I suspect that might be male bravado. Women are never shy to scream the house down."

### A VERTICAL FARM

The world is set to see its first vertical farm, which is going to be developed in Las Vegas. The 30-storey project is designed to be a functional and profitable working farm that will grow enough food to feed 72,000 people for a year, apart from providing another tourist attraction for the city. The structure would house about 100 crops ranging from strawberries to lettuce. Even growing miniature banana trees would be possible in each floor's specially controlled environment. Although the initial cost of the project is high, the vertical farm should be as profitable as a casino. Source: HT Media Ltd.

### THOUGHT DU JOUR

"Being understood is not the most essential thing in life." - Jodie Foster

FACTS & ARGUMENTS EDITOR: LORI FAZARI » FEEDBACK TO FACTS@GLOBEANDMAIL.COM

## SUPPORT Heart&Stroke 7 Summits™ at [www.7SummitsForHeart.ca](http://www.7SummitsForHeart.ca)

On February 24<sup>th</sup>, I will join 100 other business leaders in the first-ever Heart&Stroke 7 Summits™ expedition. Together, we will climb the stairs of Toronto's seven tallest office towers to reach our ultimate goal - to raise \$1 million for the placement of life-saving Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) across Ontario.

I am climbing and raising funds to commemorate my uncle, Don Snowden, who died suddenly of a heart attack in his mid-50s.

Scotiabank has supported the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario since 1993, and contributed about \$1.1 million across Ontario, including an initiative to install 105 AEDs in 15 communities across the province over the next three years.

Robin Hibberd, EVP, Personal Lending & Insurance - Scotiabank



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