



Top Stories



Al Gore and Climate Panel awarded Nobel Peace prize

Wikimania jury chooses Alexandria for 2008 location

According to an official mailing list post from Wikimedia Volunteer Coordinator, Wikimania 2008 will be held in Alexandria,

Egypt.

Wikipedia Current Events

The President of Russia Vladimir Putin threatens to renounce the Cold War-era INF Treaty while calling on the United States to abandon a proposed European missile shield in talks with the United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Secretary of Defence Robert Gates.

- Former U.S. Vice President Al Gore and the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) share the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize.
- Indonesia and Australia commemorate the fifth anniversary of the 2002 Bali bombings.

Kordia's annual report shows increase in profit

New Zealand state-owned enterprise (SOE), Kordia published its annual report a few days ago for the financial year ending 30 June, 2007.

Formerly known as Broadcast Communications Ltd (BCL) prior to the name change in November 2006, the Crown-owned company offers contracting, consulting, and networking services. They operate a national communication network and provides network feeds and broadcast services for the major television and radio networks in New Zealand.

The annual report shows Kordia Group Limited's net profit, after tax, at NZ\$11.9 million, the 2006 result was \$9.8 million. Revenue

was up from \$201 million in the 2006 financial year to \$264 million this year; a 31% increase. Chairman of Kordia, Wayne Brown, described this financial year as "solid achievement" while being "on track to record further growth in the exciting fields in which it operates."

These increases is despite the major acquisition of Orcon Internet Limited, an ISP (Internet service provider). Kordia will use Orcon, acquired on 2 July, 2007, to invest and deliver the possibilities of the current progress of local loop unbundling, new Wi-Fi zones, and WiMAX technology. CEO of Kordia, Geoff Hunt, said, "Orcon will soon offer a complete range of Voice over IP products". Orcon is being operated at arms-length to the rest of the company.

Other areas where Kordia is advancing itself is mobile television transmission where they are already prepared to start services once content providers have been secured. Hunt said, "Spectrum is available, so all we need are the content providers and some good consumer demand. Then we'll be ready to roll."

Kordia is also immersing itself further in the television sector as well as its mobile television service. Other advances includes New Zealand's new digital television service, Freeview with it set to start terristeral transmission next year.

Parliament TV also began this year

Featured story

Augusten Burroughs on addiction, writing, his family and his new book

Wikinews conducted an in-depth interview with New York Times bestselling author Augusten Burroughs about his settlement with the Turcotte family, his battle with addiction, his happiness in sobriety and why he would want breast cancer if he was a woman.



in July. All House proceedings are available via the Parliament website and a broadcast quality feed is provided to all broadcasters, with full coverage being televised by Freeview and Sky Network Television. The manager of Kordia's Transmission Control Centre, Merv Brooks, said, "This is another example of people and technology coming together to deliver a truly unique product to New Zealanders."

Being a SOE, Kordia is required to give the Government a dividend. The Government will receive a total dividend of \$8.4 million; \$6.8 million in 2006. A \$3 million dividend had already been received by the Government so a payment of only \$5.4 million was made.

Violence increases as Darfur peace talks approach

United Nations Envoy Jan Eliasson said Thursday that negotiating a ceasefire in the conflict occurring in the Darfur region of Sudan will be the main goal of the peace talks scheduled for later this month.

"The first very concrete step ... is that we will go for and hopefully achieve a credible cessation of hostilities," Eliasson said in Khartoum.

"I find the situation on the ground ... deeply alarming. The military escalation is a great source of concern...Haven't we seen enough violence and hopelessness? Don't we see what is happening to the social fabric of Darfur ... torn apart completely -- is this what we want to perpetuate?"

Eliasson also warned that any delay in the negotiations would be detrimental in stopping the violence in the region. Despite protests from rebel leaders, he

pleaded for affiliates from all of the numerous rebel groups to attend the peace talks, currently scheduled for October 27th in Libya. Mark Malloch Brown, Britain's Minister for Africa, said Wednesday that rebel groups who do not participate in the peace talks will not benefit from any possible ceasefire deals.

"Anybody who wants to be a legitimate representative of the Darfuri people needs to go," Lord Malloch Brown said.

"If they opt out, they should understand the consequences of doing that - probably their role in the peace negotiations may be finished."

These comments came on the same day that forces believed to be from the Sudanese government and janjaweed militias attacked a fortification in Muhajiriya of the Sudanese Liberation Army(SLA), the only rebel group to co-sign a 2006 peace agreement with the Sudanese government. At least 40 people were killed in the attack.

"Until now the number of dead civilians are at least 40, with 80 missing and a large number of injured," the SLA said in a statement sent to Reuters. They believe that Sudan's army was responsible for the attack, although the government has refuted this accusation.

"There has to be an international investigation immediately," said Minni Arcua Minnawi, an SLA leader who became a presidential advisor in Khartoum. Speculation is rampant about the motivations for the attack, although analysts in Nairobi claim that the rebel movement and the government were barely allies even after the signing of the peace pact.

Another crisis in the peace process occurred Thursday when the main southern political party pulled out of the government due to Khartoum's inability to share power. Former rebels from the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) withdrew from the national government after the escalation of violence against rebels.

Adding even more to the uncertainty leading up to the peace talks, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said in a report that Khartoum was delaying the deployment of the African Union-UN hybrid peacekeeping force.

"The implementation timeline for UNAMID is being delayed owing to ... delays in obtaining feedback regarding the list of troop-contributing countries submitted to the government of Sudan," said the the Secretary General's report.

"I remain extremely concerned about the continuing violence in Darfur. The ongoing loss of life and displacement of civilians is unacceptable and is not contributing to an atmosphere conducive to peace talks."

Though these events have put the peace talks at risk, all involved know that the success of the talks is critical for the well-being of the region. As Eliasson said, "To miss this opportunity is a tragedy -- this is the moment of truth,".

TaiwanRFID 2007 shows the applications at the exhibition and seminar

At the 4th day of 2007 The 1st Taiwan International RFID Applications Show (TaiwanRFID 2007), in conjunction with TAITRONICS 2007, the organizer TAITRA held an international

seminar with RFID solutions at the entrance of the seminar. This seminar is mainly focused on some topics (RFID applications and solutions world-wide) continued from the exhibition at TWTC Hall 3.

According to a survey by Institute for Information Industry (III), the top 3 productive value of RFID industry in Taiwan are sensor tags (39%), readers (31% approximately), and services (21%). This market trend can be observed at this exhibition with the industry nature of participated exhibitors such as chips producer, antennas, tags, and readers. Some of prominent manufacturers like IBM, Cheng Loong Co., Ltd., and ChungHua Telecom were participated at this exhibition.

Not only the performance of RFID applications, some of companies simulated the process of RFID smart tags in the factory to buyers. NXP semiconductor and National Instruments (NI) also provided RFID solutions to ensure the quality of RFID tags such as RFID test system by NI.

This RFID exhibition and TAITRONICS will open to 3pm tomorrow.

Al Gore and Climate Panel awarded Nobel Peace prize 2007

The 2007 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded today to former U.S. Vice President Albert Arnold Gore Jr. and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The Nobel committee cited "for their efforts to build up and disseminate greater knowledge about man-made climate change, and to lay the foundations for the measures that are needed to counteract such change" as the reasons for awarding the prize.

The Nobel Peace Prize (Swedish and Norwegian: Nobels fredspris) is the name of one of five Nobel Prizes bequeathed by the Swedish industrialist and inventor Alfred Nobel. The other prizes are given out in Sweden, in different categories, but the Peace prize is given out by the Norwegian Nobel Committee in Oslo, Norway. Last Year Muhammad Yunus and The Grameen Bank won the Nobel Peace Prize.

The Peace Prize is awarded annually in Oslo, the capital of Norway. The actual prize always is presented on the 10th of December, the anniversary of the death of Nobel. The Norwegian king is in attendance. For the past decade, the Nobel Peace Prize Ceremony at the Oslo City Hall has been followed the next day by the Nobel Peace Prize Concert, which is broadcast to over 150 countries and more than 450 million households around the world. The Concert has received worldwide fame and the participation of top celebrity hosts and performers.

By the provisions of Nobel's will, the Nobel Peace Prize is awarded "to the person who shall have done the most or the best work for fraternity between the nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses."

The Committee's five members are entrusted with researching and adjudicating the Prize as well as awarding it. Although appointed by the Norwegian Parliament (Stortinget), they are independent and answer to no legislative authority. Members of the Norwegian government are not permitted to sit on the Committee. Nominations for the Prize may be made by a broad array of qualified

individuals, including former recipients, members of national assemblies and congresses, university professors (in certain disciplines), international judges, and special advisors to the Prize Committee.

Turkey outraged over U.S. Armenian "genocide" resolution

Turkish officials have expressed outrage over a United States congressional resolution labeling the Ottoman Empire's World War I era killings of up to 1.5 million Armenians as "genocide". The Turkish government has warned that the resolution threatens its strategic partnership with the U.S.

The resolution, passed 27-21 by the U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs on Wednesday, states that "[t]he Armenian Genocide was conceived and carried out by the Ottoman Empire from 1915 to 1923, resulting in the deportation of nearly 2,000,000 Armenians, of whom 1,500,000 men, women, and children were killed". The resolution calls on the President "to ensure that the foreign policy of the United States reflects appropriate understanding and sensitivity concerning issues related to human rights, ethnic cleansing, and genocide documented in the United States record relating to the Armenian Genocide."

The World War I era killings, commonly referred to as the Armenian Genocide, have been recognized as genocide by 22 countries, including France, Russia, Venezuela, Argentina, and Canada. The killings have also been officially labeled as "genocide" by 40 of the 50 U.S. states. Turkey acknowledges that Armenians were killed, but calls it

a massacre rather than an organized campaign of genocide.

On Thursday the Turkish government released a statement saying that "It is unacceptable that the Turkish nation should be accused of a crime that it never committed in its history." "We still hope that the House of Representatives will have enough good sense not to take this resolution further," the statement added. A statement on the Turkish Foreign Ministry web site said that the resolution "will not only endanger relations with a friendly and allied nation but will also jeopardize a strategic partnership that has been cultivated for generations."

On Thursday, Turkey recalled its U.S. ambassador Nabi Sensoy, and warned of further repercussions. "Yesterday some in Congress wanted to play hardball," said Turkish foreign policy adviser Egemen Bagis. "I can assure you Turkey knows how to play hardball."

White House spokesman Scott Stanzel said he was "disappointed" by the vote. While acknowledging that "[w]e understand the feelings that people have about the tragic suffering of the Armenian people," Stanzel warned that "Turkey is playing a critical role in the war on terror and this action is problematic for everything we're trying to do in the Middle East and would cause great harm to our efforts." U.S. President George W. Bush had lobbied against the resolution, saying that it would damage relations between the U.S. and Turkey.

House of Representatives speaker Nancy Pelosi said the resolution will go forward for a vote in the House despite Turkish opposition.

"As long as there is genocide, there is a need to speak out against it," Pelosi said.

Augusten Burroughs on addiction, writing, his family and his new book

I had an unofficial phone call from Gay Talese last Tuesday. He had just flown back from Colombia and he was cranky. "I'm happy to do an interview with you," he said, "but what the hell could you ask me that's not already out there? Have you even bothered to look?!"

"Jeez, Mr. Talese, lots of things," was my response. I lied. The truth is that when I call people to interview them, I do not have a set of preconceived questions. My agenda is to talk to them and gain a sense of who they are; to flesh them out as humans. To find out what they think about the world around them at that moment. With Gay Talese I had little interest in talking about Frank Sinatra Has a Cold and with Augusten Burroughs I had little interest in discussing *Running with Scissors*. I want to know what they think about things outside of the boxes people have placed them in.

With a memoirist like Burroughs, even this is a challenge. What parts of his life he has not written about himself, other interviewers have strip-mined. When we met for dinner at Lavagna in the East Village, I explained to Augusten this issue. I suggested we make the interview more of a conversation to see if that would be more interesting. "Instead of you in the catbird seat," I said, "let's just talk."

We struck an instant rapport. What set out to be an hour and half interview over dinner had turned into four hours of discussion about our lives similarly lived. I removed

half of the interview: the half that focused on me.

Below is David Shankbone's conversation with writer Augusten Burroughs

On addiction and getting sober
David Shankbone: It's difficult to be creative and innovative. When you come up with an idea and then come across a place where it has already been done, how do you overcome disenchantment that can ruin your inspiration?
Augusten Burroughs: It's funny; back when I was in advertising that was the one thing I wanted to be: original. I didn't own a television and I never watched commercials. In advertising everyone studies the awards annuals, which are hardcover compendiums of all the best advertising examples. I would never read them when I first got in. I didn't want to be polluted, and I think it's like that with the writing, but much less--I don't think about it to that extent. The way I work best is not the way I wish I worked best. The way I actually work best is to not think, but just to do. Dry was really the first book I ever wrote, and the reason for that is because I was 30, and I got out of rehab, and it was the first time I had been sober in my adult life. I hadn't been sober since I was ...16...I had been a nightly drinker from 16 on. And I was 30--

DS: You started drinking when you were 13, but 16 was when you were really--

AB: That was when I was going all the time, and then at 17 it was every night. I would drink every single night. And by 18, 19, I was an alcoh--I needed it. I needed to always drink. So I went to rehab when I was 30, and when I got out I was living over here on Third

Avenue and Tenth Street, in this really crappy little apartment. I didn't know how to do anything at all. I was horrified by that. I couldn't date anybody, because I was so damaged. I have my background, my history--I could never get through the third date with that. "Tell me about your family. Tell me about your past." You know? It was like a deal-breaker by the third date, because it was just too much for one person to go through and remain sane. So I felt already ruined. And then, on top of that, I was now sober for the first time, so--

DS: How did you get over the problems of dating? Just by being sober-?

AB: Well, no [nervous laugh], what happened is I got sober, I was sober for about a year and a half, and then I relapsed. I relapsed in just a huge way--

DS: Which is what one tends to do.

AB: Yes. I was much worse than I ever had been. First of all, when I got sober, that's when I started to write. I had this just manic energy; if I went downstairs to get cigarettes--I smoked at that time--I would be gone ten minutes, and I would spend the next four hours writing about it, just the tiniest detail, everything. Everything I did, I wrote about. I was working, so I would email the document to myself, pick it up at work and keep on writing. It was like a security blanket. Everything I had was this stupid journal. When I relapsed, I stopped writing completely, and I started drinking and doing drugs I had never done before.

DS: As happens.

AB: Yeah, as happens, and I got to the point where I started to develop really serious physical symptoms. I began hallucinating; I

had cardiac symptoms, and I got alcohol poisoning--and I knew that I'd end up having a heart attack. My heart started beating very irregularly and then stopping and starting--

DS: I know that feeling.

AB: I knew, this is how you die. This is it. I always wondered, how do you die from alcohol? They always say it's a terminal illness, but assuming you don't drive, how do you actually die? Well, now I was starting to see how. My system was shot, you could see my liver outlined in the mirror when I stood up, and I was a real mess, and--

DS: You saw all this, but how long did it take before you started saying, 'I need to stop'?

AB: What happened is I got alcohol poisoning; I began hallucinating spiders on my ceiling. I went up and Googled 'spiders, alcohol' and saw that that was a symptom of late-stage alcoholism, when it's chronic. People in the very last stages of their alcoholism, of their illness, often hallucinate spiders; it's a common hallucination. And it freaked me out. I developed hives, I was shaking and I was more physically sick than I've ever been in my life.

DS: Gin blossoms kind of stuff.

AB: And I remember it took me maybe four or five hours to get the strength, the physical strength to go downstairs to get a six-pack of hard cider. Brought it back up to the apartment and downed a couple of them, just really fast. That took the edge off. Then over the next forty-eight hours, I drank the rest of that six-pack--not to get a buzz, but to detox. I was working my way through withdrawal in a very unhealthy way; I mean, you should never do that. But that's what I was doing,

and so, it was shortly after that that I woke up one morning and I was drinking again. But I was not drinking quite as much. I woke up one morning hung over, and I sat down and I wrote something. It was two pages and it made laugh, and I hadn't laughed for years at that point, and that turned out to be the first couple pages of my first book, which was *Sellelevision*. It's a novel about the home shopping world, that whole world--and, I didn't know what I had written. But it amused me, so I kept on writing, and I wrote until very late that night. And I drank a little bit less. And the same thing the next day. Again, I had no idea what I was doing or where it was coming from, but by the seventh day, I was not drinking at all.

[food arrives]

AB: Because the drinking just got in the way of this writing that I was doing, and I knew I wasn't writing the next great work, but it was--

DS: You were proud of it.

AB: It was something. I'd never written anything beyond an ad, you know, that was long, and so by the seventh day I had finished the book. I didn't know if it was a good book or a bad book, but I'd finished the book. And that's really when my life changed. That's when I decided, I'm going to do this the rest of my life. I'm gonna be a writer, I've just finished writing a book. Now, it may be a piece of shit, but that doesn't matter, it's 150 pages, and they're in order--

DS: That accomplishment is so difficult.

AB: Yes, exactly. I began reading at 24. I had never read before that. Once I started reading, I didn't want to do anything else. But I could never understand how

do you keep a whole book in your head. How does an author do that? How do you get a book--I mean, it's 250 pages, and yet it resides in your head! Where? How? By writing my book, I saw firsthand how it happens; for me, it was totally subconscious, automatic--it was like watching a movie. My fingers did the work--I was fully unaware; I didn't think about structure, or characters...I stared at the space between the screen and the keyboard like I was in a trance.

DS: That gives you some amount of respect for people who write a book of crap, but yet write a book.
AB: Yeah. Any book is an accomplishment.

DS: It's like, you can have the talent, but if you don't have that discipline to actually carry it through, the talent's wasted.
AB: Exactly--I had never had that discipline, and I didn't know where it came from. But once I did it, I knew I could do it again and again, and by the time I was 40 or 50, or in my 60s, if I kept doing this, if I kept writing a book every--not every seven days, but a month or two months, or even a year, eventually in my 40s or 50s or 60s, I would have written something that was publishable. And--

DS: How did you get the discipline?

AB: It was not so much discipline as I realized, this is me. This is what I'm going to do. This is it. It was an epiphany of, "I'm home." I'm--what am I doing? I've wasted my life. I need this--writing felt better than anything had ever felt. It felt better than any drug, and it felt better than any relationship. So that really changed a lot about me. Just the experience of having written it made me not care so

much what other people thought. I then went out and tried to get an agent, and I did get an agent, and he did sell the book. And he sold it for no money, but it was sold. And that's when everything really changed in my life. I became much more confident with just--just being, you know, just me, just myself. I didn't feel as damaged--

DS: You were sober at the time?

AB: Yeah, I was sober at the time.

DS: And you couldn't have probably done all this without being sober.

AB: Never. Oh no. No, nothing. I never wrote a word when I was a drunk. Never. Never wrote a word--very few, very few. And after I sold Sellelevision, I didn't have another idea for a novel, but I did have this journal that I'd written when I got sober. So I gave it to my agent, who asked, "Why didn't you show me this first?" And my publisher bought it, and that's Dry. And then after they bought Dry, which was my journal--it was like selling someone my used tissues--I thought my God! well if you guys like that, I should tell you, I had a really fucked-up childhood. And they said, "Really? What happened?" And I said, "Well, here." And I sat down in half an hour and I wrote a proposal for it and emailed it in, and that was Running with Scissors, and they bought that, and I had to go away and write it.

On the Turcottes and his mother

DS: Did you read the Vanity Fair interview with the Turcottes?

AB: Believe it or not--I didn't read it, no. I heard about it.

DS: You just don't have an interest?

AB: How can I explain it so it makes sense? I don't want to see

that family anymore. I don't need to see--whatever they said, it doesn't matter to me. Because what I wrote is the truth. So I don't need to hear them yammering on about whatever it is that--

DS: A debate that is not a debate.

AB: It's not. I mean, you know what, the world is--

DS: It's like Holocaust denial.

AB: The world is not flat. You may not like it. You don't have to believe it, you don't have to like it, you don't have to think it's polite, but it's true. You know, I may be an asshole for having written that book because I'm telling family secrets, maybe that makes me an asshole, but I'm not a liar.

DS: Do you think the memoirist has a responsibility to inform people that they're writing about that they're writing about them?

AB: No. I changed them in the book. I changed the house, and I changed the location. You can't read the book and find the house, and people have tried. People have tried. And they're always wrong. I had people emailing me, maybe about seven, from the area trying to guess. "I know exactly who this is." It was funny because they weren't right. It was not that person that they thought it was--I changed their physical description. So I think if you're going to write about people on something that's potentially upsetting, you have a moral obligation to at least give them privacy. Which is what I did. I changed their name, I mean, we wouldn't have known them if they hadn't announced to the world who they were. They became public not because--they apparently had said in some magazine that I revealed their name. But I actually never did. I've never uttered their name in an

interview. It's been put in my mouth. But I've never uttered their name.

AB: So I didn't read that. I don't read interviews with me, because... I don't know why. It makes me uncomfortable. I'm not really sure why. Partly because if something's wrong, I can't do a thing about it. So I don't want to have to obsess over it.

DS: Although you could with this.

AB: [Laughs] Well, right. So I don't know why I don't. I didn't read that, it was just--you know, it was an upsetting thing to have happen; the lawsuit was upsetting, and I think for me it was most upsetting because of the media glomming onto it and thinking, 'Well of course, it's because of James Frey!' Just associating with that whole thing...

DS: Did you listen to the NPR interview with your mom?

AB: I heard about it. I didn't hear it. But my mother--I'll tell you something funny. The first thing my mother said to me-- it was an email. I haven't been in contact with her now for years. But right after or before Running with Scissors came out I told her there's a book coming out, and my mother said to me, "What will I tell my media??" My mother--and so, it's not surprising--

DS: She's still in that 'I'm Anne Sexton' thinking?

AB: Absolutely. My mother believes that she's Grace Paley. My mother believes that she's the most famous woman in the world, or should be--the most famous poet.

DS: It's ironic that the notoriety she's received has been via you; do you think that in some ways she likes it?

AB: Oh, I know she likes it. Oh, absolutely.

DS: There's no such thing as bad publicity.

AB: Right. My mother could get published tomorrow now if she wanted to. You know? I love my mother because she's my mother, but I don't like her. I don't like the woman. And I don't want to have anything to do with her, and I don't consider her a mother--she's the woman who gave birth to me, but she's not a mother in the sense of mothering a child. I was watching Annette Benning on the set of the movie Running with Scissors with her daughter. We were sitting around talking and Annette was telling a story to the crew. I watched her daughter reach up and grab Annette's earlobe, and then Annette just--without stopping, without breaking the conversation, she bent forward so that her daughter could kiss her. And it was the most natural thing in the world. When I saw that, I knew--Annette may very well have a staff of twelve for all I know, but she's changed every diaper on that girl. I knew she had changed every diaper on her daughter. Because there was an intimacy. The daughter was not filled with this desperate need. She had full access to her mother. And if she happened to want, in the middle of her mother's story, to have a kiss, it was a given that her mother would acknowledge that need.

DS: Make that time.

AB: My mother was not like that. My mother was absolutely focused on her, on her writing--she shouldn't ever have had kids, she should have probably focused on her writing. I mean, I'm glad she had children. It's hard to blame, too, because she was ill. My mother was ill. She had mental illness that was not treated correctly; it was exacerbated by

the treatment of this ridiculously unqualified doctor.

DS: Intellectually, that's nice, but I mean, in the end --

AB: Well, I don't have anything to do with her. You know, in the end.

DS: -- it's still your experience too, and what you went through. It's almost like someone who pleads the insanity defense. You can't really blame them. But they still killed your mom, raped your sister or whatever.

AB: Right, but they still did--yeah, exactly. And she still let a lot of things happen that I find--that I would never let happen to my child. She still allowed a lot to happen that is terrible. So when she goes for her publicity, I just have to laugh it off. You know there's--

DS: She takes credit for your writing career.

AB: Yeah, you know that's the kind of thing she would do. You know, when really--

DS: Does that bother you at all?

AB: It--you know, it doesn't really bother me, no, because what she says doesn't bother me. My mother has said such outrageous--and this is a woman who used to eat cigarette-butt-and-peanut-butter sandwiches, so she's not the most reliable person. I can't value her opinions. My mother's going to say whatever--she's a wild card; she's gonna say whatever she says.

My brother was more of an influence on me in many respects, in terms of being a writer, because he's such a wonderful storyteller. He would go away and come back with just outlandish stories. I think I loved watching those stories. But my mother, to her credit, she always did encourage me to write. So she did--she definitely played a

part, I think, in getting me to write.

DS: Elizabeth Berg writes a lot about parental and domestic relationships. Do you think that you're dealing with latent issues with your mom through your love of Berg?

AB: What I love about Elizabeth Berg is that, if she were a man, she'd be John Cheever--she'd have that sort of level of critical respect. She's never written a false word. I love the humanity and the absolute emotional truth of an Elizabeth Berg book. I defy the most cynical reader to read an Elizabeth Berg book and not be able to then say that it is emotionally true. It rings true. Now, it may not be the world that you're at all interested in, because it's very domestic, and it's often Midwestern, or at least if not Midwestern geographically, emotionally Midwestern. It's centered around relationships and moms and husbands and wives having problems. So yeah. Probably there is an element of finding comfort in that. But it's also just the prose; I just find it beautiful, the simplicity of it. It's just very beautiful.

DS: In the Vanity Fair article Teresa said that she had come down to New York to visit you with her kids--

AB: Right, right, yep.

DS: And that you were saying that you want to marry her, how great she is, what a kind person she is...

AB: Right before *Running with Scissors* was published, I was thinking about her, and I thought, "She is going to love this book." I remember feeling really excited because I thought, "She is going to be blown away." That period of growing up together was a very pivotal and central aspect to both

of our lives, hers and mine, and we shared it together. And I thought, "Man, when she reads this she is"--

DS: She's really going to be there with you.

AB: Yes. She's going to be like, "Oh, my God, I can't believe you remembered this. I had forgotten about that. Oh, my God--" I thought, she's gonna be so blown away that I remembered so much and brought it all back; I felt like I was giving her our childhood again. So when the lawsuit occurred, it took me by absolute surprise. To find out she was involved in it, I was shocked, and then I was disgusted. I was just blankly disgusted, because it reeked to me of just greed. It had, you know--

DS: Do you think that's what it was, the motivation?

AB: I've learned never to try to put a word on them. I don't know what the fuck it was about. Did I say one thing in there that really hurt her? I didn't mean to, but obviously, I guess I did, you know? Was it about the money--did they think they could get a lot of money? I'll never know the answer to that, and I don't even want to know, now.

It's unfortunate, it's unfortunate, but I'm not at all sorry that I wrote it. And you know, the suit settled--it settled in my favor. I didn't change a word of the memoir, not one word of it. It's still a memoir, it's marketed [as] a memoir, they've agreed one hundred percent that it is a memoir. You know, the only thing I--

DS: They got what they wanted apparently from settling with Sony?

AB: Yeah, right. There you go, exactly I mean, if it was not about money, and it was about, you

know--

DS: Setting the record straight?
AB: Yeah. Then they didn't do a very good job of showing that. I'm just really glad that it's over, and I know I'm not vindicated. A lot of people are still like, how did that resolve? I feel vindicated, because of the way that it settled. They couldn't have done anything else. They never could have won. We had such an incredibly strong case. I mean, the lawyers worked like hell and got witnesses, and I had my journals--I mean, it's--there were a lot of other people around back then, you know?

DS: Yeah.

AB: Who saw. And who experienced. So, it was crazy--the whole thing seemed crazy to me to begin with.

On his work

DS: Do you read reviews of your work, and commentary on it?

AB: Some of them, not all of them. Some of them.

DS: Did it ever bother you if you came across somebody using the Twelve Steps in a review of your work?

AB: I don't know if I've seen that. What do you mean?

DS: I mean comparing the things you did with your writing and comparing them to how they conform to the principles in the Twelve Steps. It happened with Frey too, where all of a sudden you had these alcoholics coming out and saying, "Oh, this is such a typical alcoholic, doing this or doing that. It's not very Step Eight," or whatever... You never came across that?

AB: No, I didn't care about that kind of thing. You know, *Dry* is not a terribly structured book. I mean, it is what it is. It's what happened

when I stopped drinking. I'm the first to admit that right before it came out, I was horrified. I thought, you know, my God, what am I doing? The world doesn't need another alcoholic book. It's already been done by so many authors before me...

DS: Do you still feel that way?

AB: Well, no, I think that--

DS: That's the 'nothing's original' thing, isn't it?

AB: Yeah, I think everybody is different, and my book's different because it's me. There are some things about it, I think, that are funny--you know, I'm not the most objective person when it comes to my own work.

DS: Do you know anyone who is?

AB: Actually, I do. My friend Haven Kimmel, the writer, has a mind like a finely tuned laser. She has perspective. I don't have that ability to step back like that.

On the response to his work from addicts

DS: How does it feel to be a hero to addicts?

AB: You know what? I just want addicts to stop. I want addicts to do whatever it takes. If it takes thinking of me as a hero, fine. If it takes thinking I'm a jerk, fine. If my book makes someone look at themselves, or look at their lives, then that's what I want. I know that I am absolutely happy in my life. I'm pretty happy, and I've certainly accomplished a lot, and I accomplished everything because I don't drink. That's the only variable. Nothing else in my life changed except I stopped drinking and taking drugs. You have to replace alcohol or drugs or sex, or food, whatever the drug is, with something else. You have to replace it--

DS: You replaced it with writing?

AB: Yeah. With introspection, reporting on what I find inside. And it feels very much like a drug, in the sense that it's--I binge. I don't write four hours a day, and then do lunch, and then call friends and return emails--I don't have that sense of structure. I tend to wait too long, and then I tend to work for 15 hours, 18 hours, 48 hours straight. I tend to do just like I drank. You know, binging.

Augusten Burroughs and David Shankbone.

DS: Have you ever had an alcoholic write you and ask you to be their sponsor?

AB: I have not had someone ask me to be their sponsor, no, but I've had some amazing letters. I had a homeless guy in a big city write me and tell me that he shoplifted my book from a Barnes & Noble. He only intellectually shoplifted it. He sat on the sofa and read it. And he said that he had never read a book about recovery that hit him with the force that Dry hit him. He realized, "My God! I'm 50. I'm young." And he checked into the same treatment program that I myself went to and got sober. I mean, that to me was just--I--it blew the top of my head off. So I've had things like that happen, but I've not actually had anybody ask if I would be their sponsor.

DS: When people write to you, and they say they relate to your work, what element do they say they responded to--your upbringing, your relationship with your mother, your contending with alcoholism? You write on such a variety of topics--

AB: It so varies, yeah, it's all so much.

DS: Is there a theme that seems to resonate most with people in your life?

AB: Well, certainly being raised in a very untraditional and chaotic childhood. And addiction; also being single and dating in the city. I mean, there are so many. Probably the two are having a crazy childhood or a chaotic childhood or being sort of abandoned by parents; and drug abuse or alcoholism. I hear from a lot of alcoholics. It's interesting to me because I've heard from a lot of famous people--whose names you would absolutely know, and politicians, whose names you know, anyone in America would know--soccer moms--and working dads, and--

DS: George W. Bush?

AB: [laughs] And . . . straight and gay, just a whole range of people. And the thing that is so amazing to me is how absolutely dead similar they all are. You know? I mean, it's shocking.

On belief in a higher power

DS: Do you believe in a higher power?

AB: I wouldn't say that I believe in one. I don't know. I don't know if there's an organizing principle to the universe, or if there's a sentient being that is the architect of everything--you know, everything being the "observable-and-beyond" universe. I don't know. I would like to know. I would like to know--I don't believe in any God that has been described by man in any way. I certainly don't believe in the Islamic or the Jewish or the Christian God. I don't believe a word of the Bible, I don't believe a word of any organized religion and I don't have any firm belief whatsoever, other than I don't know. I can't say that I don't believe, because I really don't

know. I would love to know.

DS: Did you ever come close to believing?

AB: Yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, I have. As a child, I was very--I would almost say religious, as a child. I prayed constantly, obsessively even. So I was very, very, very religious as a child, or spiritual as a child. And I went through another burst of spirituality, I think, when I got sober.

DS: Through a program?

AB: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

DS: Did it feel false to you?

AB: You know, it was funny, because I was able to really go with it and suspend--

[dishes are removed from table]
I was able to just go with it and just--pretend--I acted as if, and it just totally worked.

DS: Which I think a lot of people do.

AB: Mmm-hmmm. And that's the thing, I mean if you--

DS: 'Fake it 'til you make it.'

AB: Yeah, yeah, and I mean, now I'm making it, and I don't really have to fake it.

DS: What was your higher power, then?

AB: I used to visualize--it's ridiculous, it's ridiculous. But I just visualized a cartoon Jesus in the sky with a pet cow --

DS: [chuckles]

AB: The baby Jesus, you know, like--that's what I visualized--just a very cartoon version of Jesus, plucked from the manger with a pet cow.

DS: Sounds like something--that it would be great if one of your fans

drew for you.

AB: Yeah, that would be great. I wish they would.

DS: [chuckles]

AB: And now I'm going to get a stack--

DS: A swarm of cows and cartoon Jesuses. You'll have to start a collection.

AB: I'm going to get a stack of them.

I would like to be a physicist. I would like to find out--because that's the question that physics seeks to answer, ultimately.

DS: When did you lose it, though? When did you lose the belief in the higher power?

AB: I couldn't--it's very diff--It wasn't even that much of an existential crisis. It was much more like, um, it's just hard for me to believe--

DS: I meant more so in recovery, when you said to yourself, 'I'm just not getting the higher power thing', or, 'I just have to give up on the cartoon Jesus.'

AB: It sort of faded away, I think. It sort of faded away.

DS: Once you were stronger.

AB: Yeah. It's difficult for me to believe in something when I don't; when I don't have evidence. Now, that's obviously the point of faith. Faith is not meant to be logical: faith is meant to be. The argument for faith is it's meant to be a higher form of human functioning. We don't use our base intellect, that we're supposed to go beyond that. And...and... what more proof do you need? I mean, someone would say, what proof do you need? My God, the glass is not elevating off the table--there's your proof. Gravity! You know?

And maybe that's true. It very well may be true. It may be true.

I certainly know that--that if there is God, that God does not care that the person I watch TV with also has hairy arms. I mean, that's a ridic--the idea that a God would not like homosexuals, now, is patently absurd. That doesn't even begin to become logical in any way. The idea that the architect of gravity, the being that created the ability for elemental particles that are absolutely nothing to come together and create living organisms and bricks and buildings and cars and jets--the architect of absolutely everything would care--the sex of the person the little human loves? It's a pitiful thought. It's pitiful.

DS: It's a very small thought.

AB: It's an absolutely, profoundly small thought. And there's no way it's true.

On the gay community

DS: What are your feelings about the gay community? Do you feel part of it?

[Waiter stops by]

AB: No, I've never really felt like part of the gay community. I never questioned my sexual orientation. I didn't go to school, so I didn't have that high school indoctrination. I was raised without a formal religion. When I was religious as a child, it was on my own. I was the one asking the questions, and I was the one believing in Jesus. It wasn't because I went to church. If we went to church, it was because I wanted to go. So I never had that indoctrination to believe it was wrong, and then I was plunged into such extraordinary living, uh, circumstances, that my--and I then had to think about my very survival and my very sanity--that sexual orientation just was--I didn't even think about it. It was just like totally on the back burner.

And as a result of that, it was never really an issue.

DS: You had bigger issues to--
 AB: Yeah. I think of it as I'm right-handed. I'm right-handed and attracted to men. To me, it's the same thing. I'm not "proud" of it, because it's not an accomplishment. It's like being--

DS: I always found the idea of pride--I mean, I understand the genesis of it.
 AB: Yes.

DS: I do understand where it came from. But now when I hear it, it sounds like such an anachronism. It's like--
 AB: Well, we needed it originally, so that we could--

DS: "I proudly serve Starbucks coffee." The word "pride" is so bandied about in so many venues, and it's like, what do you mean, you "proudly" serve Starbucks coffee? What do you mean that you're "proud" about being gay, or --

AB: Right. Where's your personal accomplishment? Here's the thing: I would be proud if I had been raised Evangelical Christian, and I had been taught from birth that it was wrong, and against the backdrop of that history, I was gay.

DS: You accepted yourself--
 AB: Then, I would be proud.

DS: Yeah. I can understand that.
 AB: That's the difference. It was handed to me basically on a silver platter that was stuffed with mental illness--that's not a good metaphor, I mean it was--

DS: [Laughs] That's great..
 AB: I never dealt with it. It was never an issue. I had so many other more life-critical issues to

deal with that it was never something I thought about. And therefore I never worked for it. I never had to struggle to be gay. It was the easiest thing, it was just like writing with my right hand. So I'm not entitled to really be proud, but if I had to fight for it, I would be. And I think that's the difference--

On his new book, *A Wolf at the Table*, a memoir about his father

DS: How did you teach yourself to write about difficult things in your life with such humor?

AB: Well, there was no teaching involved with that. That's just the way that I wrote about myself.

DS: But originally you didn't, right? I heard an interview where you said you started writing something and you were like, 'Oh, God, this is just so depressing'--
 AB: Oh, well--

DS: And then you put it away, and decided that you were going to write something funny, which I think was *Sellelevision*?

AB: Yeah, I didn't probably explain that well--no, no, that wasn't *Sellelevision*. That was when I was working on *Running with Scissors*, when I sat down to begin writing it. I began writing the book with a scene that was me and Bookman in a cornfield kissing, and it was so depressing to go back there and remember that. It just felt so ugly that I thought, no, this--I can't do this. I've got to start with

something funnier. So I started with a funnier scene from the book, and I focused on the parts of my life that to me, were fun and funny and wild. So, that was really about that specifically. The humor has always been such a part of my survival mechanism; that it was really organic to the writing. It was just sort of one step back and removed and then, judging or

commenting on, is something I do when I'm in a horrible situation. I distance myself from my life this way, so that I can get through it. So that's really where the humor comes from. My next book, which is a memoir about my father, is not funny at all. It's deadly serious. And it's, um, just devastating.

DS: Did you make a choice--
 AB: I made a deliberate choice with that book, yeah.

DS: Why was the choice made?
 AB: Because it was the only way I could write that book, and I had to write that book.

DS: Did you try to write it funny at first?
 AB: I was terrified--no. And I know this may turn a lot of people off. Because there are going to be people who approach this book with a smile on their face--

DS: 'Oh, another Burroughs!'
 AB: And as soon as they hear the title, *A Wolf at the Table*, they'll already chuckle. And then as they read it, they'll think, "Well, my God, he's lost it. This isn't funny!" And then the more they read, they'll realize: this is just horrible. I mean, it's just a devastating, terrifying story. But I had to write it for me--and, um, I mean, it's, it's definitely scary, because it's--I don't, you know, I don't want to alienate my readers, or my fans, but you know, I can't think about that.

DS: No.
 AB: I can't...I can't write books to sell.

DS: But also, too, your fans should realize that you're not one-dimensional.

AB: Right.

DS: With your writing, that you

don't have a--

AB: Well, that's the other thing.

DS: It's like, "Oh, we wanna see Data from 'Star Trek' be Data; we don't want to see him in his full range of emotions," you know--

AB: I don't want to be just funny, or just sarcastic, because you know I am--

DS: Versatile.

AB: I'm very serious--that's the weird thing; in person, I'm very serious. I'm not so funny. I'm, like, as funny as your dentist. So, this book is...is--it's another side of me.

DS: Why do you think you are so serious in person?

AB: Well, I get a lot of it out in the books. I used to be funnier, which is funny, ironic.

DS: Is it like a purpose-ness? That you're very purpose-driven now, or--?

AB: It's not that I'm purpose-driven; I've always been serious. I've always been really, really serious. I've always been very introspective and introverted, and--

DS: Do you and Dennis yuk it up at home?

AB: Some, yeah. He's on the serious side, too. [Laughs] It's like--who! what a fun time--no, we do have fun, we do laugh. We have a very similar sense of humor, very dark. It's not to say that I'm always deadly serious; it's that I'm not a person always "on" you know, in that funny way.

DS: How can anyone--

AB: You know? I like being able to just-- I like that this book is going to show another side.

On women's breasts and tattoos

DS: What's your favorite curse word?

AB: My favorite curse word? Let me think about that . . . I like "cunt."

DS: [Chuckles] That's always the one that--

AB: It seems to offend so many people still.

DS: It does.

AB: There's something about it I like, or--

DS: It's a cutting word. Do you have a favorite euphemism for women's breasts?

AB: Oh yeah, let's see...what do I call them...? I like the old-fashioned words for breasts, like "boobies." I like "boobies," um "girls," "my girls" or "your girls"; I like the idea of naming breasts, like "Jen" and "Stacy." I think every girl should name each breast. "Stacy hangs a little lower"; "Stacy needs a tuck, but Beth doesn't."

DS: [Chuckles] What would you name your breasts?

AB: I would name them--"Regina" and "Claire."

DS: Would Claire be the bigger one?

AB: I'm glad I don't have them-- actually, if I had them, I would have them sawed off. I wouldn't be able to stand it.

DS: [Laughs] Really?

AB: Yeah, I'd be like, "Chop these fucking things off."

DS: You're not like most gay men who have a fascination with breasts?

AB: I would want them gone. They look uncomfortable.

DS: Do you like them on other people?

AB: Yeah, I do.

DS: Do you have a breast fetish?

AB: No, because you know what, I saw this picture of this woman who had breast cancer, and she had a radical mastectomy, and she had these massive scars, and then she had them tattooed. And I thought that it looked soooo cool. She looked great and she was in shape. And I thought it would make me want breast cancer if I'd seen that picture; I would have thought, "I want it!"

DS: My sister has stretch marks on her stomach that she's really self-conscious about--

AB: Tattoo it.

DS: We've been talking about that!

AB: It's a good look.

DS: I had suggested to her tattooing a band of stars across it, that--

AB: Oh, what a great idea!

DS: Yeah, like where it starts out small, and goes like bigger over the marks?

AB: Yes. Yep. That's a beautiful idea.

DS: And she was all for it. We were going to take her to my tattoo guy, over here on First Avenue--

AB: Such a good idea.

DS: And she all of a sudden has been like, "Mmmmm, I don't really know." And she's like, "Maybe I'm going to get a belly button ring." But that's going to highlight it!

AB: Yeah. Not the thing to do.

DS: No! So--

AB: Get her drunk and get her tattooed.

DS: [Laughs] I should--it would only take one drink with her.

AB: I think it'd be cool to have razor stubble tattooed here on my

head, so that it'd look like I have really thick hair, but choose to have it very short.

On losing his hair

DS: Was it difficult losing your hair?

AB: It was funny, because I've always been really good--I'm not--I'm not someone who goes into denial a whole lot. Even though I was a big lush, I knew it. I'm really honest with myself. And when my hair cutter told me, "Oh, you're losing your hair," I said, "Oh, no, I'm not. I've always had a high peak." Then I went home and looked at it, and I saw that I was really losing it. And I was horrified. It was my--it mattered too much. And so I deserved to lose it.

DS: It's really hard.

AB: It is hard. Women don't--it's like losing your breasts. Imagine if your breasts shrank up and shriveled away to cork nubs. I mean, it would really be--it's traumatic, it is.

DS: I freaked out on my mom one time because she made a joke about it. I went overboard, I just freaked out. This was years ago, when it was just first starting to go a little bit. But I also always had a high peak, always.

AB: Right.

DS: As a matter of fact, people made fun of me about it in my Georgia high school.

AB: That is something that people would make fun of you about in a Georgia high school.

DS: Yeah. [In a southern accent] "Sportin' a pretty big forehead, there, Day-vid."

AB: Yeah, yeah.

DS: I freaked out. "You don't know what it's like! You don't have any idea!" It was Christmas. But a

person has to get to a point where he accepts it.

AB: You do.

DS: Like when you see guys who try all these creative styles to--

AB: Yeah.

DS: You know, pushing all their hair forward, when it's really--

AB: Not good.

DS: You know, and you think--

AB: You need to let it go.

DS: Let it go. It makes it seem like they have trouble dealing with things.

AB: Oh, yeah!

DS: There's wider implications.

AB: Hair becomes your psychological issue, you know?

DS: Or reflection of psychological issues.

AB: Exactly. Yeah, exactly. It's the externalization of your denial. Better just to chop it off, although, you know, I have to say...

DS: Yeah. You look very nice, without...

AB: Oh, thank you. I've been toying lately with getting a really good hairpiece, like a beautiful quality lace-front, but I would wear it on Tuesday, but not Wednesday, do you know what I mean?

DS: Yeah, yeah.

AB: Because some--why not--

DS: Like a hat.

AB: Exactly, exactly. That's what I'd call it--my hair hat. Like one day, you have Brad Pitt hair, but then the next you have no hair.

DS: Wouldn't it be great if you were Jewish, and you could have a yarmulke with a hairpiece underneath it?

AB: Yes.

DS: Or, or you wore a hairpiece as a yarmulke.

AB: Well, I have like a flesh yarmulke--my balding pattern's become like a little--

DS: But you have one of those really great heads that are conducive to having a shaved head. Like sometimes you see guys, and you're like, "Oh, you don't really have the head for having a shaved head," you know?

AB: Yeah, they have no option.

DS: Misshapen heads...

AB: Well, you do, too. You look good like that.

DS: Thank you, thank God. I was told that by my sister, and I was like, "Oh, thank God," And she's very honest with me.

AB: Thank God.

DS: And I said, "Thank God," because I don't really have a choice?

AB: You have a square jaw; that's why--

DS: Well, this is why I also do the scruff here, because I'm losing my hair. It's completely like...

AB: Yeah. It happens. Gotta have it somewhere.

DS: I used to think that beards were a form of male self-mutilation. Now, if I don't do it I feel like I look like Norman Mailer or something.

AB: Ugh.

DS: Do you have nightmares?

AB: I used to, I used to. And you know what, usually they're about being back in the house, from Running with Scissors, and I'm in the front TV/sitting room. And I look down at myself, and I think, "Oh my God, what am I doing in

this place? I've got to get out of here before I get sucked back in. They're going to see me here, and I'm going to get sucked back into this family. I've got to get out of here." I've had that recurring nightmare.

I've had some nightmares about my father hunting me in the woods-- some old dreams from childhood--I mean, my father used to do that, when I was very little. So I have those. But very, very infrequently now.

Today in History

54 – Claudius was fatally poisoned by his wife Agrippina the Younger, making her 17-year-old son Nero the next Roman Emperor.

1773 – French astronomer Charles Messier discovered the Whirlpool Galaxy, an interacting, grand-design spiral galaxy located at a distance of approximately 23 million light-years in the constellation Canes Venatici.

1843 – The Independent Order of B'nai B'rith, the oldest continually-operating Jewish service organization in the world, was founded in New York City.

1917 – An estimated 100,000 people in the Cova da Iria fields near Fátima, Portugal witnessed "The Miracle of the Sun."

1943 – World War II: With a new government led by General Pietro Badoglio, parts of Italy switched sides to the Allies and declared war on the Axis Powers.

Quote of the Day

I'm always astounded at the way we automatically look at what divides and separates us. We never look at what people have in common. If you see it, black and white people, both sides look to see the differences, they don't look at what they have together. Men and women, and old and young, and so on. And this is a disease of the mind, the way I see it.

~ Doris Lessing

Word of the Day

profligate; v

1. (archaic) To drive away; to overcome.

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