



## Oh what a book!

By Barbara Aggerholm, Record staff  
February 17, 2012

WATERLOO — They would solve the mystery of death, end global warming and learn how to survive a zombie attack.

If people could possess one book that contained everything there is to know about one subject, anything would be possible.

Entries in this year's Loving to Learn Day contest provide a fascinating snapshot into the world of children, teens and adults, says contest creator Mark Morton, who works at the Centre for Teaching Excellence at the University of Waterloo.

Morton, a published author with a PhD in English, asked writers to imagine they had entered a secret library from which they could choose one book containing all knowledge about one subject.

The question attracted about 230 entries and Morton this week announced the contest winners and some honourable mentions.

If such a magical book existed, there would be a cure for cancer, an end to bullying, a bird's-eye view inside students' brains, a foolproof way to hang drywall and a guide to immortality.

Everyone could play the guitar like Stevie Ray Vaughan, talk to animals like Doctor Dolittle, water ski like Whitney McClintock and bake like Buddy Valastro of TV's *Cake Boss* show.

We'd learn the secret of true happiness, move like a ninja, and read people's minds. The Loch Ness monster would be revealed and the Bermuda Triangle would cough up whatever has been lost there.

Since 2006 when he started the contest, Morton has asked entrants to do everything from talk about their mentors to write catchy learning slogans. He designated Feb. 14 as Loving to Learn Day and the contest spread to schools across Canada and as far away as Australia.



**Mark Morton.** Mark Morton administers the Loving to Learn Day contest. Peter Lee/Record staff Source: Record staff

This year's entries were creative, thoughtful, amusing and touching.

Some entrants wanted to cure diseases and disorders experienced by their relatives. One wanted to know how music is connected to the mind, so that music could help make her family happy.

A 12-year-old boy wanted a book telling him how to manipulate his parents so he could eat lots of ice cream, hang out with friends and stay up late.

A teenager would select a book with knowledge about teen pregnancy to help young people like her sister, who is 18 and pregnant. Her sister has a supportive family, the teenager wrote, but there is so much to know about having a baby.

But knowing what you don't know is also an inexhaustible subject, suggested winner James Danckert, associate psychology professor at UW.

The book he would like to find — it's titled *Agnotology: A Complete Users Guide To Ignorance In All Its Myriad Forms* — would prepare a person for the journey of discovery, he wrote. Incidentally, the book's author is Ein Onating.

Morton's curiosity about the universe sparked this year's contest question. He says he has read every book, listened to every podcast, and watched every film he can find on the topic.

"It sometimes does keep me awake," he says. "Where does the universe come from and how can something come from nothing? It's partly a metaphysical, partly intellectual puzzle."

His interest in the universe began when he was a child growing up with seven siblings on a farm in the southeast corner of Saskatchewan. The huge Prairie sky and the extremes in temperature — dipping to minus 40 C in winter and soaring to 40 C in summer — made him aware of beginnings and endings and transitions, he says.

"This notion of things . . . coming back from the extremes of cold" intrigued him, says Morton, 48. It also "got me thinking about origins" when his parents adopted three children and fostered 70 others, he says.

He remembers pondering the universe when he was 15 and his parents allowed him to stay home from school during a total eclipse of the sun.

"The chickens started to run to the chicken coop and the three dogs howled at the moon while the cows moaned," he recalls. "It was dim but the memorable thing was there were no shadows."

Morton, who has been studying Arabic for the last three years, says he thought initially that he personally would like to have an all-knowing book that would give him perfect fluency in the language.

But then, he says, he realized he enjoyed the process of learning too much.

- Read the winning entries (and the honourable mentions) online at the Loving to Learn Day website at <http://cte.uwaterloo.ca/L2L>

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