Which direction?

Two explosions, three people dead, and more than 100 people injured. The attack on marathon runners and bystanders this past week in Boston continues to dominate news headlines. Social media has also been set ablaze, with everybody offering their two cents as to whom may have been behind the attack. One comedian’s—yes, a comedian—take on the disastrous event is worth noting. He observed that when the bombs went off there were people running towards the explosions, ready to risk everything in order to help.

As Christians, we are in the middle of a spiritual battle, and disasters will only grow in number as Christ's return draws nearer. The question is, when tragedy strikes, which direction will we run? Away from the danger in fear, or towards the trouble to those who desperately need our help?
Feature film begins historic production

Scripts are being finalised, storyboards completed and filming locations set for an Australian Union Conference (AUC) heritage film project entitled Tell The World.

Is there hope for hip-hop?

You may be surprised, but there is powerful poetry embedded in hip-hop songs—poems written from the heart, asking big questions.

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An ounce of prevention

Despite a number of bitter experiences and a warning from Ellen White, the Adventist community remains particularly susceptible to health extremism. And no extreme is more dangerous today than the movement against basic childhood vaccinations.
Feature film begins historic production

Scripts are being finalised, storyboards completed and filming locations set for an Australian Union Conference (AUC) heritage film project entitled Tell The World.

“This film will clearly show God’s leading in the establishment of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and our commitment to biblical teachings,” said AUC president and executive producer, Pastor Chester Stanley. “We’re making Tell The World not only as a powerful evangelistic resource but as a nurturing tool. It will teach young people about the dynamic beginnings of our Church and re-inspire long-term members.”

The film will follow prominent pioneers of the Church, including Joseph Bates, James White, John Nevins Andrews and Ellen Harmon, as they discover new Bible truths.

Originally planned as a DVD series, the production has escalated into an entirely dramatised, full-length, historic feature film—something never previously attempted by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

“As we progressed through the planning stages the vision grew to the point where we decided to make the most of our opportunity to document our Church’s history in a modern medium,” Pastor Stanley said. “We’re striving to make it as professional and inspirational as
possible.”

Utilising specialised talent from Hollywood to prepare the script, the Adventist Media Network (AMN) at Wahroonga, NSW, is producing the film.

“Hollywood is known for its great storytelling and Adventism has a great story,” said Dr Allan Lindsay, the project’s chief historian. “Our goal is to be as truthful to our story as we can be. We have a team of historians auditing our script to make sure we tell the story accurately and maintain the integrity of the film.”

AMN’s Kyle Portbury, director of Tell The World, is excited about the authentic filming locations he found while scouting overseas. “We discovered a pioneer village in Canada that is practically perfect to tell our story in,” he said. “The look and feel is not only mid-1800s New England, but being a ‘living history’ village there is a high level of authenticity that you only get when people plough a field every year with 170-year-old equipment or still bake bread in an original 1840s bakery. We think the set alone will transport the audience back in time.”

Filming will commence mid-2013 following the completion of pre-production work, including actor auditions and costuming.
Visit `<auc.adventist.org.au>` for more information.
I've been listening to poetry lately; powerful poems, written from the heart, asking big questions. Surprisingly, I've found these poems embedded in hip-hop songs. I say surprisingly, as I generally avoid the hip-hop genre altogether and it certainly wasn't the place I expected to find profound thoughts. But recently I made a conscious decision not to ignore an art form that has swept the world and is so meaningful to so many people. I see it as a bridge into the life of a generation twice removed.

The content of some of the lyrics is fascinating—the artists are crying out for meaning and understanding; they are relating to the big questions in life about existence, identity and purpose. Through hip-hop, these foundational questions are receiving mainstream radio airplay in contemporary society.

Take for example “Maybe Tomorrow” by Chance Waters, a catchy song full of rhymes about an impending world apocalypse:

I heard a preacher man claiming that the rapture’s coming/He blamed it on the gays, and Democrats, and probably someone else —

I didn’t really pay it mind, I’ve learned from life that;

I would fall for anything if I refuse to stand for something….Don’t you know, there’s not too long to go.

I've met a man who knows, he said the world will end on, (someday, someday).
I sat in my car and wondered about the religious background of Waters, and if he was lurking around the edges of any church. As an independent artist, he uploaded some of his songs to Triple J Unearthed—a website that allows anyone in Australia who thinks they can make good music to upload some songs and promote themselves. So I went to Waters' Unearthed page. Here I found a song that gave me goosebumps. It's called “Infinity”. The lyrics didn’t fit with the stereotyped, generalised view I had about hip-hop:

Before time had a name, well life had a face

When everybody shared that place,

before all that we know was let loose from its chains.

Pandora’s Box can’t be closed again.

Every particle of energy in me and you,

love and hate and every eye we see it through.

Every piece and part of me, every key and harmony,

is woven from the start of things and singing this tune...

I don’t know if there’s a grand design,

or we found some dice and got the gambling type.

Or are we just one more stop for the hands of time?

Or here with a reason, a man divine?

If it all boils down to the collision of atoms,

can we act as if it matters if we black the skies?

If everything we do is just a stitch in the pattern,

and choice is an illusion in the map of our lives.

Then, I don’t know if I can stand it to try to make
Seth Sentry is another Australian hip-hop artist receiving a fair amount of airplay, especially for "My Scene"—an amusing song about trying (and failing) to find a sense of belonging in different types of social groups. Many of the songs on Sentry’s latest album address the emptiness of consumption and greed. One particular song is called “Ink Blot Test”:

But I feel so alone on the globe spinning.

So I jumped up and made a god in my own image.

Spun a gun around a sun.

Simple.

Printed up a couple of bumper stickers for the gift store.

Not sure what I exist for?

So I think by the wishful, drink by the fishful.

I got the devil in the details, Bible in the porn stash.

That's what I'm seeing in the Rorschach."

How many young people would identify with feeling alone on the globe spinning, not sure what they exist for, thinking by the wishful? How many are just as conflicted between faith and the appeal of hedonism?

Being a complete hip-hop novice, I did a quick web search about Christianity in hip-hop. As the first results came up on my screen I felt like I had thrown myself head-first into a viscous boxing match. Links came up to articles praising Christian hip-hop as a valid evangelistic approach, alongside links with text such as: “being a ‘Holy Hip Hopper’ is just like saying I am a ‘Holy Pimp’.” The extraordinarily popular Kanye West (so popular Barack Obama referred to him occasionally during his presidential campaign) has a song called "Jesus Walks", where he repeatedly declares his devotion to Jesus while noting that:

They say you can rap about anything except for Jesus/
That means guns, sex, lies, video tapes/But if I talk about

God my record won't get played. Huh?

Every year Australia’s Triple J (the ABC’s youth radio network) holds what they call “the world’s biggest song democracy”—where they invite anyone to vote on what they think are the best songs of the year. The results were announced in January. Chance Waters and Seth Sentry both had two songs in the top 100. These two artists are asking big questions about life and meaning, and their fans are demonstrating resonance with these questions, hence the popularity of the songs.

This raises the question: how should I talk to a young person who’s listening to the Seth Sentry rap “Ink Blot?” How do I share that my faith helps me not to feel "alone on the globe spinning" in a way that is relevant to someone 20 years or more younger than me? The good news is that they have the same profound questions we all have, and that God has answers that speak to every heart in every age. But how can I provide those answers in a culturally relevant manner that cuts through the noise and avoids the clichés? Maybe there's a young person in my church family who has “Infinity” on repeat in the headphones they always seem to be wearing. Are we able to help them find answers to their questions with a song of truth and hope?

Michelle Abel is an international community development consultant based in Sydney. She is currently working on projects in Papua New Guinea and Rwanda. She previously lived in Mongolia and Papua New Guinea, where she worked for ADRA.
An ounce of prevention

If you’ve never been to Howick, I’d recommend a visit. It’s a lovely village, situated on the eastern side of Auckland. In the middle of Howick’s high street is a picturesque pub, and at the end stands a quaint church surrounded by an old graveyard. Walking down the street, it feels very much like you’ve wandered into a village in Surrey or Berkshire in south-east England. If that’s not enough to tempt a visit, views of beautiful Cockle Bay entice from the higher points of the village.

When I was in Howick, that old graveyard beckoned me in. I’m not morbid, but there’s something oddly appealing about reading gravestones from a bygone age. I suppose the inscriptions provide perspective. And they’re often deeply affecting. Maybe all that perspective and pathos is the reason I was the solitary figure wandering in the cemetery that day, while across the road people bustled by on their errands.

But it was what I read on a special memorial that stopped me in my tracks. It turns out that in 1854, Howick had an epidemic. Three of the vicar’s children died within nine days of each other—a little boy and two little girls. His family was not alone in tragedy. Fifty children in all died and were buried in little graves in this peaceful Anglican churchyard and the nearby Catholic cemetery. The grief that must have swept this idyllic community sitting on the far edge of the Empire is almost impossible to imagine.

How fortunate we are to live in an era where it has been so long since communicable diseases have decimated our young, that we have almost forgotten about them. So much so, I suppose, that some of us have become enamoured with various movements in opposition
to common sense, proven measures necessary to ensure we do not return to an era where cemeteries are full of lifeless little bodies.

The fascination with novel health theories is not entirely surprising. Adventists have a long history of health extremism. So long, that right from our beginning, Ellen White dedicated substantial time warning us against getting carried off on fanatical tangents. For example, in 1868 she castigated “extremists [who] would run health reform into the ground”.

Being around physicians for much of my life, I grew up hearing my father warn against a whole host of bizarre “health” fads in the Church. There were those who were travelling offshore for injections of the essence of apricot kernel to treat their cancer, with predictable results; others who refused modern medicine in total. And then there was the remarkable array of exotic diets. There was the church member who couldn’t hold down a job because he restricted his diet to dried fruit which, to put it politely, had a rather drastic impact on his digestive system. And the woman who was feeding her children raw soybeans. Suffice to say, you wouldn’t want to be stuck next to those kids on a long flight!

Despite our community’s bitter experience, however, we remain particularly susceptible to health extremism. And no extreme is more dangerous today than the movement against basic childhood vaccinations.

“It is useless to attempt to reason a man out of a thing he was never reasoned into,” observed Jonathan Swift, and in my experience his observation remains as true today as when he made it in the 1700s. So I won’t try. After all, if you’re willing to believe the whole medical world is part of a grand conspiracy that has stretched from Louis Pasteur to your local Adventist doctor, what am I going to say to convince you otherwise?

What I do intend, however, is to firstly encourage those on the fence to listen to health professionals (see the excellent article by Dr Andrew Pennington here, not internet speculation—no matter how firmly stated or how well the speculation might be presented. And, secondly, let’s ensure we never confuse the wonderful Adventist health message with the wanton rejection of proven medical advances.

I’m glad we chose to vaccinate our precious children. It was the right thing to do for them, and for other children they come in contact with. And I am deeply grateful that I live in an era of low infant mortality due, in large part, to the wonderful blessing of childhood vaccination. If per chance you’re tempted to turn your back on modern medicine, maybe a walk through an old graveyard will help provide perspective.

James Standish is editor of RECORD.