



### Top Stories

#### Eurovision '82 winner Nicole talks about 'Ein bißchen Frieden', her success and the Contest today

German recording artist and Eurovision winner Nicole talks to Wikinews' Mike Halterman, discussing her three-decade career and her thoughts on the contest that made her famous.



*Credit: Nikolaj Georgiew*  
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#### Heavy snow fall disrupts UK transportation and communications

Heavy snow has caused transport and communications problems in the United Kingdom. Air, train and bus services have been disrupted. The area worst affected is the south east and London. Snow is expected to spread north across the United Kingdom.



*Credit: Nick Farnhill*  
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#### American swimmer Michael Phelps laments "bad judgment" in marijuana controversy

U.S. Olympic swimmer Michael Phelps has apologized to fans following tabloid pictures of him smoking a marijuana pipe.



### Wikipedia Current Events

The United States Senate confirms Eric Holder as Attorney General.

- United States department store Macy's announces it will cut 7,000 jobs.
- Muammar al-Gaddafi is elected Chairman of the African Union.
- A human rights protester throws a shoe at Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao during a speech at Cambridge University.
- Nine people are killed when a hospital is shelled in Puthukkudiyiruppu, Sri Lanka.
- Japan's Mount Asama erupts.
- Heavy snowfall across England closes London City Airport and one runway of Heathrow Airport and shuts down public transport in London.
- The International Criminal Court announces it will investigate Israeli war crimes possibly committed during Operation Cast Lead.
- Chairman Mahmoud Abbas says he will not deliberate with any group that does not recognize the Palestine Liberation Organization.
- The Israel Defense Forces bomb the Gaza Strip in response to Palestinian rocket and mortar fire.
- Wildcat strikes spread across the United Kingdom.

#### €8bn bank bailout in Ireland

The government of Ireland plans to inject €4 billion each into the Bank of Ireland and the Allied Irish Bank.

An insurance scheme to underwrite bad debts would also be created and the banks will attempt to raise €1 billion from shareholders. The two banks have been in need of recapitalization for several weeks. The government had previously offered €2 billion. The deal will see the government take on up to €24 billion of risk from speculative property loans by the banks.

#### Nuclear sites close as more UK workers walkout

Workers at two nuclear facilities in the United Kingdom walked out today in the continuing row about foreign workers.

Contract staff at the Sellafield nuclear recycling facility in Cumbria walked out this morning. They were joined by staff at Heysham nuclear power station in neighbouring Lancashire. Workers at sites affected by industrial action last week walked out again today, with 200 leaving the Fiddlers Ferry Power Station in Cheshire and a further 1,000 at Grangemouth oil refinery and Longannet power station.

The UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown had condemned the wildcat action on Sunday, calling it "counterproductive". This drew criticism from unions and opposition parties as he had

previously promised "British jobs for British workers" at the Labour Party's conference in 2008. Brown has insisted that clarification of European Union law and European Court of Justice decisions will allow people to see that discrimination doesn't take place in future.

The Secretary of State for Business Lord Mandelson has backed the site's owners Total S.A., telling the BBC that the company had "very strongly refuted" the allegations and that he believed them to be right. He added that the media was "feeding this xenophobia". He added that he hoped the rebuttal would calm the situation, saying "I hope in the light of that people will be reassured and call off these unofficial disputes".

This drew an angry reaction from the GMB union. General Secretary Paul Kenny said "Peter Mandelson is in denial about the nature of the problem that has given rise to the dispute. Overseas companies are refusing to employ UK nationals on projects in the UK. That is not right".

Lord Mandelson's shadow, Kenneth Clarke, also condemned the strikes on behalf of the opposition Conservative Party, saying "I understand people being worried about their jobs. I don't think this is the right way to demonstrate it". Some Labour MPs, however, have expressed more sympathy with the strikers. Health Secretary Alan Johnson called for EU law to be changed to stop global companies undercutting local wage rates, while former minister Frank Field said "This form of contract clearly cannot go on, where contracts are awarded and there's free movement of companies but those companies then restrict who can apply for those jobs". Another

former minister, Peter Hain, also sided with the strikers, blaming the government for "gold plating" EU law (making EU-derived laws stronger or stricter than the original directive) and telling them to "stick up for British workers". The leader of the Liberal Democrats Nick Clegg sounded a warning note about changing British or EU law, saying that "any attempt to ban EU citizens from jobs in Britain would be a massive own goal. If every EU country followed suit, we would have to cope with a massive influx of British people who work overseas".

The unofficial protests began on Friday, when workers in industrial plants across the country walked out in sympathy with the staff at Lindsey Oil Refinery in North Lincolnshire. The refinery are striking over the awarding of a contract by the French-owned site to an Italian company. This led to 200-300 Italian and Portuguese workers arriving at the plant. Unions allege that British workers were actively prevented from applying for the jobs.

Protests have continued today outside the refinery.

### **Barclays Bank credit rating downgraded**

An international credit ratings agency has downgraded the creditworthiness of British bank Barclays.

The bank's shares fell on the news that Moody's had cut long-term debt ratings from "Aa1" to "Aa3" on the back of fears of nationalization, significant losses and write downs of more bad loans as the recession bites. The bank's financial strength was also downgraded from "C" to "B". Last week, another agency, Fitch, downgraded the bank one step to

"AA-minus".

Barclays is one of the few major "High Street" banks in the UK not to have taken any government capital support. The support is given in return for shares, giving the government significant - sometimes even controlling - stakes in other banks, such as Lloyds Banking Group and the Royal Bank of Scotland Group.

Moody's said that the downgrades "reflect [our] expectation of potentially significant further losses at Barclays as a result of write-downs on credit market exposures as well as an increase in impairments in the UK, which could weaken profitability and capital ratios... [we consider] the systemic importance of the bank and the likelihood of receiving government support in case of need to be high."

The bank has forecast a pre-tax profit of £5.3 billion for 2008. It has £36 billion in committed capital equity and expects gross write downs of £8 billion. The bank has recently been referred to the UK's Serious Fraud Office over allegations of breaching South Africa's foreign exchange controls, something the bank denies.

### **American swimmer Michael Phelps laments "bad judgment" in marijuana controversy**

U.S. Olympic swimmer Michael Phelps has apologized to fans following tabloid pictures of him smoking a marijuana pipe.

The 23-year-old multiple gold medalist was pictured yesterday in the British Sunday newspaper The News of the World apparently using a "bong" at a University of South Carolina party he attended whilst visiting a friend on

November 6, 2008. He released a statement on his Facebook wall, saying "I engaged in behavior which was regrettable and demonstrated bad judgment."

The statement said "I'm 23 years old, and despite the successes I have had in the pool, I acted in a youthful and inappropriate way, not in a manner that people have come to expect from me. For this, I am sorry. I promise my fans and the public - it will not happen again."

Marijuana is banned by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) when athletes are actually competing, but not outside of that. Phelps therefore is unlikely to face sanctions from WADA because of the incident. However, US swimming officials and Fédération Internationale de Natation (FINA), the international swimming federation, will comment later on their thoughts about the incident. FINA banned Gary Hall for three months in 1998 for marijuana use.

Phelps has never failed a drugs test in his career and has previously volunteered for extra testing as part of the sport's campaign against performance enhancing drugs. He does, however, have a conviction for drunken driving gained when he was 19. Phelps was named as the U.S. Olympic Committee's male athlete of the year last week and was also Sports Illustrated magazine's "Sportsman of the Year" in 2008. He has endorsement contracts with Speedo, Visa, Guitar Hero and Frosted Flakes.

### **Heavy snow fall disrupts UK transportation and communications**

The heaviest snow to fall for 6 years has caused transport

problems in some parts of the United Kingdom, especially in London, where it was the heaviest snow for 18 years. It was caused by cold air travelling westwards towards the British Isles from Poland and Russia. As showers moved across the North Sea towards the east coast of Britain, it fell as snow. Throughout Monday, weather fronts pushed in from the south east in Belgium and France towards the South East of Britain. The weather fronts pushed their way further north and westwards.

Almost a foot (30cm) of snow has fallen in the south-east of England, halting train and bus services and making driving treacherous. Flights to and from London's Heathrow and City airports and the outer London Gatwick and Stansted airports are suffering delays and cancellations. In some affected areas, the majority of schools have been closed.

The centre of London, which usually sees no snow at all most years, has around 4" (10cm) of laying snow, whilst Kent, Sussex and Surrey have up to 10" (25cm). The snow reduces further north but has still disrupted travel, with England's Highways Agency advising against car journeys unless essential. The agency had 500 gritters clearing main roads during the night and 600 motorway patrols out in the morning. Stretches of motorway and main road have been blocked by jack-knifed lorries or closed as a pre-emptive measure.

The snow caused disruption to British transport websites, with National Rail Enquiries, Transport for London and South West Trains websites all brought down by heavy traffic. The Highways Agency's site was also unavailable and returned with interactive

features turned off. People calling and texting during the abortive rush hour jammed the mobile telephone networks. Mobile network '3' said it had seen "a very steep jump in the number of picture message sent across the network" whilst T-Mobile UK reported 73% more calls, 21% more texts and 20% more broadband bandwidth being used than usual.

The Met Office has a severe weather warning in place for England, Wales and parts of Scotland, with further snow expected across the country later in the week.

### **Canadian National buys Chicago railroad**

Canadian National (CN), the Montreal-based rail operator, has bought the main lines of the U.S. Elgin (EJ&E).

CN began to buy the railway from U.S. Steel in September 2007. Regulatory approval in the US was given in January. The Canadian railway company will use the lines to avoid congestion in Chicago, taking freight along a 300km loop through the American Midwest. The route will begin the new operations on March 4.

U.S. Steel will keep the facilities and staff required to keep the Gary steelworks in Indiana rail connected, renaming the resulting operations to the Gary Railway. The rest of the EJ&E will be integrated into CN's existing networks. The railway passes through suburban areas of Chicago, causing residents to fear the noise and traffic that greater intensity of operation could bring.

The Surface Transportation Board (STB), the US rail regulator, has required CN to make upgrades to

ease local concerns but opponents have vowed to continue to fight against the changes. The Chicago Tribune speculates that CN will switch trains from the former Wisconsin Central line to the EJ&E south of Mundelein. This would reduce traffic in suburbs north of the crossover from 19 trains a day to just two; whilst south of the junction trains would increase from five a day to 20.

CN paid \$300 million for the lines, and will pay \$100 million to upgrade them and \$60 million to make the STB's required improvements.

### **Supercross: Stewart wins 4th consecutive Monster Energy event in San Francisco, California**

Yamaha rider James Stewart led from start to finish to win his fourth consecutive Monster Energy series Supercross race at AT&T Park in San Francisco in front of an almost capacity crowd. Australian Chad Reed, despite a slow start, managed second whilst Kawasaki rider, Ryan Villopoto, took third place.

Having earlier set the fastest time in qualifying, Stewart look determined to win and was a clear winner in his heat race and continued the aggressive approach into the final. Commenting on his win Stewart said ""We are working really hard this year. I felt good tonight and the track was tough. It was an awesome night for me."

For series championship leader Chad Reed, it was a much tougher story. Seemingly down on speed throughout the night Reed had to battle in the final starting from fourth and moved into second place on lap three. Despite having seventeen laps to catch Stewart the 2008 champion was unable to

make any ground on Stewart. Commenting on his disappointment for the night Reed said "Right now that is important and we go back to Anaheim next weekend, so we will work to get better."

The win brings Stewart closer to Reed in the championship points table and now only trails by 6 points with more than half the series still remaining. Yamaha rider Josh Grant remains in third place despite failing to make the podium in San Francisco.

The Supercross Lites provided an entertaining battle between James Weimer, Ryan Dungey and Trey Canard. Leading for the first eleven laps Weimer held his line as Dungey tried an aggressive pass that saw him lose control and crash. Canard took advantage to move into second. Managing to restart the race, Dungey eventually caught and passed Canard to finish second behind race winner Weimer.

During the intermission the crowd was thrilled by the Jägermeister stunt team which included the rare feat of four riders performing reverse summersaults of the same ramp in sequence.

The next round of the series takes place in Anaheim California on the 7th February.

### **Eurovision '82 winner Nicole talks about 'Ein bißchen Frieden', her success and the Contest today**

It has been nearly 27 years since Nicole, then a high school student from the Saarland in extreme western Germany, sang a heartfelt plea for world peace on the stage at the Eurovision Song Contest held in Harrogate, North Yorkshire in the United Kingdom. That

simple message was wrapped with success; she became the first German in Contest history to take home the grand prize. The song was a brainchild of her former record producer, Ralph Siegel, and would be their greatest achievement in their nearly three-decade partnership.

Afterward, she was propelled to stardom across Europe by recording versions of her winning song, "Ein bißchen Frieden" (A little peace), in many European languages. To this day, it was the last winning Eurovision song to top the charts in the United Kingdom; it also has the distinction of being the 500th #1 single on the British charts.

This newfound fame brought her music to audiences across Europe, and in time, into Asia as well. By the end of the 1980s, however, her fame subsided somewhat and she refocused her career domestically. Since 1980, she has released over 30 albums in Germany; her most recent offering, *Mitten ins Herz* (Right into your heart), was accompanied by a three-month "unplugged" tour that ended in the third week of January.

Now off the road, Nicole spoke with Wikinews' Mike Halterman about her past success, her life and career today, and her overall impressions of the Eurovision Song Contest, both past and present. This is the first in a series of interviews with past Eurovision contestants, which will be published sporadically in the lead-up to mid-May's next contest in Moscow.

#### *Early career*

Mike Halterman (Wikinews): You started out performing at the age of 6. Was this an interest you

really wanted to pursue at such a young age? Did you ever feel pressured by your family in any way to succeed musically, or were they very supportive?

Nicole: Actually, I started out performing at the age of 4. When I got my first applause, it was clear to me what my profession would be, and my family gave me the utmost support.

MH: When did you start to consider music as a full-time career?

Nicole: At the age of 16, after the great success I had with my first record, *Flieg nicht so hoch, mein kleiner Freund* (Don't fly so high, my little friend).

MH: You started your partnership with Ralph Siegel back when you were 16. How did he decide to give you a record contract? Did you have any doubts about signing it?

Nicole: He was the first one who believed in me after hearing my voice and I had no doubt that he was the right person for a [musical] partnership.

#### *Eurovision '82 and mainstream success*

MH: Did any of your inspirations and goals change when you signed your record contract, or appeared in Eurovision?

Nicole: I was trying to find my own way. After I signed my record contract everything changed. Especially after winning the Eurovision Song Contest.

MH: Were you ever torn about eventually putting your singing over your guitar skills?

Nicole: I liked playing the guitar in "Ein bißchen Frieden". It was a good combination, wasn't it? Afterwards I put the guitar "into the corner" so I could be more mobile on stage.

MH: The bookmakers Ladbrokes had the United Kingdom as the favorite to win back in 1982. Going into the Contest, especially knowing that Germany hadn't won at that point, did you feel daunted?

Nicole: I expected to win. After the first rehearsal, everybody could feel the magic of the song and its message. It was my song!

MH: Many of the songs and performers who performed for Germany before you performed sweeping ballads, with dramatic melodies, in sometimes very showy performances. And here you come in, a young girl from the Saarland, guitar in hand, singing a modest offering, asking for peace. Do you feel the lack of complexity in the song and performance perhaps gave it a special kind of appeal?

Nicole: I was honest in everything [I said] and sang what the people were thinking at that time. Asking for peace was also in their minds.

MH: During the 1980s, you had a string of hits in Germany, and released singles and albums across Europe and into Asia as well. Whose idea was it to give you exposure in Asia?

Nicole: It was the idea of the record company and Ralph Siegel.

MH: Did you have pleasant experiences doing promotional tours over there? What thing do you remember most fondly?

Nicole: We went to the Tokyo Yamaha Festival and won second place there with "So viele Lieder sind in mir" (There are so many songs inside me). I learned to introduce myself [to people] in Japanese. That's what I remember fondly and I haven't forgotten one word to this day.

MH: You've continued to release albums nearly every year since the early 1980s, but a lot of your mainstream chart success ended in that decade as well. Did you feel discouraged when that started to happen?

Nicole: Not really. I've now been in this business for 29 years. I take it as an Olympic swimming competition. There's an A-final and a B-final. You don't have to be first every time, but you have to take care and swim with the others in the A-final.

#### *Career today*

MH: In many European circles, "schlager" is almost looked upon as if it were a dirty word, synonymous with "uncool" or "out of touch." Do you feel that common threads in schlager songs (namely love and feelings) get stigmatized and mocked, and do you think that's fair?

Nicole: That doesn't faze me much. To me, the audience is the most important thing. I did an unplugged tour a few weeks ago with all the songs from the last three decades. It was fantastic to get standing ovations (nearly 20 minutes every evening).

MH: Where was your favorite place to perform?

Nicole: The best place to perform was the "Schmidt's Tivoli" in Hamburg where we also recorded the "Live DVD."

MH: In your long career, you have released over 30 albums. Do you have any regrets as far as directions your career has taken? If you could do anything over again, would you?

Nicole: I would do the same all over again, no doubt!

#### *General thoughts about Eurovision*

MH: And 27 years later, you remain the only Eurovision winner

from Germany.

Nicole: In 1982, it was the right song, with the right girl, at the right place. As I said before, it was a three-minute magic moment when I was on stage. An honest girl with an honest authentic song, telling a message everybody understood.

MH: Some of the German performers and entries in recent years had inventive themes, especially Roger Cicero's swing song and Texas Lightning's country performance. How do you feel about these "theme" entries?  
 Nicole: In my opinion, every artist should be authentic, no matter what kind of song.

MH: Do you feel the allegations of "bloc voting," favoring Eastern European countries over Western European countries (of which Germany is a part), are true? Also with the advent of telephone voting, do you feel the Contest has drifted in a direction where Eurovision is no longer "about the song"?

Nicole: Yes, it's true. The eastern European countries obviously support each other with the so-called "bloc voting." It's now a political affair and no longer a "song contest."

MH: Do you ever see yourself returning to the Eurovision stage as the German representative?

Nicole: No. I can't top being #1.

MH: Will you be a part of the German delegation going to Moscow this year? If no decision has been made yet, would you like to go?

Nicole: I haven't been asked yet, but of course I would like to be a part of the German delegation. Eurovision is still on my mind.

MH: In closing, what would you

like to say to all of your fans who have followed your career these past three decades?

Nicole: I want to thank all my fans for their loyalty and believing in me and my music. Thanks for walking side by side with me through the years.

**Today in History**

1488 – Portuguese explorer Bartolomeu Dias landed in Mossel Bay, having sailed around the Cape of Good Hope and the southern tip of Africa.

1959 – Hours after appearing at the Surf Ballroom in Clear Lake, Iowa, USA, American rock and roll musicians Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, and J.P. "The Big Bopper" Richardson were killed when their plane crashed shortly after taking off from the nearby Mason City Municipal Airport.

1966 – The Soviet spacecraft Luna 9 became the first space probe to land on the Moon and transmit pictures from the lunar surface to Earth.

1996 – A 7.0 Ms earthquake struck Lijiang City, Yunnan, China, killing at least 200 people and injuring 14,000 others.

2007 – A large suicide truck bomb exploded in a busy market in Baghdad, Iraq, killing at least 135 people and injuring 339 others.

February 03 is Setsubun in Japan; Four Chaplains' Day in the United States

**Quote of the Day**

The whole duty of man consists in being reasonable and just ... I am reasonable because I know the difference between understanding and not understanding and I am just because I have no opinion about things I don't understand.  
 ~ Gertrude Stein

**Word of the Day**

oleaginous adj

1. Oily, greasy.

2. (of manner or speech) Falsely or affectedly earnest; persuasively suave.

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