11-1976

Klipsun Magazine, 1976, Volume 07, Issue 01 - November

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Life as a Cocktail Waitress

Who Says Silence is Golden?

Mushroom Mecca
This is our first magazine of the quarter and when we set out upon the task of putting it all together, the theme was to be “Adventure.” But as story ideas emerged and final stories took shape this issue evolved into one that was shaped by discovery. Whether it is a student’s discovery of the Speech Clinic’s services or a discovery of self through finding oneself in a new situation — There is a sense of adventure in discovery... both offer a release from the routine.

Sherry Mackenzie
— Editor, KLIPSUN

KLIPSUN welcomes all manuscripts, photographs and suggestions for publication. Please address all comments and submissions to KLIPSUN Magazine, Haggard Hall 111.
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Klipsun is a Lummi Indian word meaning "beautiful sunset."


Front, back and inside cover photos by Cory Boone.
Graphic Artists: Terry Cloherty, Larry Frey.

Klipsun is a twice quarterly publication funded with student fees and distributed without charge. Copyright 1976, KLIPSUN, Western Washington State College, Bellingham, Washington 98225. Published by Washington State Department of Printing, Olympia, Washington.
by Sarah Arney

She flopped into a pile of leaves that someone so kindly swept together for her and stared up through the leafless maple tree above her. She pulled her winter parka closer to her body. The stinging cold air set her back in time to the day she stepped off the plane in Kenai, Alaska.

It was a warm sunny day in April when she boarded the 727 at SeaTac. She'd left the blooming daffodils, her newly planted vegetable garden, and the college life, to face the "cold cruel world." With her first site of downtown Kenai on that sunny day in April she began to realize what was meant by "cold cruel world." The locals were oblivious to the foot and a half of frozen snow and the huge mounds of ice scattered about town. They were wandering around in shorts and T-shirts, while she pulled her wool hat down over her ears.

Herring season started Tuesday morning. At eight a.m. she stood beside a forty-foot table with twenty-four women she'd never seen before, waiting for the first baskets of herring to roll down the ramp. "What do we do?" asked a few of the green "Americans" that had just appeared from the "lower 48." They watched the Alaskans reach into the basket with their rubber gloved hands, grasp the herring's rotten stomach between left thumb and forefinger and use the right thumb to pop out that precious bundle of Japanese Caviar. The roe went into a plastic basket in front of her and the rest of the dead fish went into the trough of running water to be washed back to sea.

Two hours later the Philippino crew at the end of the table quit shoving filled baskets down the screeching rollers and the water in the trough stopped flowing. The squish splash squish splash squish splash of herring being squeezed and dumped stopped. She looked up to discover the Kenai Packer Coffee Break.

Twenty-five herring squeezers led by their boss, Norma, eleven Philippino laborers, and several miscellaneous white Anglo-Saxon males gathered in line for the highlight of the coffee break — Carl's Cinnamon Rolls. Carl, a foxy little Philippino man, baked the most scrumptious cinnamon rolls west of Kenai Lake. He liked to make the women happy by serving them fresh out of the oven.

The first few days of work she was very careful to remove her white plastic apron, covered with fish slime and guts, and to wash her hands viciously with soap and hot water before joining the others in the coffee line. She soon realized she would have to wrestle one of those 5'7", 190 pound Alaskan herring squeezers or hurry to be first in line for a cinnamon roll. Those women knew the tricks. They took three of Carl's four inch cinnamon rolls the first time through — in case none were left five minutes later.

If the coffee they provided destroyed everyone's stomach linings and perhaps a good share of their brain cells, it also provided some warmth for thawing fingers and helped raise body temperature a few degrees. Working conditions were not exactly a duplicate of Vahalla, unless the Norwegians dream of floating down the river on an ice chunk forever after.
The giant warehouse where the twenty five herring squeezers performed their duties is located on a dock at the mouth of the Kenai River. Two large doorways on either side of the squeezing table were left open so the squeezers would not be sick from the smell of rotten fish. A large doorway at the end of the table remained open because that's where the herring were brought in. The workers could see ice and snow plowed into piles, the Kenai River filled with floating ice chunks, and Baluga whales (now and then). The stark white mountains loomed on the horizon against the clean deep blue sky. The blue sky meant sunshine but the sunshine didn't mean warmth. The temperature held close to 25°F for most of April and worked it's way up to 40°F in May. On stormy days when the April rain showers brought wind and snow, the doors were closed and the thousands of silvery little herring cast a smelly luminous glow throughout the warehouse.

The jabbering women adjusted to the smell of rotten herring, generated a little warmth by bitching about their "lazy old men," and bickered about how late they would work that night. Every morning at 8:30 the first rumor would sweep down the line, "we'll get off at five tonight because they're low on fish" then an hour later, "the Airdale is on its way in with a load of big herring." No one really knew until they were in their car on the way home.

Every now and then the women were interrupted by the slap of a herring on the back of the neck. The passing maintenance men enjoyed tormenting the squeezers. But Norma was never too far away to protect her girls. She glared menacingly at any trouble-makers and she was at hand to pat one's back too, when that seemed necessary. She assured the forlorn, "If you can make it through the first week you can finish the season." She never let anyone know when she was cold or tired, but when her boss hassled her she was ready to quit. "Twenty years is enough." But the regulars assured the new girls that her threats were common.

The atmosphere changed one day with an order from the top. A bonus would be awarded to all squeezers; twenty cents per pound for every pound over twenty per hour. Hmmm, she figured quickly in her head; twenty pounds per hour for eight hours is 160 pounds. If I do 10 pounds more I get $2 bonus. If I do 100 pounds more I get $20 bonus. I make a basic wage of $3.20 an hour, $26.50 for an eight hour day. I can double and triple that if I really work! She was motivated. She knew there had to be something about the "cold cruel world." "Maybe I'll get high," she thought.

So for the next few days she worked through her coffee break, forgetting the pleasure of Carl's cinnamon rolls and remembering the awful stewed coffee. She worked 45 minutes of the hour lunch break taking time only for a trip to the WC and a mug of cup-a-soup. On ten and twelve hour days she forced herself to stop for dinner logically rationalizing that she needed rest and nourishment to finish the day, let alone to earn a bonus. Temperatures didn't improve much but she pushed that discomfort out of her mind. She felt the greatest pain in the early morning before starting work and late at night on the way home. The cold and the muscular ache of pushing so hard for so long surfaced when she stopped thinking about the money. In the evenings she couldn't even write home, her hands were stiff, all she could do was sit at Kenai Joe's bar or in front of the TV with her hands around a cup of hot chocolate or a hot toddy.

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"The real tears came when she received her paycheck."

basket of roe, only to be awakened in the still dark morning by the numbness of her hands. With a little time and rubbing they would slowly return to life and by eight o'clock she reached into her basket of fish, ready again to make her fortune. At times she found her hands were slowing to a less painful rate. Her runny nose and throbbing hands kept dragging her down. Through tears of pain and frustration she pushed to squeeze faster reminding herself she would make her fortune this year and never have to work again. Then she flew through another basket of herring at an ever higher speed from a newly found source of energy. But that energy would fade away and the tears would return.

The real tears came when she received her paycheck. Several weeks into the season, when conditions were good, the fish were big and rotten, not frozen, her hands were strong, and her motivation was high, she was slapped in the face by Uncle Sam. Gross earnings for one week — $580.40. After all charges were deducted she received a check for $356.19. Still a considerable amount, more than she'd ever made before, in a month, let alone one week. She knew she would get a lot of the income tax back, but the shock made her think twice about all the pain she was going through. Uncle Sam got forty per cent and she was the one to suffer!

She started a new plan of attack the next morning. She tried to maintain a somewhat steady speed while talking and laughing with the locals. She went to lunch with Judy, who traveled to Alaska to work the summer five years ago and she hadn't been back to the lower 48 since. They drank wine for lunch and then had to force themselves back to work on time. Norma asked her why she wasn't flying through those baskets of herring anymore and she just laughed and asked if she might get fired soon. Instead of throwing her emptied baskets against the wall behind her she stacked them properly and was pleasantly rewarded when a very short old Philippino worker named Ben thanked her with a broad smile on his face. He brought her handfuls of roe to repay the favor.

After thirty five days straight of working from eight to twelve hours a day the announcement was finally made that there would be a day off. No work tomorrow. The order came from the head honcho, it wasn't a rumor. "The first day off in five weeks," she thought to herself, "What will I do with myself?" She knew she would have no trouble sleeping all day . . . in fact she could probably sleep three days. But Judy had a better idea. "Why don't you come home with me?" she suggested with the typical Alaskan hospitality (you can't say no). "My old man is dying to meet you. We don't have a mansion, or a bedroom, but it is our home and our friends are always welcome." So they went home, built a fire in the wood stove of their one room cabin, drank lots of homemade wild currant wine, and ate moose steak. They walked on the beach of Cook Inlet hoping to see a Baluga whale go by, and watched Mt. Iliamna, wondering how soon the active volcano might erupt.

Work was secondary during the next few weeks. Every Monday someone prophesied that week would be the last. The squeezers had to spend much of their time sorting the roe into grades one through five depending on the size. The Japanese watched over with dollar signs in their eyes, but the dollar signs had disappeared from the squeezers' eyes because they received no bonus for sorting. They worked no more overtime. Days were getting warmer. Hats and coats and long Johns were being shed. The nights were getting shorter; the sun set at 10 p.m. and rose again at three. Herring season was gradually ending.

One day word was passed to her that a cannery tender, the Airdale, would be sailing for Seattle the next morning. She could ride the boat down if she wanted to. She walked away from Kenai Packers that afternoon and noticed that the snow had melted. It was early June and the ground was beginning to turn green with grass. Through the trees she could see a cow moose grazing with her calf. So this is Alaska. She pondered on what her mind and body had been through the last two months, and she walked on home to write a letter to her family. "They offered me a good job for Salmon season . . . maybe I'll see you in September."
I gulped half a cup of hot coffee — grabbed my pack — tossed my coat on — shot for the door — yelled good-bye over my shoulder. Legs churning, I hurried into the empty darkness and cold rain . . . only to see the gray hulk of a bus pull away.

I felt like even the lights were laughing at me as they blinked on around the corner.

Clutching my bus token, I was numb (except for the scalded portion of my mouth). Missing it had become almost routine, but I still had that sinking feeling each time it happened. I turned and started trudging back to visit a while longer with my friends.

As I tromped along, I considered for the umpteenth time how much easier it would be if I had my own transportation. But the elusive bucks were, and still are, difficult if not outright impossible to gather for the sole purpose of buying a car.

I began to rationalize. Walking is healthy, cheap and non-polluting, right? Yet, those shining qualities seemed to tarnish when I thought of walking alone at night or trying to trudge uphill for 15 blocks loaded down with three sacks of groceries and a guitar case.

Even so, I had been avoiding the bus system for years. I'm not sure why, but I knew I didn't like 'em. I usually managed to find rides with friends or I toughed it out. But recently, a friend had put it to me straight. I could: (a) Forget all evening trips (b) Limit my perception of the world to within walking distance (c) Learn to use the bus service or (d) None of the above.

I was tempted to go for (d) but I opted for (c). How could I lose?

At least I was not alone with my anxiety. I found lots of college students were afraid to use the busses. Even the most confident and intelligent types got an uneasy look in their eyes as they waited for the bus. And some loathed the inconvenience of having to rely on fixed schedules and route.

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**Bus Ridin' Blues**

_by Sherry Wickwire_

As I frequented various stops, I realized that I wasn't the only one embarrassed to admit how frustrating it was trying to decipher the color-coded bus schedule. Though more often than not, the main hassle was not having a schedule to ponder over.

I was still new at the bus riding game the night I dashed to catch my bus in the rain. I returned to my friends' home where I warmed up and dried off a little before the next episode of "Meet the Bus."

The second time around I left with plenty of time to spare. In fact, my calculations were off as usual, and I shivered outside for almost 20 minutes before spying the bus. At last it squeaked to a stop and opened its doors to me.

Ahh . . . the sense of relief was overwhelming. I had made it! My token jangled musically into the slot and I settled comfortably into a seat.

The bus rumbled and bounced along street after street, punctuating its rhythm with several stops. I spotted my destination up the block and tugged on the cord (twice for good measure).

The bus driver rambled right on by. I was dumbfounded. After agonizing over how to get on, now I was agonizing on how to get off. I still wonder why I didn't yell at the driver. Instead, I just non-chalantly shifted in my seat and silently watched the other riders leave, until it was just me and the driver.

He looked at me questioningly as he made the last stop on the route, and I matter-of-factly said, "I just thought I would acquaint myself with the entire route tonight." He shrugged his shoulders. But after a few awkward minutes of silence, we started up quite a conversation my second trip around. I learned that he was into playing the kazoo and that he was moving to a new apartment soon. And I found out that he disliked driving the bus almost as much as I disliked riding it.

Finally, the bus lurched and made my stop. I was probably more wrung out than if I had walked home. Out of necessity and a little bit out of pride, I won't give up on the system — but I do suffer occasional 'bouts of the blues."
three impressions
by Bruce Shuman
The Drinks Are On Me

by Ann Carlson

Bellingham, Friday, 7 p.m.

The bar isn’t crowded yet, but it will be. It’s a mellow place, with deep cushy couches and dim lights, but the regulars sit at the bar, chatting familiarly with the bartender and checking out newcomers.

I’ve just come on duty, nylons straight, hair brushed, eyelashes mascaraed, and smile stapled into place. Some of the regulars turn from their beers to say hi, knowing I’m new here and curious as to what type of distraction I’ll be. As they look me over, I nervously hope I pass inspection, but I realize that no amount of grooming will compensate for klutzy waitressing.

It’s starting to get busy now, those killing time before a movie, the bar-hoppers, and those settled back into the couches wanting to talk. Armed with cocktail napkins, I thread my way through a maze of tables, chairs and extended legs.

“Hi,” I say to a couple on the couch. “Could I see some I.D., please?”

I say this somewhat apologetically, because they look all set for a good time and I’d hate to louse up their night. But it’s okay — the man is 32, and she’s 26.

“A white cadillac for me, and she’ll have a draft.” I nod and smile and twist my way back to the bar.

The bartender is carefully explaining to someone that he couldn’t make him a pink squirrel, because the creme de noyaux is not in stock. I get his attention, and parrot-like, repeat my orders.

“Marguerita . . . collins . . . black russian . . . sunrise . . . a tall Bud . . . behind my nodding, smiling face, I’ve frantically filed all orders, matching faces with drinks. To convey a sort of serene efficiency, an I’ll-take-care-of-everything sense, I don’t write them down. But I still don’t know what to do with my hands without a pencil.

At the bar, the drinks must be piled on a circular tray, which is balanced on the forearm. The first time I try this, the marguerita sloshes over, wiping away some of the salted rim. “Oh, fart,” I say under my breath. I look up to find several of the regulars watching me. “Nearly lost that one,” I giggle. I managed to maintain a frozen, fixed grin until each drink rested unspilt in the center of each napkin.

The man on the couch beckons me. The lady is still nursing her beer, but he’d like a puma rosa, please.

I’m all caught up now; orders filled, candles lit, ashtrays emptied. I stand at the bar and skewer maraschino cherries and orange slices onto little swords. A man at the end of the bar watches me over his beer. “Gosh, you’re good-lookin’,” he says through an unkept moustache.

“Have another beer,” I suggest. “I get better with each one.”

He snorts. I guess it would have been easier just to smile. New customers, two fatherly looking types, come in. “Two waters,” one says.

“Just water? How ‘bout on the rocks?”

“Naw . . . just two tall waters.”

When I set two glasses of water in front of them, they stared. “Where’s the booze, honey?” the other asks.

“But . . . you said . . .” I stammer red-faced, hoping nobody at the bar was paying attention. Once again I’m victimized by a bar lingo that was invented before I was born. But it’s a faux pas I won’t make again.

The man on the couch waves. He’d like a bloody mary if I could
manage it. The lady is done with her beer and doesn’t want another. I wonder what they’re talking about.

I wonder what a lot of people are talking about. The noise level has gone up here, and voices rise from the chairs and float around my head.

“I think I’ll vote for Carter because he’s more into social issues . . .”

“Yeah, when the moon is full, us Cancers really howl . . .”

“All I want to do is go somewhere and make art . . .”

“In Robbins’ book, the heroine has gigantic thumbs, perfect for hitchhiking . . .”

I feel like I’m the only one sober at a party, a kind of eternal wallflower. I try not to eavesdrop, but there’s a lot being said I find intriguing, and it bothers me, I can’t pull up a chair and join in. But I decide it’s better than a desk job.

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My head is swimming and my feet hurt. I turn to the bathroom, for the quietness and a chance to sit. It’s peaceful in here, and I pause to look at myself in the mirror. Straighten my skirt, smooth my hair . . . damn, it looks like I’m getting a zit on my chin. I wonder briefly if the customers look at me when I take their order and think, “that poor girl has an incredible zit on her chin.” I pull my mind back and readjust my smile. Who knows, it might get me more tips.

The couple on the couch are gone, leaving a pileup of nervously crumpled napkins and a quarter. In their place is a bushy black-haired giant of a man, bearded and pony-tailed, with shirt untucked, standing and singing lewd songs in an offkey husky tenor. Others in the bar watch, their talk suspended. Some leave.

He grabs for me as I walk by. “I’ll have a drink to go,” he roars. “Do you come with it?” My smile is slipping. “No chance.”

The bartender tells him to cool it, but he goes on, a fountain of slurred information. Suddenly he stops. “Ah, you guys don’t have to listen to this shit.” He gallops out the door.

The bartender, who knows most everything about everyone, tells me his story. “He was an all-American athlete in the sixties . . . big, gentle guy who wouldn’t hurt anyone. Then he got turned on to acid, got heavy into drugs, and has been wandering around pixy-like ever since. Now he’s pickled on booze.” Others at the bar nod their heads; the story wasn’t new to them.

The guy on the couch is back, this time alone. He sits in a corner and orders an international stinger. Must have been some conversation.

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It’s late now, and there’s a place at the bar for me to sit and rest my feet. I contemplate the row of bottles, and wonder if I could handle this every Friday. Next to me is a middle-aged man, balding and moustached. He begins to talk. I really am smiled out, but I listen as he tells me about his divorce, his job, and his nine year old kid who likes to hunt. As he leaves, he tells me he’ll drop by next week to see me. I laugh, because he’s a regular and he’d come anyway, but it’s nice to hear.

I can go home now, the bartender says. He’s smiling so I must’ve done okay.

Before the door swings shut, I hear someone ask for a pink squirrel. “Don’t make ‘em,” is all he says.
In October, Democratic candidate for governor, Dixy Lee Ray spoke on campus. Her audience was basically unfriendly until . . . “What is Washington's most valuable resource?” asked Ray. “Mushrooms!” shouted a voice from the back of the room.

Mushroom season! The Northwest is known far and wide as a magic mushroom mecca. A recent in-the-field study revealed harvesters from as far away as eastern Idaho who have come to collect both the everyday table mushrooms and the psilocybin, or ‘magic’ mushrooms that sprout in profusion along the Northwest coast.

Our low altitude and comparatively mild and steady temperatures are both favorable growing conditions. Another plus is western Washington's normal autumn temperatures of between 40 and 60 degrees. The wealth of cow pastures with plenty of dung fertilizer in Whatcom County attract harvesters from less rural areas.

Herewith, some on-the-scene remarks from magic mushroom pickers:

“The reason mushrooms are so . . . appealing is there’s not too many psychedelics around. There’s a natural wave spreading the country . . . this is kind of like free dope.”

“With other drugs, you always have the chance of impurities and you never really know what you’re getting, but with these mushrooms . . . Well, they just seem so clean.”

Another harvester commented on ideal growing conditions:

“Get a good rain, and when the sun comes out they start sprouting. If it’s been cloudy for a few days, all the better. Try to pick fields with longer grass because the ‘shrooms will be longer and have bigger caps.”

“These mushrooms come up over a period of weeks. The ones that are close to the surface get bleached. On rainy days they’re darker and closer to the ground. Rainy days are best because the
mushrooms grow better and the moisture tamps down the grass, so they're easier to find."

Another picker, a young girl, had this comment: "I just pick them for the fun of it. I like to get my nose in the ground and really smell the earth. I haven't found too many mushrooms, but if I do, I give them away."

One poor beleaguered fellow walked around the field asking other gatherers if they had any to sell. "I've been out in the mud and wet for three hours, and I can't go home and tell the guys that I came up with zip."

When questioned about the legal aspects of magic mushrooms, a harvester said, "Used to be possessers could only be prosecuted when the mushrooms had been processed into another form, such as a capsule. Now, everything's changed. They don't bother you on the field, because most are private property, but, legally, they can get you as soon as you walk off."

The County Prosecutor's Office would neither confirm nor deny this report, saying they are not allowed to give free legal advice. However, the Drug Information Center on campus has pamphlets stating the legal penalties for all drugs.

Mushrooms are a natural wonder, most will agree, but there are dangers that everyone, most especially the novice gatherer should be aware of. First, and most important, some wild mushrooms are poisonous.

St. Luke's Poison Control Center averages almost one case of mushroom poisoning per day during the season.

However, the pleasure received seems to outweigh the dangers, as more and more mushroom pickers glean the pastures every autumn.

No matter how you view them — as a free trip, a marketable product, or as another layer on top of your pizza — there is no denying that mushrooms are an added enhancement of living in the soggy Northwest.
I am a stutterer.
I first became aware that I was different than my fellow human beings in the classroom. First grade to be precise. Reading class.
The popular method of teaching children to read in those days was to separate the class into three distinct groups: the good readers, average readers, and the poor readers.
Sally, Spot, and Puff. But how to communicate that knowledge? I wasn’t a misfit was I?

By the time I was twenty-one I had undergone fifteen different kinds of speech therapy. The results were always the same: no progress. I had lost hope that therapy was the answer to my problem. Then I came to Western.

The WWSC Speech and Hearing Clinic, under the direction of Ruth Pratt, began a personal evaluation of my case. A series of conversations between a clinician and myself were recorded. These tape recordings were used to help me determine just how I stutter. For example: were there any particular sounds — vowels or consonants — that I was particularly disfluent upon? People stutter in many different ways. Some may repeat sounds, or syllables, or even entire words; some even repeat whole phrases. The stutterer may also prolong sounds, pause between words, or completely “block” before speaking.

Now, I do all of these things, but one of the most difficult sounds for me to say is the “th” sound. My inability to say this sound has gotten me into some disastrous circumstances. Once, while trying to make a long distance telephone call, I got stuck in the “th” sound. For well over 90 seconds I tried to say the word “three.” Then I totally blocked out. The only sounds I could manage to get out were various grunts, groans, and occasional heavy breathing. The operator, probably thinking I was an obscene phone caller, told me to kiss her ass and cut me off.

The therapy that I am undergoing at the clinic is based upon the presumption that I am making myself stutter. That is, the fear of stuttering makes me tense various parts of my body, particularly the vocal mechanism, to the point that I cannot speak. I am disfluent, so I get more tense, and on around the same vicious circle.

To counter this, the clinic is teaching me to recognize the various tension spots in the body when I am disfluent, to release this tension, and to continue to speak. For example, when making the “th” sound, the tongue is pressed tightly against the teeth. Earlier, in my desire to get the sound out, I was pressing my tongue very hard against the teeth, thereby making it more difficult for myself to say this sound. The clinic has taught me to recognize exactly where this tension is, to relax those parts of the mouth and tongue that were being tensed, and to continue to speak.

Sometimes a stutterer, anticipating trouble with an approaching word, will add a “helper” word or sound to help him through the difficulty. This technique is used by most stutterers to help distract themselves for a moment and slide through a difficult sound or syllable. Unfortunately, this helper technique is only a temporary solution and occasionally causes more problems than it solves.

For example, I found at an early age that if I swore when I was stuttering on a word, the troublesome sound would miraculously spring from my mouth. This ended in getting me in more trouble than I thought imaginable. In a theatre once, I was trying to ask a man in front of me to please remove his hat. I could not for the life of me get the word “hat” out. So I sweetly requested that he take his goddamn sonuvabitchin hat off. He failed to see the humor of the situation, and I quickly found myself ejected from the theatre. Now, all of this was peachy until the trick finally stopped working. Once it did, I was still stuttering, and at the tender age of twelve I had developed the cussing capacity of a thirty five year old sailor.

To rid myself of this verbal extra freight, my therapy program calls for strict attention to these “helper” words and phrases. The objective, of course: to “clean up” my speech. By listening closely to the recorded conversations, I can hear how cluttered my speech really is. Now, by listening closely to myself when I speak, I can detect the words and phrases I use to help me through a difficult sound and eliminate them from my speech.

Another kind of secondary characteristic is a physical tic, gesture or motion. The stutterer, once again trying to distract himself from his habitual speech pattern, will blink an eye, tap his foot, or look away from the person he is speaking to. These secondary physical motions, like the helper words, provide momentary relief for the stutterer, but create long-term problems by becoming ingrained in the stutterer that they become part of his normal body gestures. Unless quickly corrected, they can grow to monstrous proportions.

I, too, picked up a few physical tics in my younger days. I found that by tapping my knee lightly, any word that I was blocking on would spring from my mouth. Slowly, this trick began to fail me, so I tapped my knee harder and bent over slightly. Eventually, I was pounding my knee with my fist and doubling my body in half — and still stuttering. I looked like I was warming up for the Paraplegic Olympics.

As with the helper word therapy, the clinic pays strict attention to the physical secondary traits of stuttering. In my particular form of therapy I was asked to contract every muscle in my body until I was racked with tension. Then I would slowly relax each part of my body, releasing all the tension I could detect. The idea was to make me aware of the dramatic difference in my body when I was relaxed and tense. Another objective was to hone my senses so that I could detect tension in my body, release it, and speak fluently.

Almost every stutterer has an overwhelming fear of at least one specific speaking situation. For some it may be making a telephone call, or speaking to a person in authority or asking a person for a date. Personally, all of these situations scare the hell out of me, but my particular demon is speaking in the
classroom. My fear of this is so intense that I will go to nearly any lengths to avoid it. In junior high school I once contemplated working up a Rex, the Wonder Horse routine. You know, “Brian, how much is 4 plus 5?” and responding by tapping my foot nine times.

Since coming to Western, thanks to the Speech and Hearing Clinic, I have discovered moments when I am fluent in my speech. But this does not erase the experiences of the past.

The stutterer lives in a world dominated by fear. Afraid to speak out, to voice his opinions, not because he lacks them, but because of the quiet chuckling in the back of a classroom, because of the surreptitious glances at a party, because no one will look him in the eye when he has problems with a sound.

The stutterer lives a muffled life of desperation and anxiety. The eloquent phrases he constructs in his mind go unspoken, the people he makes uncomfortable with his anxiety are not to be friends.

The stutterer lives in a world scarred by memories of childhood taunts, of being different, of well-meaning but unqualified advice. “Slow down.” “Take a deep breath and start over.” “Think of what you’re going to say first, then just spit it out.” Of knowing the answers to an instructor’s question, but staying quiet to avoid the giggles, and the silence that erupts in a classroom whenever he opens his mouth to speak.

Once, when I was in high school, a boy much older than me came daily to my homeroom to taunt me, and to do his particular rendition of the Porky Pig gag. I endured this abuse quietly for two weeks. One day, he arrived promptly for his early morning kicks. He left with the imprint of a chair across his face. He later told me, “Ya know, I never thought you minded. I thought you were stupid or something.”

And this is the point, folks: I and other stutterers can deal with the meatheads. What is difficult to deal with are the subtleties of the good peoples’ reactions to us; they lurk in the shadow of the embarrassed looks, the fleeting innuendos, the surreptitious glances, the eyes that never meet.

We realize that you mean well, but think of us like this: The person who stutters is precisely that — a person who stutters — not a person who, because he cannot verbally communicate with the world, has no feelings, thoughts, dreams, intelligence, or sensitivity.

And I am a stutterer.
Besides Fighting Fires
by Peggy Watt

A call comes in at 676-6811. "My husband is having a heart attack!"

The dispatcher barks an address over the Fire Department P.A. system and two men jump to respond. But it's not a fire truck that races out, lights whirling and siren wailing, but an orange-and-white medic unit.

The paramedic and Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) inside check the address and choose the most direct route. In a cardiac attack, it takes only four to six minutes for the brain to start dying for lack of oxygen. They rehearse procedure in their minds.

Already on the scene are EMTs, arriving in an engine from a station nearer the site. They administer cardio-pulmonary resuscitation — simultaneous heart massage and mouth-to-mouth resuscitation — to the unconscious victim until the others arrive.

The medics hook the victim to a datascope to monitor his heartbeat. Then they shock him to get his heart beating. If necessary, they pump oxygen into his lungs through a tube inserted in the trachea, or administer drugs intravenously, with periodic checks on the datascope.

They may work for 30, 45, or 50 minutes, to get the victim's heart in rhythm before transporting him to St. Luke's. He might not be breathing yet — but his heart is beating, and it wasn't when they arrived.

An EMT has 81 hours of training, prerequisite to paramedic study of another 2000 hours. Paramedic trainees attend classes on their own time for more than a year, including hospital work, extra meetings, and medic duty as on-call EMT.

The call might be an auto accident, drowning, epilepsy seizure — anywhere in the city or county. Every call is different.

"We only carry life-saving drugs," Don Spady said, one of the first paramedics in the department. Cardiac arrest calls are the only calls they treat without first consulting the emergency room. The
save rate is 42 per cent — compared to a national average of 10 to 20 per cent.

Bellingham Fire Department's Medic 1 and 2 has grown from a handful of EMTs in a First Aid-stocked station wagon in July 1974 to a staff of 35 EMTs and nine paramedics, with more in training. The units at station 1, 201 Prospect, and station 5, on Northwest Avenue, are manned 'round the clock, with standbys for each as well.

"The program is a total system," Gary Hedberg said, captain of the paramedics. "We'd not have the success we do if not for the 19 fire departments in the county with EMT volunteers." They care for the patient until a medic unit arrives, in an 18-minute run to Blaine or 40 minutes to Mt. Baker. A fire truck responds with the car in the city also for the same reason.

"You've got more time to prepare on a county run — time to ask yourself questions, psych yourself up for the job," said David Hammers, an EMT in paramedic training and on internship shift. "You think, 'Do I know the right drugs to use, the amounts, the proper procedures?'" On-the-job experience, he asserts, is the best training he can get.

"There's no better memory work than a call," he said, "because it impresses you more."

Calls are evaluated later. "The more you're on, the better you get, and the more confident."

Another impression is the emotional reaction, which usually doesn't hit until the work is done and the men leave the hospital.

"You walk out and breathe in relief," Hammers said. "A call is mentally fatiguing. At the time, you don't realize the emotional impact. Say in a coronary call, you work for 30 minutes. There's no time to think of feelings and about the situation. You think of saving the life — your total effort is concentrated on the subject."

That's the way it has to be to do a good job, they agree. But the memories of some calls linger.

It took Hammers about a week to get over the drowning of an 18-month-old girl. "You don't forget, but you don't dwell on it," he said. "Time puts it back in your mind, and other things happen."

"The worst calls are infants. The older they are, the less traumatized I get," said Ron Gustafson, another EMT in paramedic training.

Another reaction is anger, as the trauma in car wrecks involving drunken drivers.

"You are upset at the wasted life," Gustafson said "and resentful at people who endanger others."

"I just try to learn as much as I can and perform as well as I can," Hammers said, "and go in with a good feeling."

Coming back out with that good feeling is the reason they continue in medic aid.

"There's no extra pay — it's through dedication and enjoyment that any of us are here," Spady said. "There's a thrill sensation to go and help another human being and know that what you did helped relieve that person's pain."

"It really is a personal job," Hammers agreed. "You know you've done something to help someone."

They think the greatest service is lowering the morbidity rate by prompt care.

The unit responds to fires, but as medics and not
tor tire suppression. Some miss being firemen, but agree there are definite benefits to medic work.

"Fire-fighting is streaky — comes in spurts," Hammers said. "Here, we use our skills regularly."

And there's a little more action. "There's a higher call rate — you're on the go more often," said Mike Meyer, paramedic trainee.

There's still an instinct to respond to fire calls. "There's a certain amount of glamour to fire-fighting," said paramedic Rick Eherenfieldt. But also more risk — the biggest risk to a medic is speeding to a call.

"Fire-fighters are a strange breed," Hedberd said. "They need more excitement. And the work gives a sense of personal accomplishment, a gratification. You're very well aware of your contribution."

Both Hammers and Gustafson were among 14 men hired when the department sent the first group into paramedic training. Gustafson entered hoping to go into the medic program.

"It's more of a challenge than fire-fighting," he said. Hammers "would never have dreamt" he'd be working in medicine.

"I didn't have any experience with trauma — it was a matter of getting used to it." Just the hospital training — in the emergency room, obstetrics, and classes helped him get accustomed to the work.

"Once you're in the field the training is continuous," Spady commented. There's been a one-third classroom dropout rate — nine finished of the first 14; in the present class, there are five left of nine starting.

About one-third of the calls are pre-arranged transfers of a nursing-home patient to the hospital or home again. Though not the most exciting, some of the men enjoy them.

"Old people can be a lot of fun," Hammers said. That's also another chance to visit people and "meet them in a fashion other than daily life." Sometimes medics and patients continue friendships after calls, with hospital or home visits, or cards.

"A little 10-cent thank-you card is one of the best rewards," Spady said.

Calls are characterized with experience. Most cardiac patients are older people. Paramedic Jim Yake said most tavern calls are duds, a request to bounce a drunk. But they answer them all.

The first call was EMT aid for a broken pelvis when a girl fell from a Ridgeway dorm. Since then, the calls average nine daily between the two units — 2000 yearly, and increasing.

On call can be frustrating.

"You're on edge, waiting," said Hammers. Most of the men nap only lightly on shift. They may help clean the station or rigs, prepare the medic car, work at the hospital.

The best way to insure a quiet day is to have a reporter waiting to see them at work or a photographer looking for action shots.

"It's kind of nice to have somebody ride around with us — it insures a quiet shift!" Meyer joked.

They get restless, waiting. It's not, Hammers added quickly, that they want someone to get sick.

"We just want to do our job"—make house calls
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