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Try to imagine a senior in college, 22, removed from campus by mental health officials because of a nervous breakdown. After four years of hard work and dedication, the senior is on the way to the proverbial nut house with a leather bit in his mouth. Although this scenario is purely hypothetical, anyone faced with the common stresses of being a senior in college might occasionally daydream about something horrible like this happening.

Is it possible that something so drastic could happen?

Day-to-day frustration coupled with trying to decide what he or she is going to do after graduation can lead many students to the brink of disaster when it comes to mental stability. If you find yourself in a tailspin, breath into a paper bag and try to think of a strategic way of approaching the problem.

Consider planning a job search and networking before graduation rolls around. Waiting until the last minute will most likely leave you hopelessly unprepared. Preparedness may at first seem like a foreign word—especially if you have spent the last four or five years becoming an expert in procrastination.

According to Tina Brinson, associate director of the Career Planning and Placement Center, the best way to approach a job search is to keep an open mind and consider a wide range of career options.

"A large number of students say they get their jobs through personal contacts... it’s who you know," Brinson said. Networking can introduce you to people who can point you directly to a job. Employers and personnel managers routinely hire people they know or who are referred to them by people working within their organization.

Finding a job or career that fulfills your expectations will require looking at a broad range of job-hunting methods. There are no right or wrong methods of looking for a job or career; however, Brinson said being set on one particular method will cause you to miss out on some good opportunities.

You might also find some interesting information and suggestions at the campus Alumni Office. The center has files filled with data and advice from the nearly 500 alumni who have volunteered to help.

"We created this office to get real-life people to tell the truth about breaking into the industries out there..."
and how to be successful," said Chris Goldsmith, director of the Alumni Office.

Goldsmith said he thinks too many students panic. He said his best advice is to get out there and try the jobs that sound interesting to you, even if this means taking some risks.

Risks might include getting into a short-term job where you might not stay for very long or a job requiring relocation.

"The first job people get probably won't be the same job they will have in two years in 99 percent of the cases," Goldsmith said.

Marcellis said her college experience and her pre-graduation networking provided her with the tools necessary to successfully break into this industry. She said the ability to communicate effectively is the best tool anyone can have when approaching the job market.

Marcellis got her first job offer one week after graduation while she was vacationing in Scotland. Seattle Trust and Savings Bank asked her to come back to the United States and go to work for them as a corporate communications officer.

Marcellis said she made up her mind when she was a junior that she was going to break into the public relations industry. She began working toward this goal immediately, taking part in activities that would lead her closer to her goals.

"Without networking, I would have never gotten the job," she said. "You can't wait until you are graduating to decide where you are going."

Clarifying goals and determining what kind of job search will be applicable to a particular field is the best way to get started, Marcellis said. Through her contacts while an intern at Seafirst Bank, Marcellis became aware of potential job leads. She said she started interviewing for jobs during spring break and spring quarter finals week.

At this point you might want to go bury your head in the sand. But, if you like, you can take a look at this from one more perspective; Ford said he sometimes wonders if he is prepared to go to work and test his abilities.

"I wonder if I am ready for all of the demands and whether or not I have the right kind of knowledge," Ford said.

Ford said he thinks it's important to try to focus on a goal and realize what it takes to attain it.

"You need a good, strong sense of where you want to go and what you want out of it," he said.

Hopefully you can plan a job search that will work for you. The testimonies in this story may not serve as the gospel for all, but seriously think about how finding solutions to your senior anxieties can be a great alternative to riding away in a paddy wagon with the nice people in white jackets.
By Catharine Legacy

"With the best mix of music, 92.9 KISM FM, 8:47, I’m Sean Cunningham checking out... coming up next, the hottest hits in Northwest Washington and Southwest B.C. ... that’s right, it’s the Northwest Top 30, exclusively from Northwest number one, KISM."

Cunningham, who often talks about the “hottest hits on the air waves,” knows what he is saying. A senior majoring in history at Western Washington University, Cunningham has a way with words and music. With dual jobs at two of Bellingham’s radio stations, one could say Sean is fulfilling his interest in radio. Both Western’s KUGS (89.3 FM) and Bellingham’s KISM (92.9 FM) benefit from the work of this hard driven and persistent young man.

Cunningham’s interest in radio dates back to grade school when he used to catch Dancing Danny Wright on Seattle’s KJR.

“Probably right around the sixth or seventh grade I always used to listen to the radio. Radio was bigger to me than television,” he said. “I was always intrigued by the music and what the people did on air.”

It was then that Cunningham set his sights on attending the University of Washington and getting a job at KCMU, UW’s radio station. Getting into UW was tougher than he thought, so Cunningham chose his second option of attending Western.

Interested in history and satisfying his parents concerns about “something to fall back on,” Cunningham decided to pursue a history/education major. Spring quarter of his freshman year, Cunningham became involved with KUGS, Western’s radio station. He ran a late night shift, learning the inside production from a business aspect, as well as getting practical on-air experience.

Cunningham, who is minoring in communications, had originally planned to go into broadcast but found that practical hands-on experience gave him a working education.

“I found my education in radio superseded that (of radio studies).” Most broadcast and communication majors are required to do an internship, which helps to give the student invaluable experience, yet Cunningham’s radio work fell outside the realm of school. KUGS
itself is funded by the school, but actually functions as a separate entity.

As music director at KUGS, Cunningham is in charge of finding out what kind of music is new on the market and then establishing some type of format for the station.

"Some people would consider it really simple because some people think, 'Wow! You just listen to new music and you can put it out,' and in a sense that's partly what it is... with KUGS we're a unique station in the sense that a lot of college stations have one format. We have about six or seven formats, which means you have to supply that music to keep them (the audience) satisfied and to keep the sound of the station new," he said.

Art Hughes, news director at KUGS, has worked closely with Cunningham on numerous occasions and has seen Cunningham's contributions to the station firsthand. "He was instrumental in bringing CDs to the station — he was the first to bring us into the CD age. He has an expansive knowledge of a mind-boggling diversity of music styles and a great attitude. Sean seems to know everything from Sammy Davis Jr. to Mother Love Bone," Hughes said. "He also knows how to talk to media people really well...and record reps — he's definitely got a great future ahead of him."

Steve Malone, a pre-med senior, said he prefers it when Cunningham does his show on KUGS.

"He's more mellow and relaxed on KUGS (than on KISM)," Malone explained. "He doesn't have to read a script and he gets to do his own stuff."

Cunningham once again fell into radio, work at Bellingham's KISM, while summer job-hunting. He took his chances inquired at the radio station, going through the normal application process. He was introduced to Alan Fee, a full-time disc jockey for KISM, to whom Cunningham expressed his interest in radio. Although Cunningham didn't have a lot of experience, Fee let him sit in on Saturday nights and help him out with his show.

"It was completely an educational thing — I would do gopher work for him," he said. "In return I learned, it was a great learning experience."

By the end of that summer and early fall, Cunningham was invited to work on the morning show as a regular. He spent about six months as the producer of the morning show and was able to fill in as a DJ. He even pulled a couple of all-nighters. By summer of 1990, he found his fill-in work increasing as staff members took their vacations.

Cunningham is also learning the business side of radio. He knows it is the listeners who keep the radio station on the air. "I've learned how you have to treat your listeners, your audience, you have to learn those things," he said. "It's not what you can do for yourself, but what you can do for the people out there."

Cunningham said he is looking forward to doing an internship after he graduates this spring, which would allow him to become more involved with the music aspect of radio. He said he feels his experience with college radio has given him many contacts to help him establish a career behind the scenes of on-air radio.

"I've learned a lot from people, and I talk with people from L.A. and New York each week and it's a very exciting, promising future I see ahead," he said. "I would say my interests would be more well used in the fact that my knowledge of music is much better... I feel I have more to give on the other side (of radio)."
A tinseled tree glistens in the moonlight and a plate of cookies wait. It's Dec. 24, and as the world sleeps children everywhere wait for Santa Claus to arrive with his bag full of goodies.

Not everyone grew up celebrating Christmas, but if you did, you may remember lying in bed awake on Christmas Eve.

Whether you celebrate the Christmas holiday or not, the spirit of giving and goodwill is part of any culture. People around the world have been known to stop battles, crusades and wars for the special day known as Christmas.

The spirit of the holiday season is celebrated each year when families gather together for feasting and gift giving.

Many of the traditions now celebrated have roots in ancient cultures and are often centered in the year's harvest or the coming new year. Whether they are part of what we now call Christmas or part of some other celebration, they all work to bring people together in the spirit of good will.

Winter celebrations date back to the dawn of civilization. In ancient Rome the feast of Saturnalia, the biggest Roman holiday of the year, was celebrated for seven days each winter. During this week no work was allowed, master and slave celebrated together and wars were suspended.

In medieval farming communities, a winter festival was held to celebrate a prosperous year and provided a way to appease the spirits to bring a good harvest in the coming months.

In England wassailing was a common practice with groups of people traveling from home to home caroling and bearing wassail bowls, filled with a brew of ale, spices and toasted apples. As members of each household drank from the same bowl and were expected to add some of their own wassail brew.

Local farmers assembled in the orchards on Christmas eve to wassail the fruit trees, singing chants for a good harvest the next year and leaving an offering of cake and cider in the branches of the largest tree.

Christmas in the United States is often highlighted by a roast turkey dinner, but the Christmas feast has also included roast goose, partridge, swan or peacock.

In Tudor England, a Christmas feast wasn’t over until a boar's head, complete with herbs and an apple in its mouth, was brought in on a platter.

Christmas also traditionally meant a time for giving gifts. During the Saturnalia festival little clay dolls or metal discs with wishes printed on them were given as small tokens.

In France bread was baked in the shape of a crescent and given to the poor. Even in the sparsest households, some sort of small feast and exchange of gifts took place.

Most holiday traditions include families decorating their homes for the season's festivities. The tradition of the Christmas tree began in Germany. Trees were set up on Christmas eve and decorated with tiny candles and presents were tied to the branches.

The tradition of the Christmas tree did not enjoy widespread appeal until the 1840s, when England's Queen Victoria, and her German-born husband, Albert erected a Christmas tree in the palace.

Gift giving is still very much a part of Christmas today. Each year children stand in front of presents and candy canes and other surprises, all piled under a Christmas tree or brimming out of the tops of stockings. And when it comes to presents we think of that good old elf himself, Santa Claus.

The original St. Nicholas came to us around 280 A.D. He was known as a protector of children, and legends of his acts of kindness grew even after his death.

Even though he has been called by many names, Sunnerklas, Pelze Nichol, Pere Noel, Kriss Kringle or Father Christmas, the story of the man who brought gifts to children who behaved themselves lives on.

The spirit of giving lives year round, in the little things all of us do each day. But Christmas is that special time of year, when people hope for peace and that all people can someday come together as friends.
Boat Sweet Boat

By Neil Landaas

He had been living in the tiny cabin of the 23-foot sailboat for only two months when the winter's first big storm hit. On that dark night, 50-knot winds whistled up the Washington coast creating two to three foot swells that smashed over the floating breakwater and into Blaine's Semiahmoo Harbor.

Todd Taylor, 29, a student at Huxley College, sat on the dock and watched his boat, the Sunny Mae, bob wildly in the current. He knew his decision to live on a sailboat was a little impulsive. As the wind blew, he watched and wondered.

Moored in the same slip with the Sunny Mae was a 45 foot, 20,000 pound sailing sloop. The bow of the huge sloop was bouncing erratically in the swells. Something was wrong.

Things happened fast on the docks when a storm blows in. Every swell brought the sloop closer to the Sunny Mae. Taylor knew he had to do something. The power of the storm had ripped the cleat holding the sloop's bow line right from the wooden dock. Taylor and the Sunny Mae would quickly be crushed.

Spotting the bow line swirling in the current below, Taylor was able to grab it and wrestle the sloop back into the slip. It was a learning experience, he said. The neighboring boat was not properly tied up and the dock was in poor condition.

When such storms happen now, Taylor patrols the dock. "Nobody sleeps, everybody is out checking their lines, it's just you and the massive storm," he said.

When making the transition to life aboard a boat, a variety of learning experiences are inevitable. One of Taylor's first learning experiences came one afternoon when he dropped his keys over-
Everything within reach. Photo by Eric Anderson

board. Hiring a diver to retrieve the keys cost him $25. While dropping keys overboard may seem trivial, some of Taylor's other experiences are not.

One evening while eating dinner aboard a friend's boat, Taylor witnessed a propane stove explosion. Although the resulting fireball inside the small cabin of the wooden boat was quickly put out, Taylor admits the combustible materials such as gasoline and propane which are commonly found on boats make him nervous.

"I realized I was living on a bomb," he said, recounting an evening he returned to the Sunny Mae to find his own cabin filled with a thick cloud of gasoline fumes.

Live-aboards must be adaptable to a wide variety of potential threats, particularly the weather. Oddly enough, the love for different types of weather drives many people to become live-aboards. Taylor left his job of ten years as a journeyman brick mason to attend Huxley college and live on a boat.

"If you like the natural elements, living on a boat is cool. You can hear every subtle change in the weather," Taylor said. Waking up to the rain can be beautiful; every drop which falls on the deck makes an amplified tick inside the small living compartment. As the number of drops increase the echoing patter becomes exciting, he said.

His favorite of all the natural elements is the wind. The variety of effects it can have is amazing, Taylor said. When evening approaches, the wind oftentimes begins to whistle through the rows of boats, gently rocking them. "It gets noisy, all the masts are going: cling, clang bang, cling," he said. "It's pure enjoyment, it's one big wind chime."

Because of its susceptibility to wind and swells, life aboard a boat at Semiahmoo Harbor can be crazy, but it's also fun. There is a wonderful feeling when you are so close and vulnerable to the weather, Taylor said.

Vulnerability to the weather means a fundamental characteristic of a live-aboard must be self reliance. People who live on boats tend to be less dependent upon society than others, Taylor said.

Living on a small craft, particularly during the winter, can be very tense. Feeling isolated in a dark, bobbing capsule with the patter of raindrops overhead can drive some live-aboards back to land, Taylor said.

"I suggest getting a bigger boat"
than mine unless you like living like a mole,” he said. “The winters get a little claustrophobic. There’s nowhere to wander in a small boat, your kind of stuck.

“It’s a great place to read,” Taylor added. Space limitations on board the Sunny Mae prevent Taylor from having a workshop and participating in a favorite pastime, woodworking. “You have to farm out for all of your activities.”

Limited space also means live-aboard must develop a more functional lifestyle than a house or apartment dweller. “Living here prevents us from being big consumers. We’re very limited to what we can buy and keep on a boat,” said Vonnie Baumgartner, a 14-year resident of Bellingham’s Squalicum Harbor. Baumgartner, who took her first sailing lesson at Western, raised three boys aboard the 44-foot sloop, Mithril, which she and her husband built.

One key to enjoying a live-aboard status is not accumulating things. “If I want a new piece of art I have to decide which one will be replaced,” she said.

The lifestyle differs in other ways. Some boats lack hot water which means washing clothes at home is not possible. Regular trips to the Laundromat are necessary. If a harbor resident is lucky enough to have hot water on board, bathing must be quick. The Mithril, which boasts state-of-the-art live aboard convenience has only a 12-gallon hot water capacity. With a family of five on board, shower time is very limited.

Taylor who has no hot water on his boat, said using the showers at Squalicum Harbor can be inconvenient. The walk is usually cold and wet, and bathers use a coin operated shower that often spews cold water for three to five minutes at 75 cents.

The most notable difference between the area’s two harbors, port, Baumgartner said.

The sound of nearby Burlington Northern freight cars being slammed together is horrendously loud and often lasts well into the night, Taylor said.

Despite the drawbacks to living at Squalicum Harbor, there is a two-year waiting list for live-aboard moorage, said a Port of Bellingham spokesperson.

Semiahmoo and Squalicum Harbor, is the lack of development around Blaine’s Semiahmoo Harbor. Taylor said he liked Semiahmoo because there was no city involved. It’s plush and green. A typical day begins with a peaceful sunrise over Mount Baker, he said.

However, the long daily commute to Western from Blaine forced Taylor to move from rural Semiahmoo to the urbanized Squalicum Harbor here on Bellingham’s waterfront. Living at the Port of Bellingham is quite different.

The smell of pulp from the Georgia Pacific plant is usually very pungent in the early morning, and sleep is occasionally interrupted by the wakes of fishing boats leaving

Todd Taylor studies for his next exam.
TARGET PRACTICE
Paintball- the chance to "Be all that you can be."

By Jeff Flugel

The siren blares in the misty morning woods, and we're off, racing like demons through the underbrush, boots crunching over brittle leaves and fallen branches. We dash for cover, knowing they'll be coming for us within seconds. No one wants to get shot, least of all me.

I dive behind a rotting stump, my semi-automatic clutched in cold-numbed hands. I breathe in sharp gasps of the pungent forest air, rife with the smells of dirt and decaying vegetation, and wonder what the hell I've gotten myself into.

The enemies swoop in upon us, floating through the trees like camouflaged ghosts. Ka-chunk! Ka-chunk! Ka-chunk! The rattle of their fire echoes amid the yells of men on both sides: "Red, on your flank!" "Watch out! They're on your right!" "Cover me. I'm going in!"

Before I know it, I'm pinned on two sides. I can only see the one on my left. His facemask is streaked with fluorescent orange paint, so I know he's the enemy team leader, and a crack marksman. I squeeze off a few desperate rounds in his direction, but I know it's only a matter of seconds.

Thwap! The shot smacks my skull just behind the left ear. Yellow paint splatters across my hair and down the collar of my fatigue jacket. Rubbing the numb welt on my head, I stand up, desperately bellowing "Hit! Hit! I'm hit!" to avoid getting shot again.

"Dead man coming out!" the ref cries, standing well to the rear of play. I raise my paintgun over my head and walk cautiously off the field, the first casualty of the game.

This was my first experience with the wild, warrior sport of paintball.

"Paintball is exciting and a lot of fun," said K.C. Martin, co-owner and operator of Pacific Rim Paintball. "Because of the nature of the sport, it's one of the few things that's more fun to do when you're an adult than when you're a kid. Disneyland isn't as fun when you're an adult. Holidays aren't as fun when you're an adult. But paintball is much more fun for adults than playing army is when you're a kid. It just keeps getting better and better."

Paintball is a good-natured, gung-ho game that has risen on a steady wave of popularity since its beginnings over a decade ago, spreading like wildfire across Canada and the United States. The sport has hit big overseas as well, with major paintball companies in Great Britain, Europe—even as far as Japan and the Philippines.

Within the past year, three separate companies, all selling supplies and running games, have sprouted up in the Bellingham area, joining the scads of others peppered throughout the Pacific Northwest and British Columbia.

Pacific Rim Paintball (located downtown on West Champion) was established by K.C. and his brother, T.J., over sixth months ago. The Martin brothers first fell in love with the sport eight years ago when they were teens growing up in Ontario, Canada, and they have not looked back since. Now paintball is not just their passion. They make a living out of it.

"We're doing our best to make the sport more high-profile," K.C. says. They also try to keep everything in a proper perspective. "At our field, we're easy-going. The players are just out to have fun. A lot of other fields don't pay attention to beginners like they should."

"I think one of the things that makes our field different than others is that my brother and I understand what it is to be players," he adds. "We always try to maintain the spirit that this is a game. It's meant to be fun."

"In my experience, a lot of field owners are rip-offs, and aren't concerned with the players' needs. A lot of store owners try to sell lesser-quality equipment. We rent out the best equipment. Renters get as good a gun as the veterans who have spent a lot of money on their own (guns)."

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Intrigued, I took a friend’s advice and decided to give paintball a whirl. The little boy in me was thrilled. The paranoid adult in me was not looking forward to being a moving (or, as it most often turned out, a sitting) target.

The fateful day arrived one crisp, clear Sunday morning. I didn’t know how to get to the playing field (the Martins’ only use a 16-acre patch of their 40-acre piece of property, located some 20 miles north of the I-5 Birch Bay exit) so one of Pacific Rim’s two additional employees/refs, Ray Snyder, guided me there.

One of the first things I learn about paintball is that events run on the age-old premise that “patience is a virtue.” Once we reach the field and set up the immense blue tent that will be home base for the rest of the day, it is another hour and a half before enough players have assembled to start a legitimate game.

I am the only rookie, or in paintball terms, “newbie.” (Enthusiasts might extend the list: “fresh meat,” “cannon fodder,” “babe in the woods.”) All the rest are veteran players, “walk ons,” most of whom come equipped with their own paintguns, complete with laser scopes, feed loaders and silencers. Some even own special facemasks with ventilating fans to keep the goggles from fogging.

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All these high-tech gadgets can add up to more than $1,000 per person, though one can purchase a basic kit for around $400-500.

“Since I really enjoy paintball, and play it every weekend, I budget for 400 to 500 rounds each day I play,” T.J. says. “Though we have some Canadians come down and go through 1,000 rounds a day. It can get expensive, but most people treat it like a hobby and just set some money aside for it each month.”

The paintballs are gelatinous globules about the size of marbles, usually yellow, and are propelled out of the guns by carbon dioxide gas cartridges at speeds of 280 to 300 feet per second. That’s why no one is allowed on the field without goggles, for, as K.C. assures me, a flying paintball WILL put an eye out. I need no further admonition.

Finally, it’s time for the games to begin. We are split up into two
teams of nearly equal experience and ability to ensure a fair competition. I am on the blue team, and soon have a blue ribbon tied to my left arm. The other side is red. Jeremy, I notice, is not on my side. Neither is T.J. I walk down the trail into the woods beside my teammates, convinced that I am soon to become the proverbial sitting duck.

There are three separate playing fields of varying size, each with opposing bases. My team goes to one base while the red team goes to another near the dubiously-named Croc Pit. The game is "Capture the Flag." In order to win, someone has to infiltrate the enemy camp, pluck their flag from its perch, and somehow make it back to their own camp with the flag held in plain view. Needless to say, I do not plan to see much of the enemy's flag today.

Now that we are on the playing field, goggles are on and guns cocked. Several of my compadres snap off a few practice rounds on surrounding trees, and discuss points of strategy, mainly who will skirt off through the bushes to get to the enemy camp, and who will be suicidal enough to charge up the middle and hold them off.

After a few minutes, we're ready. We set off our horn and wait for the red team to respond with another blast...

It is the beginning of a frustrating but undeniably exciting day for me. I am way outclassed. I'm picked off easily, mostly in the head, and after several games the glory of a "kill" still eludes me. Most of my paintballs are shot in target practice—I never see anybody long enough to shoot at them.

Around 1 p.m. we break for lunch—slices of Wonderbread wrapped around barbecued hot dogs—which is included in the day's fee. Constant adrenal highs and lows have left me ravenous and indiscriminating. I chow down four hot dogs and feel somewhat better. Lunch conversation focuses on events of the past game, verbal reenactments of wild shoot-outs and comparisons of strategy. I have nothing very exciting to tell.

My chance for some real Rambo action finally comes in my last game. Positioned beneath a huge log where I can guard my team's flag, ready to cut loose on any enemy rash enough to try and grab it, I spend a tense 20 minutes, my stomach pressed to the forest floor, feeling fir needles, dust and tiny spiders inch their way under my clothing.
By Chris von Seggern

Stacy Bloch remembers the couple who walked into his downtown Bellingham hobby shop one day as being courteous and friendly. At least, until the woman caught sight of the “Dungeons & Dragons” display at the back of the store.

“My God!” she said. “Oh my God! That game! They’re selling that game that turns children into murderers!”

Bloch and his wife, Patty, are the owners of Eagles, at 1213 1/2 Cornwall, and Bellingham’s largest retailer of role-playing and wargames. This woman’s outburst may have been an extreme reaction, but it demonstrates the attitudes some people still carry toward adventure gaming, one of the fastest-growing hobbies in the United States.

Adventure gaming is a hobby that includes a huge variety of games. The spectrum runs from recreations of famous battles to fantasy role-playing games, where the players actually assume an alter ego and pretend to be that person for the session. It’s a pastime with something for everyone because any imaginable situation can be played out, using maps, counters, figures, or just the players’ imaginations. In the course of an afternoon or weekend, the player can re-fight the battle of Gettysburg, slay a dragon, command a Klingon battlecruiser, or just about anything else that captures the imagination.

Wargames, as the word is used here, are entirely different from Lazer Tag or “paintball.” Instead of arming the participants with simulated weapons and letting them slaughter each other, wargames are played on a map, like a conventional boardgame with more rules. Miniatures or counters represent military units, ranging from flintlock-armed soldiers to 100-ton walking tanks to warp-powered starships. Dice are used to determine the outcome of the players’ decisions: whether a weapon hit its target, how much damage it did, etc.

Role-playing games (rpg’s), occupying the other end of the gaming spectrum, are probably the most well-known type of game. In an rpg, the players “become” another person, with the action taking place entirely in their imaginations. The players describe their actions verbally to the “gamemaster” or “referee,” who describes the situation for the players to react to and determines the results of their actions using dice. The experience is a lot like reading a favorite novel but being able to experience the story firsthand and determine the outcome. This kind of gaming is especially popular with college students. When “Dungeons & Dragons,” the first rpg, was released in 1974, it was played in small isolated groups, largely on college campuses, until it caught the attention of the press in the early 1980’s. Even now that gaming has become a popular activity with all age groups, the Blochs are still glad to see the college students come streaming back to Bellingham in the fall. Stacy estimates that as many as one-third of their steady customers are college students.

At first, a lot of the media attention was negative. The press swarmed with stories about players who had taken the new game too far, killing or injuring each other when they tried to “act out” the game in “real life.” Rumors circulated about unbalanced teenagers who had committed suicide when their character, or game identity, was killed within the context of the game.

Tom McLaughlin is the public relations manager for TSR, Inc., the Wisconsin company which publishes “Dungeons & Dragons,” among other games. McLaughlin pointed out the foolishness of blam-
ing the irrational behavior of human beings on a game: "It would be like blaming someone watching a Spielberg movie or reading a Stephen King novel for doing something disreputable," McLaughlin said.

Even the early bad press wasn't an entirely bad thing, McLaughlin says. "Bad press heightened awareness of the game." Ever since the fledgling hobby caught the spotlight, it has grown quickly. Bloch quoted estimates that upward of 10 million people in the United States are currently playing rpg's.

But why? Why do reasonable adults want to spend their time doing something that has no relation to the rest of their lives? And what is it about pushing little cardboard counters around a map and rolling large fistfuls of dice all day that captivates so many people?

Many die-hard gamers will say adventure games recapture some of the excitement and magic of childhood make-believe. "When we were kids growing up, we had a lot of fun pretending," says Harold Johnson, director of special projects at TSR. "We found a way to make fun respectable and acceptable again."

Western senior Matt Borselli points to the way adventure games involve the player's creativity: "It's the imagination involved. I use my imagination quite a bit. It's that aspect I like the best, I'd say."

Borselli is also the unofficial president of the Generic Association of Gamers (GAG), an on-campus club which meets every Thursday at 4:00 pm in Viking Addition 463.

Kathy Arundell, also a Western senior, says it's the escapist aspect of the hobby that appeals to her. "I get to be a person or persons that I would never be in real life. You get to jump into a world that's not real and make it be what you want it to be."

Obviously, gaming offers different rewards for different players. History fans can place themselves in the shoes of military leaders from the past and present and get a first-hand look at the problems that confronted them. Science fiction and fantasy buffs can make their own favorite times, places and people from fiction come to life, or create their own.

Gaming offers a huge variety of creative outlets for artists, writers, or anyone else with an idea or waiting to be expressed. Adventure games, especially rpg's, exist within a framework that is easily customized by the players.

"They get out of it what they want to get out of it," Stacy says.

Because the problems to be encountered and overcome are different every session, the games hold their appeal long after other pastimes might have gotten old. "The situations change, the strategies change, it's not like you're playing Monopoly again this week," Johnson says.

But where can a new player find someone to game with? There are a number of options. On-campus, GAG welcomes all comers and accommodates a wide range of interests. For information, contact Borselli at 738-3476. Off-campus, "Diceaholics Anonymous" meets weekly at Eagles on Friday nights. The group has about 45 dues-paying members, and non-members can join in for a 50-cent donation. For information, contact Stacy or Patty Bloch at Eagles (671-1913).

Gaming offers a virtually limitless range of problems to solve and goals to accomplish. Whether you're interested in military history, science fiction, fantasy, espionage, or about anything else, you can find something in gaming to hold your interest. Whole worlds of new situations and challenges await. The door stands before you, and your imagination holds the key.
Tom Aaron attends a Great Adventure class on rollerblading.
By Suzi Zobrist

How many of us revel at the thought of new development in Bellingham or see any benefits from it all? Steve Hindman, owner of The Great Adventure in downtown Bellingham, said he does. While he may not like the development, he does like what comes with it: blacktop.

The black velvet-like surface of freshly laid pavement echoes the whizzing sound of purple wheels as they glide across its surface. The asphalt, so smooth, yet so unforgiving at times, challenges the adventure-seeking in-line skater.

Freshly laid black-top is the rollerbladers dream. When the asphalt goes down, bladers don their skates and hit the pavement.

"Any new pavement is like fresh powder," said avid rollerblader Hindman.

Rollerblading has found its way to the streets of Bellingham and many locals have found it to be quite a thrill.

According to an article in the June 24, 1991 Business Week, rollerblading originated in the Netherlands in the 1700s and was adapted in 1980 by high school hockey players Scott and Brennan Olson. Their company, Rollerblade Inc., originally sold in-line blades to be attached to ice skates during the off season, but in 1987 Rollerblade began marketing them in California.

"People used it (rollerblading) as a training device and, of course, California got a hold of it and used it for fun and that's when the whole sport blew up," Hindman said.

Rollerblading has been gaining popularity rapidly since 1987. According to the June 24, 1991 issue of Business Week, "Rollerblade sales have at least doubled every year since 1987 and are expected to reach $125 million in 1991."

So, what is rollerblading all about and why are so many people excited by it?

The four in-line wheels on rollerblades resemble ice skates and the motion and maneuverability of them is a cross between ice skating and skiing. The difference is when you fall, it's on cement.

"People are intimidated by it," Hindman said. "It looks like it's hard to do, like it would be hard to balance, like you'd kill yourself. Most people find that if they choose their terrain right, they can have fun the first time out."

If you haven't ice skated or skied before, rollerblading may be more difficult, but not impossible.

"I hadn't skated before, so I was pretty wobbly," Rollerblader Jim Reichart said. "The flats weren't any problem for me but the downhills...I kind of crashed and burned a few times or skirted towards a parked car to try and stop."

For Western student and avid rollerblader, Gary Davies, doing jumps is the most fun. But this rollerblading technique may not be for everyone.

Hindman teaches rollerblading classes at The Great Adventure and begins by helping first-time bladers to feel more comfortable on their skates. He said that if they have not skated before, the rolling of the wheels will be a very foreign motion to them.
“Once you get people started they work it out pretty quickly, though,” Hindman said. “They catch on much faster than skiing. Compared to skiing, people have fun much faster on rollerblades.”

Hindman said the next important step in learning how to rollerblade is learning how to stop, which is easier said than done. Wearing knee pads, elbow pads and wrist guards, beginning bladers practice grinding their brakes into the cement.

Hindman said the grabbing sensation people experience as the brake grips the pavement will oftentimes cause people to let off the brake, which is not the thing to do. “Your goal is to return the brake with no pad left,” Hindman said.

Reichart, who attended Western in 1977-80, has been rollerblading for more than a year and is still experiencing difficulty with his braking ability.

“I haven’t really been able to use the brake on the back. I grab a hold of a lamp post or a street sign or a parked car or someone else who is standing around,” Reichart said.

Jeff Davis, facilities manager for Lakewood and a rollerblader, said he doesn’t use his brake at all. Take it off, he said.

But Hindman does not recommend this. He said although you do not use the brake much, it’s good to have it there in case you need it.

Davis said rollerblading is just like skiing. It’s like downhill skiing in that you make lateral and parallel turns down the hills and it’s like cross country skiing with the long lateral strides going up hill. Davis even uses ski poles when goes out rollerblading.

Davies also expressed much similarity between blading and skiing.

“The way you read the terrain and the ground is very much like skiing,” he said.

Although the potential is great for hurting yourself while you’re rollerblading, if you are careful and wear protective gear, it will make a difference.

“Just having Lycra on your skin as you’re sliding on the pavement is the night and day difference,” Hindman said. “You may still get scraped, but nothing like bare skin on the pavement.”

“You learn to limit the possibilities so that you don’t have any serious accidents,” Davis said. “You don’t get going so fast that you can’t stop.”

Reichart said he hasn’t fallen down for more than a year, but he did remember his last big “wipe out.” He said he was skating by the Viking Union and decided to fake like he was going to go down High Street. He got going to fast too stop and ended up going down the hill.

“I just went whipping down the hill and the only way I could stop was by doing a crash landing,” Reichart said.

Reichart says he now goes through the imagination of disaster when he skates so that he is prepared to fall.

Although Western student Denis Allen hasn’t had any serious crashes himself, he said he loves to fall down when he blades. He said he does try to plan his motion though, so he will be prepared to stop.

“When you have no way of stopping, you know you’re going too fast,” Allen said.

Davies, who does jumps off of stairs, the Red Square fountain and anything else he can find, said he hasn’t had any big crashes either.

“Maybe that’s why I’m still jumping,” he said.

Davies said he tries to skate as often as he can and enjoys skating around the campus late in the afternoon when most of the students are gone. He said the terrain is so wide ranging on the campus, but he hasn’t seen too many other rollerbladers doing jumps.

“I like to try new tricks,” Davies said. “I see different things and say ‘I could never do that’ and then up doing it later.”

So, where does a rollerblader go
in Bellingham to find flat, smooth surfaces? Some of the best places are Cordata Parkway by Whatcom Community College, which has a freshly paved road. Squalicum Way, by the Marina Restaurant, is another good place because of its wide sidewalks.

Hindman said to look for places with good pavement, low traffic volume and few stop lights. He said he has a variety of residential streets that he links up that make a good ride. He also said any new pavement makes for a smooth ride.

Rollerblades can be rented at The Great Adventure, 201 E. Chestnut, for $8 for 12 hours and $12 for 24 hours, Washington Wind Sports, 501 Harris, for $10 for all day and $14 for overnight and Fairhaven Bicycle and Ski, 1103 11th Ave., for $10 for all day, $14 for 24 hours and $5 an hour.

Jason Thayne, a sales representative at Fairhaven Bicycle and Ski, said he has rented to just about every kind of person you could imagine.

“I’ve had business people in suits come in and rent from me,” Thayne said

New rollerblades cost about $149 to $285 in the Bellingham area.

Allen just bought a pair of “Switchits,” a new brand of rollerblade on the market that can be switched from wheels to ice-skating blades. Allen said he loves his new skates: they’re comfortable, versatile and perfect for what he wants.

Allen, a newcomer to the sport, said rollerblading is exciting and one more way to have fun.

Davies also agrees that rollerblading is fun. “I love the independence and freedom that rollerblading gives me,” Davies said. “I love the challenge of my own performance and watching myself gradually improve. When you’re rollerblading, nothing can hold you back.”
By Sean McWhinny

Down the bustling hallway, high school students slam their locker doors, shouting greetings to one another with carefree, squealing laughter and race off to class. A lone little black-haired girl can be seen making her way through the commotion. She is oblivious and distant to the activity around her for she has just received news that her father was picked up by police. He was found drunk in the cemetery where her mother is buried. Clutching and pressing her books against her chest, her face cringes and quivers as she winds her way further down the congested hallway. Suddenly she breaks into a bolt to get out of anyone's sight.

"Cut!" bellows the director with an echo that reverberates throughout the set of "High School Lives."

The black-haired girl leaves the set hurriedly as she departs from her attentions as 16-year old Jackie. She must now focus on being 23-year old Donna Lea Ford, college student, who needs to cram for an exam between scenes for a psychology class.

For the vivacious Ford, playing younger roles is nothing new. With her long, straight, jet-black hair, cropped bangs and theatrically beaming young face, it's no wonder the parts she gets are primarily teenage roles.

"It used to frustrate me when I was younger, but it's proven to be advantageous. Directors like actors who are older than the characters they portray for the sake of dealing with workable, mature actors," Ford said.

What became the major challenge to this actress was how to balance a growing professional career with going to college full-time...in another country. Ford is Canadian who works in Vancouver and attends Western. With the potential for a thriving career, she has increased demands on both sides of the border. Trying to find time for both is becoming an arduous task.

However, Ford's ingrained need to perform keeps her charging ahead with her whirlwind agenda. With 14 credits this fall quarter at Western, she still dashes off to work north of the border two to three times a week.

Lesa Kirk, of Kirk Talent, Ford's agent since January of this year, said the agency never knows in advance when an audition might come up. Often the agency is only notified the day of an audition; sometimes the day before, said Kirk.

On many occasions, Ford will get the alert to storm up to Vancouver as soon as possible for an important audition in the middle of the day — a school day. On one occasion she managed to rush off after her 11 a.m. class, arrive in
Vancouver full of pep and punch for an audition and still return to campus in Bellingham in time for her 3 p.m. class.

With auditions in Canada, Ford isn’t always able to attend every class. When she must skip classes, the juggling act becomes a harried circumstance of catching up, staying in touch and focusing on the moment — whether it be in an intense scene or during an exam. For the classes she is unable to attend, she either watches an audio tape of the lectures or has other classmates take notes for her.

“I take [my studies] to the set. It’s very difficult to focus on them there. I cram while they’re setting up scenes. Usually there is an hour and a half call for hair and make-up before I have to be on the air. I do a lot of talking to myself in the car, as well. If I’m about to go on stage or do a scene, I focus on the moment with vocal and physical exercises,” Ford said.

James Lortz, an assistant professor at Western’s Performing Arts Center, is concerned but believes Ford’s two lives are leaching her valuable lessons through work experience.

“It has taught her to focus on class. Her discipline is worthy of any role model. I think everyone is behind her here. You learn by doing. She certainly is learning and doing,” he said.

While Ford is respected for her undying charisma and zest for her thespian passion, concerns are still aroused with her on-going chaotic pace.

“I admire her for doing it. I worry that she overextends herself. She spreads herself thin but still manages to keep up. I think her sense of responsibility is so strong she feels compelled to do more when she could do less,” Lortz said.

Although Ford intends on graduating by next summer, slowing down is not an option she is considering. She wants to obtain an education degree in the near future. She would like to instigate a program on the elementary level that would integrate the creative dramatic arts with education for young children. Students would interact dramatically in their different school subjects, getting their mind and body involved in the process of learning.

“From grade school, we are taught about the right way and the wrong way and that there is no in-between. Kids are not encouraged to use their imagination,” she said.

Ford’s inspiration to teach came from her experience in Western’s play about stereotypes last year. “Labels,” which was directed by Lortz, toured various elementary and junior high schools after its run on campus. Ford has also performed in “Baby” and was Desdemona in “Othello.”

Lortz described Ford’s acting presence as “energetic, bright and cheery” in which “she has a lovely porcelain quality” that sets her appearance apart from other promising, young talent.

“She has a solid formal training and theatrical back-
Donna Lea Ford takes a break from her high-charged schedule. She maintains a professionalism about what she does and is very committed,” Kirk said.

Her unusually high-charged schedule keeps her sustaining many commitments simultaneously, which includes her role as Jackie on “High School Lives.” The show should air sometime next year on the Public Broadcasting Station in Canada. The production company was so pleased with the original pilot episodes that they requested six more. For an actress with numerous commercials and a spot on the third episode of “21 Jump Street,” this recent opportunity is the gloss on Ford’s resume.

Ford’s vitality and energy have always lent themselves to entertaining. Acting is a fervor she alone possesses in her family, although she admits to having a “nut case” of a grandmother. “I always have been the performer. I would put on shows at home and sell tickets,” she said, reminiscing on growing up in Vancouver, B.C.

Originally, Ford was interested in ice-skating until an accident—fractured shins—detoured her performing into a different arena. “My initial hopes were to go to the Olympics. After the injury, I needed something to replace that outlet to perform,” she said.

Ford acted in an occasional high school play, but it was not until after graduation when she flung herself into it with full force. She opted to postpone college for a year after graduating in 1987. During this period she won her first made-for-TV movie role in “Nobody’s Child” starring Marlo Thomas. Ford played Thomas’ character at age 16. “Nobody’s Child” was the true story of Marie Balter, who was wrongfully institutionalized as psychologically disturbed. Marlo Thomas won an Emmy for her role.

When Ford was granted dual citizenship, she went to study in Los Angeles at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in Pasadena, convinced that Hollywood was the place to pursue a serious acting career.

In time, the reality of Glittertown soon dimmed Ford’s enthusiasm. “I don’t like that city at all. Every second person you talk to is an actor. There is a much larger pool of production work, but you don’t get seen as much,” she said.

Ford said with the competition so fierce and saturated in L.A. that many Canadian talents return to Vancouver, where the chances of finding work are much more probable. In fact, during the past five years, a surge of American production companies have migrated to British Columbia to film causing Vancouver to be crowned Hollywood North.

After a year in L.A., she returned north and continued her professional work in commercials and theater in Vancouver while enrolling in Western’s theater department, where her credit could most easily be transferred.

Through her many opportunities and different living situations, Ford has gained much wisdom from how to tackle her acting roles to how she might want to shape her future turns in life. She claimed she will never be through learning all she can from opportunities lurking in her promising horizon. Throughout her career span, Ford intends to keep a consistency and truth to her form as an actress.

“I think the basic motivation for a character has to be honest. [Your] body has to be attuned to yourself and find the character center. I think the character has to start from within yourself. I like to watch people in the streets. In L.A., we went to Venice Beach and the airport — any public place to watch people from all walks of life. Actors, after all are depicting people in more heightened situation.”

Ford deliberates whether she thinks she might hold her station in Vancouver and continue to build her career there. But she said she would not mind dabbling her talents in other locations including New York. “Eventually, I want to be able to choose what I want to do. I like being up in Canada. There’s a lot of Canadian material up there that I feel drawn to. I want to be happy with the work I’m doing and the material I’m doing. I put that in highest priority.”

As Jackie in “High School Lives,” Ford may cease to exist at the end of the scene at the end of the hall, but as Donna Lea Ford, she has every intention of enduring.
By Daniel Carollo

It looks futuristic. An artificial dome, under the natural blue dome of the Vancouver sky, rests on the hilltop like a round jewel.

Outside, a crisp autumn wind blows fiercely, stripping the tarnished gold, orange and red leaves from the maples and oaks. The warmth of the sun gets through only for brief moments between the chilly gusts of air.

But open the door to this bizarre dome, and you are in another world—a kind of Eden in a glass house. The wind has stilled, the air has thickened with moisture, resembling a sub-tropical climate. It is green everywhere, with hundreds of varieties of tropical plant species. The lilting melody of chirping finches and swallows along with the gurgling rhythm of a miniature waterfall, create a natural symphony which fills the dome.

This biosphere under glass is Bloedel Conservatory, located in Queen Elizabeth Park in Vancouver, British Columbia. The plexi-glass dome conservatory, opened in December 1969 was created to be a window to the world; bringing plants from all over for people to appreci-
Bloedel Conservatory in Vancouver is heaven under a dome.

"If heaven is like this, that’s where I want to be."

Conservatory Visitor

"Some people call it ‘The Bubble,’" Leupen said.

The conservatory is different from a greenhouse which grows plants merely for practical or experimental purposes. "A conservatory is more like a display garden," he said. "...a garden under glass."

The Bloedel Conservatory also has a variety of free flying finches, swallows, and other birds; a feature which few conservatories have, says Leupen.

The conservatory rests on Little Mountain, the summit of Queen Elizabeth Park, which is the highest point in Vancouver. On the north side is a wide view of West End Vancouver and Stanley Park, with the towering Pacific Range rising above North Vancouver. The dome overlooks a large patio with fountains and covered walkways. In the center of the patio, a smooth bronze Henry Moore sculpture called "Knife’s Edge," seems to stand watch as dozens of people practice the ancient Chinese art of Tai Chi. Like a mix of ballet, martial arts and meditation, their bodies seem to flow to music heard only by them.

Below the conservatory is an old stone quarry which has been resurrected into a charming arboretum, with both native and foreign species of plants, trees, and shrubs.

Inside the conservatory is a living, environmental sanctuary, a shelter from the cold and drizzly Northwest climate. The plexi-glass dome, comprised of 1,490 semi-translucent bubbles, scatters the bright rays, illuminating the interior with a softer glow. There is a fine mist, visible only against the light, coming from fog nozzles lining the conservatory.

Towering above the other plants are large Buita Palms from Brazil and Uruguay. The air circulation causes them to sway to-and-fro like a Tai Chi exercise.

"The palm trees can’t be pruned," Leupen said. "If they get too big, they would have to be re-
moved."

Several South American banana trees stand in a small group, each carrying a bunch of bananas—small, green bananas. The leaves, as large as airplane propellers, filter the sunlight like green stained glass.

There is also a giant Columa Cactus. Its slender, finger-like branches stretch skyward—or domeward, almost touching the 70-foot high interior. There are over 400 varieties of plants, coming from regions as close as California, Mexico, and Florida, and as remote as India, China and Fiji, according to a conservatory facts sheet. Other plants in the collection come from Vietnam, Brazil, Java, Colombia, West Indies and Hawaii.

"I think it's a bit of heaven," said one passing visitor. "If heaven is like this, that's where I want to be."

A shallow pool contains a school of about 30 Japanese Carp, called Koi. The Koi fish are an average length of 12 inches. Some thin, some plump, some orange, and some an odd blend of orange and white splotches. Whenever the visitors pass by, their gaping mouths poke the surface of the pond, looking for a bit of crumb. Next to the Koi pond is a separate pool where people toss coins.

There are about 36 different varieties of birds and a total of about 150 individual birds. Perched on several branches are Macaws (parrots) and Cockatoos. One Macaw seems to woo another sitting on a branch next to it. Its chest a sunset yellow, the bird dances back and forth, stretching its feathered crown toward the other in a seemingly one-sided courtship. The other Macaw sits unmoved, staring straight ahead—it is not taken by the charms of the wooer.

Occasionally, a small weaver or finch skitters across the foot path.

"I wanna step on 'em!" said one eager toddler, attempting to free himself from his father's restraining hand. "No, you don't step on the birds. You're supposed to watch them," said the father, regaining his grip on the little stomper.

"I don't care, I wanna step on one anyway!"

Other finches and sparrows dart passed plant gawkers, flying from shrubs to palms to fig trees.

The history of artificial climates like the conservatory, is said to date back to the first century A.D., according to a book titled The Glass House, by John Hix. Pliny the naturalist and Columella described growing cucumbers in the winter by using very large clay vessels covered with slabs of transparent stone.

By the 16th century, the botanical gardens in Padua, Italy included a wintering shed used for housing the more delicate species. It was called a vivarium, or greenhouse. International trade through Venice and Geneva brought a variety of new plants into the botanical gardens of the Italian universities, where people could see them in one place.

During this period, the Dutch had wintering places, also known as "Dutch Stoves", which were very similar to the Italian sheds. By the 18th century, the Dutch developed a more sophisticated frame with sloped glass roofs in which they grew oranges, pineapples and grapes.

Very influential in the glass house design of the 19th century, was horticulturist John Claudius Loudon. In his book, Re-
marks on Hot Houses (1817), Loudon said his vision for glass house horticulture was to “exhibit spring and summer in the midst of winter...” His designs revolutionized the use of the glass semi-dome, and the curved, Gothic-style roof made of iron framing and glass.

In 1960, the Missouri Botanical Garden in St. Louis was the first plastic-domed conservatory to apply Buckminster Fuller’s geodesic principles, according to Hix. Like Vancouver’s Bloedel Conservatory, it is 70 feet high, with a slightly larger diameter of 175 feet.

The Bloedel Conservatory is 140 feet in diameter and covers about 15,386 square feet of display. It is heated and cooled by eight air circulation units and two gas-fired water boilers. The sub-tropical climate is kept at 65 degrees, with a humidity level of 80 to 90 percent, says Leupen. The humidity is produced mainly from the expiration and evaporation from the soil and the ponds. The humidity level is controlled by varying the indoor and outdoor air circulation and by dispensing water vapor into the air through fog nozzles.

Bloedel Conservatory has about 200,000 visitors a year, says Leupen. Joining the number this year is Dick and Mari-Anne Larson from Edenville. They describe their first visit to the conservatory on the chilly October day as simply, “Absolutely fantastic!”

Molletta, a Vancouver resident from Copenhagen, Denmark says she comes here when she is feeling “uptight and worried about things.”

“If I ever get married again, I want to get married on that little bridge over there with the waterfall behind it.”

Bloedel Conservatory is open every day except Christmas, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. during the winter, and from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. during the summer. Admission is $2.40.

To get there, take the Vancouver-Blaine freeway to the Oak Street Bridge which crosses the North Arm Fraser River. Continue on Oak Street and take a right at 33rd Avenue. Queen Elizabeth Park is located near 33rd Avenue and Cambie Street.
AUDIBLE ALTERNATIVES
A Novel Way To Drive

By Toni Weyman

Red light. Stopped at an intersection, you become aware of deep, pulsating, rhythmic sounds emanating at a colossal decibel level from the vehicle idling next to you. The car — a red sporty number — is heaving and swelling with every beat of the ground-shaking bass.

Green light. You’re relieved when the boom-box-on-wheels roars into traffic disappearing into the horizon. With your hearing restored, you grab a cassette, insert it into your tape deck and settle down to listen to a good book.

Listen to a good book? On tape?

Sure. Who has time to read for the fun when they’re in school? Maybe you promise yourself to read Tom Wolfe’s “The Bonfire of the Vanities” during Christmas vacation (it had to be better than the movie). What happens instead? You spend your time shopping for presents, going to parties and visiting relatives you never see except during the holidays.

If you’re one of the commuting class driving many miles to and from Western Washington University each day, or you’re planning to travel long distances by car, bus or air for the holidays, you might want to consider books on tape. As an alternative to music, a book on tape might be just the ticket for livening up an otherwise long and tiresome journey.

With more than 400 titles in its collection, the downtown Bellingham Public Library is probably the best local source for books on cassette. The best part is — they’re free. All you need is a library card.

Linda Hodge, the audio-visual librarian at the Bellingham Public Library, said audio books have grown in popularity since they hit the market a few years ago. Books on tape first showed up in book stores and then in libraries.

Hodge said library patrons enjoy books on tape for several reasons. Patrons usually check out tapes for use in their cars. Sheer laziness is another incentive for people to check out books on tape.

“Some people will do anything to avoid having to read the book,” Hodge said.

The Bellingham Library has a variety of titles, including selections from the Bible, science fiction, new-age pop psychology, classics, financial advice, poetry, humor, recent bestsellers and mysteries.

Books on tape available at Western are located in Special Collections on the fifth floor of the Wilson Library. The selection is less extensive (about a hundred or so) with less variety than the Bellingham Public Library. They also tend to be more academically oriented, including recordings of lectures and speeches delivered at Western and literary classics from such famous dead guys as Homer, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Kipling, Yeats, Thoreau, Kafka, Ibsen, Frost and Twain.

Most of the well-known bookstores in Bellingham stock books on tape. But, unlike the libraries, they aren’t free. Audio book prices start at $7.95 and can cost as much as $74.00 for unabridged works. Henderson Books, a second-hand bookstore on Grand Street has a mixed variety of used cassettes at considerably cheaper prices.

A word of caution about books on tape checked out of the library: some have been used a lot and may not have premium sound quality. Hodge said some of the library’s more popular books on tape take a lot of abuse. Some library tapes may get hung up inside your tape deck, which is particularly bothersome if it happens during a suspenseful moment in a story.

Think about it. In the midst of all the required reading from those dry textbooks, haven’t you ever longed for some spare time just to read for the pure enjoyment of it? Isn’t there some trashy bodice-ripper of a romance novel calling your name from the racks of the local grocery store? How about the latest thriller from Stephan King? Whatever your preference, books on tape can make the getting there more enjoyable.
How does it happen? No one really knows, but it has something to do with the transformation from childhood into the dreaded "A" word — adulthood.

Each September, students pass into the next stage of this transformation. No student tries to, or even wants to, but it's inevitable. Before long, they will become their parents. Goodbye wild and free, hello mild and responsible.

Every year another group of incoming freshmen are granted their first taste of true independence, and thus begins stage one. Along with this new found freedom from Mom and Dad are a set of rules and guidelines they must live by. The rules change from year to year, or from stage to stage. They aren't written down or even really spoken of, it's just one of the mystical experiences no one can explain.

Stage one. Freshmen occupy this stage and are very easy to spot on campus. They're the only ones who have the new, up to the minute, stylish attire. You remember the clothes — the ones Mom and Dad bought when you were first leaving home. Don't worry though, the same outfit won't be worn again until after Thanksgiving break, when the young pups finally wear their last new shirt.

Freshmen enter college with a very focused mind: Party! Each weekend becomes a quest. A mission to see how much alcohol can be pumped into the body in 48 hours. Before long, they begin to experience some of the real joys of alcohol. Joys such as studying the bottom of the community toilets as they relieve their bodies of that one final beer via the esophagus and the throbbing, nauseous hang-overs which await on those mornings after killer keg parties.

Freshmen are easily spotted sitting outside their dorm rooms on the phone mooching money from Mom and Dad. Phone bills are an excellent excuse to get a little extra cash.

The word through the grapevine is that there once was a freshman who studied before dead week, but he was pressured into transferring because he ruined the curve for everyone else.

Stage two. The sophomore year is similar to the freshmen year, except for one major detail. Most students reach the age of 19 during this stage. Look out Canada! You see, at the age of 19, students can legally study the culture of our northern neighbors in the dance clubs.

Canadian dance clubs have become a haven for these hormonal drinking machines. Where else can a person get a $6 beer and dance the night away with one of the less-than-wholesome club dwellers who grace many of the establishments? Then comes the real challenge: finding someone sober enough to drive everyone else home. Most often this is the one who can actually find the car.

Sophomores have the same clothes as they did as freshmen, which are still new enough to be considered somewhat stylish. Although their wardrobe may be smaller, due to the wonderful trial and error lessons in laundry as freshmen. Isn't learning a new skill
great!

By stage two of their college careers, students begin to acquire an appreciation for espresso and even Starbucks. This is a true mystery in life. What once tasted like Minit Lube rejects, has become a bitter delicacy.

Studying is actually considered a necessity from time to time in stage two, and some sophomores discover Wilson Library actually has an upstairs.

Ah yes, stage three. The junior year, when most students get out on their own and move into a house or apartment with their dorm buddies. Stage three is often the time when students discover the true concept of poverty.

Outrageous rent for a run-down shack, power bills for what must be the entire block's electricity and grocery shopping all help to deplete the accounts of most juniors. Good beer is a thing of the past. Move over Henry's and Corona, make room for Lucky and Reinlander.

The junior has usually acquired the art of preparing fine dishes such as macaroni & cheese, Top Ramen and hot dogs by the end of the second week of school. Never in their sheltered lives did they realize Top Ramen could be cooked 47 different ways. The toughest dinner question they face is whether to boil or microwave the hot dogs. Microwaving almost always wins because no pots are required.

Clothes now begin to fade, shrink and get a little tight. No longer are they the mark of style and hipness, but seasoned students. Nike Air shoes are replaced by the ugliest shoes ever invented, the Birkenstock. These are what separate the mere students from true Vikings.

During this vital stage, students are forced to take up studying to avoid academic probation for yet another quarter. Juniors realize they need a higher grade point average than a 1.3 to get that job they deserve. Goodbye brew buds, hello study group.

The 21st birthday usually falls during stage three. Canada is out of the question, local bars are much easier to get home from. You don’t even have to dress up. No one there will be impressed anyway, so why bother?

One morning students wake up and realize they have entered — the senior zone. This is the stage when students discover they aren’t going to graduate on time. Don’t worry, even if there was a remote chance of spring graduation, the classes needed won’t be offered until spring quarter, all seven of them!

This is the stage of new identity. Seniors are old. Their bodies can’t take a single night out on the town, much less an entire weekend. The once recreational intramural sports activities have become the games from hell. Soreness doesn’t leave the body anymore, it just moves to different locations.

The bars are a thing of the past. Seniors are too busy rewriting papers, working on final projects or power lounging on the sofa. Clothing choices have become a question of what’s left with no hole in the crotch and what will fit over those love handles. Anything near the bed is good enough for school.

Nutrition in stage four consists of coffee, stale bagels and tortilla chips with salsa.

The fifth stage is the final stage for most students. School is no longer a social event, but a daily battle to graduate. Professors not only recognize your face, but know your name. Is this good?

A party in stage five is two aspirin and a swig of the old sniffing — sneezing — coughing — achings — head — fever — so — you — can — rest — medicine.

Dressing is about the same now as it was in the previous stage, but now everything has a hole in the crotch or gets high centered on their pooch bellies.

The transformation is complete. Congratulations, you’re now a full-fledged adult ready to enter the real world as un-stylish, out-of-shape, burn-out with ugly shoes.