Dear Readers,

I hate to bring up the economy (after all, it’s all we ever hear about anymore), but even during these hard financial times, a fresh start is possible. That’s what this issue of Klipsun is all about: “New Beginnings”—the challenges we face in our lives and how we start anew.

“New Beginnings” covers a wide range of stories, from life after injury and prison, to the struggles of being a transsexual or living as a refugee in an unfamiliar country. Starting anew can also create opportunities to grow and learn as individuals and as a community, including finding new ways to explore cultures or to research life-threatening diseases.

This issue also marks a new beginning for Klipsun. We are only publishing one issue this quarter—a bigger issue with more stories for you to enjoy. In addition, we are increasing Klipsun’s online content by creating multimedia components that explore several fascinating stories. Take a look online at klipsun.wwu.edu to view these new installments.

I hope these stories and online clips provide you with inspiration during these difficult times. I hope you, too, can find a fresh start—a new beginning.

Thanks for reading,

Katie Dreke
Editor in Chief

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The P-I building on Elliott Avenue, located along the waterfront in downtown Seattle. As the globe revolves, the mounted red lettering reads, “It’s in the P-I”—a media mockery of what the publication was just a few short months ago.

Everything looks eerily ordinary at the P-I headquarters. The unmistakable words, “The Seattle Post-Intelligencer,” on front of the building match the newspaper’s banner, which once ran across the top of the front page. The one standout difference, however, is the vertical red and white ‘For Lease’ sign in the shadow of the globe—an evident symbol that the P-I has become yet another victim of the current economic crisis.

March 17, 2009 will stand out in the hearts and minds of people across the Northwest as the day it all ended—the P-I’s last date of publication. With America’s newspaper industry struggling, a slumping economy forced the P-I to stop publication. However, online journalism is providing a new beginning for Seattle area journalists to keep breaking the news.

After the closure, concerned citizens, current employees and the journalism community as a whole were left questioning what the next step would be for the P-I. The answer was a quick transition from print to online, coupled with substantial layoffs in every department. From more than 150 employees, approximately 20 have remained on with Seattlepi.com to continue gathering and publishing the news.

Yet for a determined group of former P-I employees, the answer to layoffs was to create their own opportunities: The Seattle Post Globe and another reporting group, InvestigateWest.

Seattlepostglobe.com is still in its preliminary stages. They featured stories on the Mariners’ home opener and the race for Seattle’s city attorney. InvestigateWest also remains in the beginning stages, but the organization’s goal is to gain an affiliation with local universities, such as Western and the University of Washington. The organizations represent the new and innovative ideas former P-I writers, editors and photographers are now working on in order to continue their careers in the ever-changing journalism world.

Under the arched ceiling of the church, Western junior Julie Lynch—one of more than 100 students meeting for Tuesday night service—bows her head. In the dimly lit pews, she closes her eyes and claps her hands together under her chin as she sings, wearing her harmonica with the voices of those around her.

Lord, we are breathing the breath that You gave us to breathe: to worship You, to worship You. And we’re singing these songs with the very same breath to worship You, to worship You.

Her bright red hair catches in the light of the candles flickering along the edges of the room. She brings her hands in front of her chest as she sings—palms facing toward her, fingers stretched toward the ceiling. Around her, others sit and sing while some lug bags nearby. In the balcony, one man spreads his arms wide, his fingertips outstretched as his voice joins the choruses.

It was a night like this, two and a half years ago at The INN, a Christian non-denominational ministry group, that sparked Lynch’s rediscovery of her faith. During the service she had a “this is it moment”—what some call a “spiritual birthday.”

The INN University Ministries is one of 16 religious Associated Students clubs on campus. As students reach college and are faced with choosing classes, majors and friends, some find their spirituality is another question to ponder. As they enter a largely secular campus, some students will re-examine their faith and its current place in their lives. Some explore and advance in the faith they have grown up with, some seek out new religions to try, and others dismiss and abandon their faith.

*To read more, go to klipsun.wwu.edu.*
Art, culture, a willing community and decades of planning. Relentless, unwavering perseverance. This is what it takes to create the Bellingham Arts District.

Twelve years ago, representatives and board members from the Whatcom Museum of History and Art, Bellingham Public Library and Mount Baker Theatre sat in the corner of a dimly lit Pepper Sisters restaurant to discuss the future of art and culture in Bellingham. As the half dozen men and women dined on southwest-style burritos and enchiladas, they hashed out the best way to develop a city center focused on the arts.

Two hours and countless rounds of tortilla chips later, those few progressive thinkers planted the seed for the Bellingham Arts District.

Ken Culver, a tall, distinguished man with graying hair and mustache, was one of the original visionaries present at the downtown restaurant that night, and continues to be personally invested in the project.

Culver says the group dreamed of a place in town where the young and the old, the artist and the art enthusiast, the creative and the creative at heart could meet and mingle to discuss, appreciate and contemplate the arts.

Without an abundance of culturally rich activities, a city can become devoid of creative thought and progress, and stops living up to its full, sophisticated potential, Culver says.

For Culver, the Arts District would include beautifully paved sidewalks lined with vegetation and pedestrian-friendly streets to promote both walking and driving. Music from outdoor concerts would travel through alleyways and accompany chatter of those emerging from theatre shows and performances.

Culver says the district is not about creating new venues, but giving the old spaces a rebirth by connecting them together.

“The arts bring a dimension to this town that any town would die to have,” Culver says. “We have the theater, a world-class museum and a great library system. They are all sitting within two blocks of each other, so why don’t we package this up into a physical, geographic location and call it the Arts District?”

This downtown revival is a collaboration between the City of Bellingham and Campaign for the Arts. Places such as the Whatcom Museum, Mount Baker Theatre, Pickford Cinema, Allied Arts and the American Museum of Radio and Electricity will be linked through the Arts District.

Culver says the district was only dreams and conjecture before city funding arrived— when they were finally able to put their plan into action.

The Bellingham-Whatcom Public Facilities District was created through state legislation in 2002 to provide approximately $17 million to the Arts District project over 25 years, but this was still not enough to make the district come
With the current economic climate making it nearly impossible to begin such a large project, the city is lucky they took advantage of Campaign for the Arts fundraising opportunities when they did, Sundin says.

Adding a new museum facility was just one step among many to make the city a more inviting and welcoming place for tourists and the community.

In an effort to make downtown more pedestrian-friendly, $1.6 million went toward streetscape projects like the one seen on the corner of Holly and Bay Streets. The busy intersection was restructured to accommodate a crosswalk, the sidewalk was widened to include a seating area and the “Sentinel” sculpture was installed.

Culver crosses his arms and and back on his heels amidst laddders, tarps and two-by-fours in what will soon be the newest addition to the Whatcom Museum. The outdoor courtyard of the Lightcatcher building, filled with large slate stones and building pkees trees, is beginning to take shape. Standing beside Calver is Patricia Leach, the museum’s executive director for the past two years. Leach’s face lights up as she heanz stories of the Arts District’s early beginnings—struggles and victorries that were before her time.

Three years of intense fundraising efforts enabled Campaign for the Arts to raise an estimated $5.5 million. With the current economy, however, Culver says the campaign is at a standstill. Donations have dramatically decreased and goals have been pushed back 10 years because people in the community are unable or unwilling to give money to the cause.

“We were doing great until the bottom fell out of the economy,” Culver says. “It has been very, very difficult to move ahead. We’ve chosen to sit it out for a little while.”

The future of the project, which Culver says was smooth sailing up until several months ago, is looking bleak. The days of unwavering-only events, guided tours of the developing Lightcatcher building and detailed presentations to prospective donors are over. Culver says he devoted more than a decade of his life to the development of the Arts District because an entertainment district adds diversity and energy to the community. He passionately felt Bellingham needed the district to be whole, he says.

Alice Clark and Michel Falter, Pickford Cinema executive and program directors, know all too well the financial woes of the Arts District. As they climb a rickety staircase covered with sawdust at Pickford’s new film center site, which is still under construction, they describe the student collaboration, extended film festivals and education programs in the new building.

Since September 2006, the directors have been looking to move from their cramped quarters on Cornwall Avenue to the more accommodating Dream Space building on Bay Street, a gateway to the Arts District.

“Film is the most accessible form of art there is, and we aim to serve a large part of the community,” Falter says.

The new center will boast two theaters and a 250-person seating capacity, but nearly three years and $2.3 million later, the project is incomplete and in need of $1 million more, Falter says.

Including the Pickford as part of the Arts District ensures Bellingham’s only independent cinema would continue to survive. Falter says it would be heartbreaking to see the project come to an end.

Culver says he is unperturbed by any economic hardships that threaten to thwart the completion of the Arts District. Especially when money is tight, free or inexpensive leisurely activities should be in high demand, Leach says.

“Bellinghamsters” of all ages. She says her biggest hope is people will peruse cafes, restaurants, theaters, gallery walks and exhibition openings on a nightly basis in the Arts District. Especially when money is tight, the possibilities are endless for the Pickford, as long as they are able to move into their new, larger space.

Different sized photographs and drawings line Leach’s office walls and cover her already cluttered and messy desk.

Leach becomes lost in her own thoughts.

“I see this as a really vibrant, active district with a lot of potential,” Leach says as she peruses her office, overlooking Bellingham Bay. She adjusts her eyeglasses and smiles, “I have always thought the Arts District would be heartbreaking to see the project come to an end.”

Culver says he is unperturbed by any economic hardships that threaten to thwart the completion of the Arts District. Even if he has to raise the remaining money one penny at a time, he is determined to see this rebirth through.

It is important for residents to see how much their contributions helped build this district, Culver says. The project made it this far because of the hard work of numerous people and organizations.

Culver shields his eyes from the evening sun and looks out across the empty Lightcatcher building construction site. The project has come a long way since its start at the Pepper Sisters restaurant, and he can almost taste the satisfaction of a successful venture. He says it would be heartbreaking to see the project come to an end.

Culver and Leach agree Campaign for the Arts still needs to raise another $3.1 million to keep the Arts District’s grand opening on schedule. The museum has its only fundraising event of the year planned for July 2009 in the nearly-complete Lightcatcher building as a last ditch attempt to attract donors, and continue to involve the community in the district’s progress.

To date, the campaign has raised more than half of $5.5 million. The city is lucky they took advantage of Campaign for the Arts fundraising opportunities when they did, Sundin says.

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room that night because of the little pink dot.  The 72-year-old Dixey was admitted to the emergency room on Thanksgiving Day 2001, Kevin Dixey reports.  "I was shocked at first and then kind of angry because I felt that no one was listening to me," Dixey says.  "I told Dixey he used a team of doctors to fight his disease, including a surgeon and oncologist, who practiced traditional Western medicine, a naturalpath and a doctor, who practiced traditional Chinese medicine.  The man from the site said this team was able to save his bladder, giving Dixey a glimmer of hope.

Dixey's case was also posted to an online tumor board where doctors discussed difficult or strange cases.  There he was introduced to Dr. Ben Chue of Seattle.  Dixey says he became interested in Chue's opinion on his disease, and thought it would be worthwhile to schedule an appointment.

"[Chue] scratched his head and said, 'This is a really strange situation. I don't usually take new patients, but I saw your case on the tumor board,'" Dixey says about his initial appointment with Chue.

Chue thought Dixey's organs could be saved.

Dixey says he and his wife did not stop researching the disease once his team of doctors was assembled.  When it was time to start battling his disease, Dixey went online and found a new treatment for bladder cancer that mixes the traditional drug used to treat the disease, Bacillus Calmette-Guerin, with Interferon, a drug that helps raise the body's immune system.  Dixey presented this information to his doctor, who then began treating him with the regimen.

"By using the Internet, I got as many points of view as possible, and just went with what the doctors told me," Dixey says.

When asked if he thought the Internet was a valuable resource, Dixey said yes.

"I made it my mission to get educated about it," Dixey says.  "I knew that something wasn't right," Dixey says.  "I think it was that anger that drove me to find out more."

He and his wife began to gather as much information as they could online and elsewhere.  More than 3,000 doctors and researchers share their expertise on the site and team of editors, who, according to the site, also have doctor of medicine degrees, screens all the information.
A SNAPSHOT OF WHAT’S OUT THERE

+PATIENTSLIKEME.COM
Healthcare’s version of social networking. More than 35,000 patients add friends, and post information and support about their illnesses. The site also features news on research and improvements in the medical field from doctors and scientists around the country.

+MAYOCLINIC.COM
Covers information on more illnesses and diseases from A-Z. The site compiles information from more than 3,300 doctors and researchers. It also provides news updates on the latest health conditions.

+MEDLINEPLUS.GOV
Compiles information from the U.S. National Library of Medicine and the National Institutes of Health. According to the Web site, MedlinePlus features “extensive information about drugs, an illustrated medical encyclopedia, interactive patient tutorials, and latest health news.”

+FAMILYCARENETWORK.COM
Compiles information from doctors in the Family Care Network, a team of Whatcom County-based, board-certified physicians. The site provides medical information to those who specifically live in Whatcom County, including doctors and clinics in the area, recent medical news and tips to old common ailments.

+WEBMD.COM
In 2007, an average of 17.1 million people per month visited this site. It features a “Symptom Checker” as well as A-Z information on an array of illnesses and diseases. According to the site, posted information is reviewed by a medical board consisting of four physicians.

TIPS FOR SEARCHING ONLINE FOR MEDICAL INFORMATION

+SEARCHING FOR MEDICAL CONDITIONS
through a common Web site may lead to less than credible results. Try searching on EBINDEX, a search engine run by the National Library of Medicine, or healthfinder, an engine that searches through government health Web sites.

+FIND BLOGGERS OR FORUMS
that primarily discuss the condition you have. Information from someone who has experienced the treatment of a particular disease or illness is helpful because it is delivered first-hand. Something that worked for another individual may also work for you.

+MEDICAL JARGON
can sometimes be difficult to understand. The Medical Library Association Web site features “Deciphering Medspeak,” a resource that translates medical jargon, making it easier to understand.

+ASK YOUR DOCTOR
before trying anything. Web sites are great places to look for information, but before trying someone’s home remedy, you should discuss it with your physician. Certain foods or drugs may counter act with prescription medicines, so getting your doctor’s permission is a must.
Two years ago, Western junior Lara Buelow and her roommate, Randolph Rhea, huddled and shivered in a cramped, smelly tent they had pitched in a patch of woods beside an old cemetery. All night rain pummeled their tent while a dull, 24-hour sunlight suffused it through its fabric, waking them every hour or two. They had no place to stay. They were miserable. They were two American students visiting the arctic tip of Norway.

Days before, Buelow, 22, and Rhea, 21, embarked on a dream trip from northern Sweden up to the city of Tromsø, Norway. Though they had little money between them and no semblance of an itinerary, two free weeks of summer vacation in Europe was reason enough to venture out.

After days of riding trains and nights of camping in national parks, the friends finally reached Tromsø; the place where the dream trip gave way to a reality check. The city hostel would not open for another month, no hotels fit their price range and they knew no Norwegians. Despite it being May, Buelow and Rhea still noticed snow on all the surrounding mountaintops when they wandered into the drizzling woods near the city limits to set up camp.

Thankfully, the next morning, they met Scott Meyer. Compelled by fantasies of sleeping some place warm and dry, Buelow and Rhea walked to the Tromsø city library that morning to use a Web site Rhea had recently learned about—one where hospitable locals from all around the world offer their couches to travelers who need a place to sleep. There, at CouchSurfing.com, they contacted Meyer, a Tromsø resident and seasoned couch surfer.

“Scott instantly became our savior,” Buelow says.

Within minutes of meeting Buelow and Rhea at the library, Meyer assured them they could pack their tent away—they could crash at his apartment. No charge.

“He pretty much gave us the keys to his apartment on the spot and was like, ‘Oh, yeah, you can totally stay with me—I’ll meet you back there in two hours,’” Rhea says.

The two friends slept in Meyer’s living room for the next three nights. They made pizza with him, partied with his friends and visited places around the city based on his recommendations. Overnight, Buelow and Rhea’s first couch surfing experience jump-started their love for a new method of travel, introducing them to roughly 100 individuals across the globe and giving them new perspectives on other cultures they could not gain without staying with locals.

“You meet people from a lot of different backgrounds,” Buelow says. “You become familiar with this whole new international community so quickly.”

That international community consists of more than 1 million couch surfers from almost every country on Earth who use Web sites like CouchSurfing.com, HospitalityClub.org.
and GlobalFreeLoaders.com to stay with locals during their travels. With the global economy suffering in recent months, the community has grown at an exponential rate. In April 2009, an average of 14,000 new couch surfers registered with CouchSurfing.com each week, nearly doubling the growth numbers from April 2008, which also had doubled from the previous year. Approximately 300 people in the Bellingham area are now registered couch surfers—many of them Western students.

Bulman and his partner of 28 years, Jim Rich, a Bellingham artist and longtime couch-surfing host, were initially skeptical about opening their doors to anyone who could find them on the Internet. “We were just waiting and going, ‘Oh my God, what are we doing? Are we crazy? Nothing ventured, nothing gained.’” Bulman says. “But for many women, the concept of couch surfing sparks thoughts of bigger threats than just obnoxious dudes. “There are always people who tell you that you're going to get robbed or hurt if you travel like this too often,” Buelow says. “But the truth is that there are millions of people out there who are just trying to make it work.”

One of the couple's most memorable guests was a Japanese man who flew from Tokyo to Los Angeles and bought a bike that he pedaled up to Bellingham, couch surfing along the way. He wanted to take a ferry from Bellingham to Alaska, but after learning how expensive ferry tickets were, he rode back to Seattle and bought a plane ticket to Anchorage, the couple says. From there, he biked across Canada until he reached New York City, where he reunited with his girlfriend, had a baby and started earning in recent months, the community has experienced marked as positive experiences.

“Once you both agree to let someone into your home, you have to expect that things are going to change in your private life,” Bulman says. “It requires you to communicate with each other to make it happen. It's strengthened our relationship—absolutely. You experience it and you have to agree. 'OK, we want more of this. We usually go to sleep at night and talk about how great it's been.'”

In fact, the couple says using Couch Surfing and Hospitality Club has very little to do with monetary savings. “It's a super economical way to travel, but it's more so a wonderful way for us to have a cultural exchange,” says Rick Bulman, a Bellingham artist and longtime couch-surfing host. “Suddenly someone's in your home from another country and you get to ask questions like, 'What's your life like? What was going to school in your country like?' How does your society handle jails? ‘How do they look at gay people?' ‘How do they look at gay schools in your country like?’”

For two years minimum, and they will have to prove themselves to travelers extraneously. They always want to cook. They always want to do dishes or help out around the house.’”

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Couchsurfing.com tries to ensure the safety of travelers and hosts through a number of measures. Users write feedback on one another’s profiles, and while many also pay an optional $25 deposit to verify their address and identity, experienced users can also “vouch” for friends they meet through the Web site, giving their profile more credibility and their hosts extra reassurance.

But the best prevention against danger while couch surfing, says Lars Buelow’s sister, Maya, is to simply be smart about choosing a host by thoroughly communicating, and only contacting users with detailed profiles and trustworthy pictures. She also recommends meeting in a public place beforehand.

Western junior Peter Donnelly couch surfed for the first time during spring break 2009 in Greece. He and a friend arranged to meet their host at a metro station in Athens and he remembers feeling a rush of anxiety anticipation as they waited to meet the stranger whose couch they would sleep on.

“We were just waiting and going, ‘Oh my God, what are we doing? Are we crazy? This is ridiculous,’” he says. “But soon enough, he rode up on his moped with a big smile, and after the initial formalities, we knew he was going to be a lot of fun.”

Donnelly, 20, says during the short amount of time he has spent couch surfing, he already notices a positive change in his disposition. He is more outgoing. The world feels like a smaller, more manageable place than before. He knows now he is free to travel the globe as long as he makes a priority of experiencing cultures beyond his own. “Putting your comfort zone can make you grow and stretch as a person,” he says. “It's important to realize that our own way of looking at the world is not the only way, and that while we do have differences with people from other cultures, we have a surprising amount in common.”

The experiences of many couch surfers mirror Donnelly’s. By seeing life in a foreign country through the insight of a local host, they gain a perspective on a new culture they might not have obtained as a tourist passing through. Rich suspects that as the couch surfing community continues to grow, so too will the number of bigger threats than just obnoxious dudes. “There are always people who tell you that you're going to get robbed or hurt if you travel like this too often,” Buelow says. “But the truth is that there are millions of people out there who are just trying to make it work.”

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Part the new development issues and condominiums at the north end of Whatcom County, the wide, smooth paved street turns into a lumpy, freshly gravelled road. The road leads to a large fenced area in the middle of a big green field surrounded by tall fir trees, distant mountains and the endless blue sky.

Inside the 8-foot-tall fence are a dozen people too busy to take notice of the picturesque surroundings. Fifty wooden, raised garden beds, each measuring 4 by 16 feet, sit waiting to be filled with rich, dark soil, and volunteers will fill them one wheelbarrow at a time.

Piled high are huge drum-hunk loads of topsoil. Just inside the fence near the work shed are boards, plastic buckets, coiled hoses, rakes, shovels, trowels, rolls of wire fencing, and sheets of cardboard. All these materials, combined with the sweat of volunteer labor and a100-year planning session by the Guida Merivs/11odontai Neighborhood Association committee, are transforming the once empty field into the reality of Cordata Community Gardens—a 15,000-square-foot nonprofit garden space open to the public.

An electrical cord snakes out of the work shed running to the end of the drill in 72-year-old Ben Andrews hand. Andrews, one of the garden organizers, is up on a ladder, and Bill Smith, a Washington State University Master Gardener and official consultant for Cordata Community Gardens, is steadying boards that will fit above the smaller walk-through entry gate.

“I’m just not sure if we can make our start date on May 1, 2009,” Andrews says. “We don’t want too much hook-up yet, and the beds aren’t going to plan for. But we are trying for it because people are wanting to get on it.”

People all across the country are “wanting to get on it.” The recent headlines about the economic crisis, tainted food and poor nutrition have helped inspire a sense of urgency in transforming the Victory Garden idea of the Eleanor Roosevelt era to the Community Gardens of today. Growing one’s own food has even taken on a social justice aspect. Gardening can be a way to make a political statement about inequities in the U.S.’s current troubled food system.

“Change is coming to food,” says Sara van Gelder, editor of YES Magazine. “As the global economy unravels, and as the implications of peak oil and climate change sink in, interest in alternatives to the current food system is growing. People are reconnecting with the land and with community.”

Ben Chester agrees with van Gelder’s ideas about the importance of developing alternatives to the present system of agriculture. Chester, a 26-year-old Western alumnus, majored in philosophy and has studied permaculture gardening. He divides his time between Seattle and Bellingham, volunteering with another new community garden, and says he has noted the surge of interest in gardening food.

“Community gardens are sprouting up all over the Sound and Bellingham area,” says Chester. “This is definitely a new trend.”

Even before the projected opening date of May 1, all 50 raised beds at Cordata Community Gardens rented for a $35 annual fee, and a waiting list was start, says Dee Andrews, 63-year-old garden organizer and Ben Andrews’ wife of 22 years.

“Many of the reasons for starting the garden is the realization of topsoil. Just inside the fence near the work shed was started, says Dee Andrews, 63-year-old garden organizer and Ben Andrews’ wife of 22 years. The waiting list was started, says Dee Andrews, 63-year-old garden organizer and Ben Andrews’ wife of 22 years.

“Ben Andrews says he sees community gardening as a way for people to prepare for coming social changes brought on by economic and environmental crises. He notes that community gardens can inspire you to think of these things: get going, and you are just pulled into it,” Shah says. “One of the main themes established by research is that community gardens act as a catalyst for a ‘de-industrializing’ urban culture.”

Shah tells us that of all the volunteers she is already having visions of all the gardeners getting together and having a “Mid-Summer Nights Dream” party at the garden.

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Shah tells us that of all the volunteers she is already having visions of all the gardeners getting together and having a “Mid-Summer Nights Dream” party at the garden. **“I need to talk about how to feed ourselves with quality food,” Ben says, with a slight southern accent.**

At the Washington State University Whatcom County Extension Service office, Master Gardener Jill Cotton says the recent surge of interest in gardening is being driven in part by the current recession.

“My phone has been ringing off the hook with people asking for help with starting a garden to supplement their food budgets,” Cotton says.

Cotton says the implementation of the new Whatcom County Extension Service program, called Community First Gardens, could not have come at a better time for Bellingham residents. The program offers help in the form of matching funds of $5,000 for approved applications for nonprofit community gardens.

The Cordata Community Gardens is the first recipient of a $5,000 grant from the Mary Redman fund affiliated with the Community First Gardens Project. These kinds of gardens offer affordable garden plots, tool, community support and education from master gardeners for beginning and advanced gardeners.

A community garden can serve as a gathering place for diverse neighborhood residents. The gardens are known for their “potluck get-togethers,” seed exchange parties, and education seminars, which are held at community garden sites.

Studies have shown community gardens create several benefits, in addition to economic, nutritional and environmental issues. The study is dealing with.

“Gardens can inspire you to think of these things: get going, and you are just pulled into it,” Shah says.
TOP PICKS

Master Gardener and official consultant for Cordata Community Gardens, Bill Smith, says with careful planning, a 14-by-16 foot raised garden bed can easily feed a family of four during the growing season. Here are Smith’s plant recommendations:

MARIGOLDS + NASTURTIUMS + ONIONS + CARROTS + RED BEETS + BROCCOLI + GREEN CABBAGE + SPINACH + OREGON SPRING TOMATOES + BUTTER CRUNCH LETTUCE + LOOSE LEAF LETTUCE + JADE BUSH BEANS + INDIAN CORN
Laying on his bed at Bellingham's Aloha Motel on Samish Way, Department of Corrections inmate 971030 claps his bald head and furrows his brow as he thinks back to the prison cells he spent years living in.

The gates in his mind crank open and memories flood forth: the tiny cells, the hour to shower, the hour to smoke, the fights with other inmates and the days spent in solitary confinement as a result. An alcoholic and drug addict, he was sentenced to three and a half years in prison in 2001 for kicking in the door of his trailer on the Muckleshoot Indian Reservation and threatening to kill his girlfriend because he thought she was unfaithful. He stayed seven years, picking up more charges—and years on his sentence—because of the fights.

Heddrick is one of approximately 34,000 men and women in Washington under active DOC supervision. Although he will be watched for the next 16 months, he considers this a blessing because he has faced 46 criminal charges in his life—an average of more than one charge per year lived.

"When you look at my criminal history, I look like an animal," Heddrick says.

More people are going to prison in Washington than ever before. In 2006, almost 18,000 people were incarcerated in state prisons, which is 10,000 more inmates than in 1986, according to DOC statistics. While the increase of inmates is not exceptionally based on per-capita rates, it causes him to pace around his motel room. As the injections make him anxious and cause him to panic, he will break free of the criminal justice system, says his community corrections officer, Eric Petersen.

Heddrick is a bipolar schizophrenic and cannot work until he has progressed enough with his mental-health treatment. His community corrections officer ensures he gets his antipsychotic medication injected every two weeks. This year Heddrick is one of approximately 34,000 men in prison in Washington.
Shannon Pauline Lathrop’s story has no hope for a new beginning, only a brutal, tragic and violent end.

Lathrop, 31 at the time of her death, had severe mental illness and suffered from paranoid delusions exacerbated by the heroin and methamphetamine she regularly fed into her bloodstream.

For much of her adult life, Lathrop bounced back and forth from Bellingham, Spokane and mental hospitals, says her community corrections officer, Jer Reid. Reid supervised her for years, and says at times Lathrop truly believed someone was out to kill her. Reid says these were delusional fantasies but played out as voices inside Lathrop’s mind. Alone in her motel room, Lathrop would sometimes scream so loud neighbors would call the police convinced she was being murdered.

“It must have been awful living in her mind,” Reid says. “In her mind she was terrified.”

The DOC provided Lathrop with her room at the Aloha Motel and ensured she was complying with her court-ordered mental-health treatment, Reid says. She was set to end her supervision in the last week of July 2008. Before her death, her mental state was improving and she told Reid at their last meeting, July 16, she wanted to stick with the treatment so she would not have to return to the mental hospital.

Reid says Lathrop’s supervision with the DOC had improved her life. She had progressed so much she was seeking visitors rights to see her son, whom she gave birth to in jail, Heddrick says. Lathrop called Reid obsessively—sometimes more than 30 times a night. But suddenly, the calls stopped, and Reid knew something was wrong. On July 21, Reid knocked on Lathrop’s motel door, but no one answered. On July 23, Reid filed a court notice to confirm her worst suspicions.

Investigators did not know who she was for months, until they ran a fingerprint through a national database and found a match. A detective called Reid to confirm her worst suspicions.

“We knew something had happened to her,” Reid says. “It’s sad that she died a violent death. Hopefully she’s in a more peaceful place.”

Heddrick says detectives came by his room several times to question him about Lathrop’s disappearance and have him try to identify stale suspects from a photo line-up. The problem, Heddrick explains, is Lathrop was also a prostitute whom he had intercourse with on several occasions.

Shannon Lathrop’s life is now contained in manila folders belonging to the Whatcom County Sheriff’s detectives and FBI agents tasked to find and arrest her killer.

Lathrop never had the chance to experience life outside the criminal justice system. She was at the cusp of finally breaking her life free of the system, but someone intervened and cruelly ended it.

As Heddrick stands outside his motel room smoking a cigarette and looks at where Lathrop had lived, he allows himself to reflect.

He thinks of the walks they would take to Fairhaven and back, the meals they would cook on his hot plate in his room and the plans they had to watch the Fourth of July fireworks at Boulevard Park that she did not keep.

“She was a really lovely girl even though she was crazy,” Heddrick says. “It just made her seem more vulnerable. Shannon was like everyone’s baby.”

And with that, Heddrick’s troubled mind cranks forward and he begins talking about tools, jobs and his future once he leaves DOC supervision.

Forty-eight million dollars—that is how much the state government will use taking its eyes off of people cycling through its criminal justice system. To Eric Petersen, a Western graduate who has worked with the DOC for 12 years, laying off community corrections officers is offensive.

“They look great on paper,” Petersen says. “But it’s going to hammer the local communities. We see the people who would be cut loose. In my opinion it’s going to be a major community safety issue.”

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Her body was found 24 hours later. A boat had been lit on fire in a rural area off of North Red River Road, in the northern part of the Lummi Reservation, and firefighters found her badly burned corpse propped up against it. While the cause of her death has not been released, an autopsy report noted she had died days before the fire.

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“IT MUST HAVE BEEN AWFUL LIVING IN HER MIND,” REID SAYS. “IN HER MIND SHE WAS TERRIFIED.”
As her date circles the perimeter of the construction Dumpster, Jen Girard inconspicuously climbs up the ladder and into the commercial-size bin.

“Oh my God, you got in!” exclaims her date.

Girard, a trash designer from Seattle’s Ballard district, often rescues reusable trash from Dumpsters to make garments. She was one step further on Feb. 1, 2009 when she asked her date to help her find trash on their second outing. Dressed in stylish clothing—albeit warm with five layers, to protect herself in the middle of winter—Girard met up with the lucky man.

The cold February weather hit the two hard in the enclosed space. The large metal bin trapped the cold winter air and made her glad to have worn a down vest, hat and scarf, she says.

After an hour of rummaging through the Dumpster, Girard finds enough items to begin her design, including orange construction fencing and three pieces of Holly Hansen rain gear. She donated a quarter of her findings to Goodwill—items such as bungee cords and unopened tools that were perfectly usable—and used the rest to fashion a garment.

“Trash fashion allows what would otherwise sit in a landfill to be recycled and rework them to give the items a new beginning as a work of art,” says Robin Worley, a designer for Haute Trash.

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“Trash fashion has become so widespread that a few garments for Bellingham’s fashion show came from San Francisco and London,” says Robin Worley, a designer for Haute Trash.

Worley, who has friends in Europe, says the system in the population-dense continent is better than U.S. recycling procedures, as European manufacturers are responsible for packaging. A European consumer can purchase a product and leave the packaging at the store, giving the burden of discarding the packing materials to the producer.

Trash fashion allows what would otherwise sit in a landfill to be given a new life. Worley, whose designer name is “Rayona Visqueen,” says she often sits on the bus and scopes out future projects.

“I look at backpacks and I think ‘That looks like it’s falling apart; it would make a great top,’” she says.

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Rebecca Maxim, a nurse whose designer name is “Alottadetritus,” has shown her design in five shows and now considers herself part of the trash fashion community. She says creating garments from trash is a growing trend and was initially done by a small group of designers in California.

Three days, people as far as Great Britain and New Zealand are involved in trash fashion, as seen in the yearly Trash to Fashion awards in California.

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Instead of dumping reusable items into landfills like Americans, people in Nepal pick through trash until what is left is no longer usable, Darling says. For example, plastic bags, the country’s most common pieces of trash, are swept and burned to keep warm in the cool mornings, despite the dangerous fumes given off by burning plastic, he says.

The U.S. is quick to bury its trash in dumps, leaving few opportunities to pick through to procure reusable items. Every Dumpster holds reusable goods, Darling says.

For years, Darling rummaged through Western’s Dumpsters at the end of the school year to find reusable items students threw away before the start of the summer. He says throughout the years he has found a leather jacket, a working car stereo and shoes.

Western senior Ben Weiser, who has worked with Western’s Recycling Center since 2006, says the center adds recovery barrels to residence halls a couple times a year to reduce the amount of reusable goods disposed of by students.

The barrels are set out in the winter when Asia University America Program students leave Western, as well as after spring quarter. The items collected by the barrel are donated to charity, Weiser says.

Throwing away goods is a relatively new concept, Darling says. Americans have been wasteful for the past 50 years because it was economical and easy to throw things away.

Corporations started producing goods to make money by building short-lived products that would need to be replaced frequently, which caused the volume in the landfills to grow, Darling says.

In some instances, the trash does not find its way to landfills. Worley says she is appalled when she finds out new information regarding trash. For example, ocean currents in the Pacific Ocean transport floating debris to a central location, forming what is known as the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, Worley says. The garbage patch is rumored to be twice the size of Texas or as large as India, she says.

“We are all part of the problem,” she says.

Girard is just one person who has embraced the trash fashion trend as a way to reduce waste and says the fashion shows give light to how much people throw away.

Once garments like Girard’s have had their one-year runs in fashion shows, they are either shipped to other locations to appear in various shows, placed in a large storage facility in California where Haute Trash began, or stored in the recesses of Worley’s living room.

Girard plans to make new garments to enter into fashion shows in fall 2009.

“I have ideas,” she says. “I just need to go Dumpster dive—to replenish supplies.”

She says the material she finds on her trash expeditions determines the design of the garment since the trash is difficult to work with. But, she would like to see trash made into more big dresses and headaddresses.
On Sept. 7, 2008, the leaves were beginning to change their green for gold. The sun was out and the sky was such a deep blue that the atmosphere seemed within reach. It was a perfect day for a bike ride. Friends Seth Keeghan and Kevin Candela were nearly finished with the 30-mile loop they had ridden around Lake Padden. They were on their way back into town, riding downhill on Connelly Avenue, which becomes Old Fairhaven Parkway after the I-5 overpass. They never made it onto the parkway. Riding their road bikes at 25 mph, the two friends zoomed down a hill they had ridden down hundreds of times before. It was 2:30 p.m. and traffic was heavy. Hands on their brakes, they studied the traffic, relying on their brightly colored clothes and bikes to keep them visible to motorists. Suddenly, a forest green Range Rover turned left to go onto northbound 1-5, five feet in front of Keeghan. Keeghan hit the SUV, leaving a massive dent in the front panel. He and his bike flipped into the air and landed on the windshield, smashing it. Keeghan regained consciousness and emitted a sound of pure agony. Keeghan over to administer CPR, but when they grabbed his shoulder, beneath him. He was unresponsive and not breathing. Candela and the man who was driving the SUV tried to turn Keeghan over to administer CPR, but when they grabbed his shoulders, Keeghan regained consciousness and emitted a sound of pure agony. "It was a combination of a scream and a moan that was blood curdling," Candela says. "He hardly gasped and then started again."

"It was this incredible, ‘Pow!’ sound," Candela says. "The first thing that went through my mind was, ‘Fuck, he’s dead. I just saw my best friend get killed.’" Keeghan regained consciousness and emitted a sound of pure agony. Keeghan had a collapsed lung and internal bleeding, and the doctors said he was possibly not going to make it. Candela and the man who was driving the SUV tried to turn Keeghan over to administer CPR, but when they grabbed his shoulders, Keeghan regained consciousness and emitted a sound of pure agony. "It was a combination of a scream and a moan that was blood curdling," Candela says. "He hardly gasped and then started again."

The men rolled a writhing Keeghan over onto his back and tried to hold him still until the ambulance got there. "It seemed like forever," Candela says. In the hospital, Keeghan’s body swelled twice its normal size. He had a collapsed lung and internal bleeding, and the doctors said he was possibly not going to make it. Keeghan did not lose his life, but he lost almost complete mobility of his left arm. After five days in the hospital and two months of lying around and doing nothing, Keeghan had regained consciousness and emitted a sound of pure agony. "It was a combination of a scream and a moan that was blood curdling," Candela says. "He hardly gasped and then started again."

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According to the Bicycle Helmet Safety Institute, about 540,000 bicyclists visit emergency rooms with injuries each year. Luckily, Keeghan was wearing a helmet. Like many accident survivors, Keeghan would rely on physical therapy to regain the motor skills he lost on that fateful summer day. Physical therapy does not always guarantee patients will fully recover. A person’s attitude and goals for recovery play a big part in how effective the therapy is, says Lori deKubber, an athletic trainer at Western who practices injury rehabilitation and has a master’s degree in sports psychology. She says looking ahead to a new beginning, rather than letting the trauma of an accident take over, is essential to recovery. deKubber is not alone in her thinking. In three separate surveys, 90 percent of trainers agree that it is important or very important to treat the psychological aspects of injuries, according to the book "Foundations of Sport and Exercise Psychology" by Robert Stephen Weinberg and Daniel Gould.

It is crucial to find out what motivates patients to get better so they will continue to do the same boring and monotonous exercises every day, says Margaret MacLean, an assistant physical therapist at Bellingham Physical Therapy who worked with Keeghan.

"I stood there at the window and I just broke down. It wasn’t even the fact that it happened to me, but the stuff that I’d have to go through and the mystery of how I was gonna turn out."

Keeghan has gone through many ups and downs, but in the beginning of his recovery it was mostly downs. During his second stay in the hospital, he was walking through the halls in his robe, looking out the windows. "It was such a beautiful day," Keeghan says. "I stood there at the window and I just broke down. It wasn’t even the fact that it happened to me, but the stuff that I’d have to go through and the mystery of how I was gonna turn out."

Both MacLean and deKubber say it is important to build relationships with patients because it helps them stay motivated through the challenges and setbacks of injury rehabilitation.
The key is that they know you really care about them as a person—not just their injury, but how they’re doing in school, at work, in their relationship,” deKubber says. “You need to be concerned about the whole person and you’re gonna have a better response.”

Keeghan began half-hour sessions twice a week at Bellingham Physical Therapy. After a few weeks, he moved up to three times a week. Although he alternated between three different therapists, MacLean was his favorite because she was tough. She brought the pain threshold on, but studied his facial expressions and knew what he was capable of handling.

“I like her better than any other just because she pushed me so hard,” Keeghan says. “The more you can handle, the more quickly you can recover.”

MacLean says Keeghan’s diagnosis was special, and that because of his “frozen shoulder,” it was important to push him hard to break through the scar tissue.

One of the exercises he performed included him lying on his back while a therapist raised his arm over his head. The horrible one, Keeghan says, was when he would lie on his back and rotate his arm out with his elbow still touching his side.

Keeghan also had a pulley system over his bathroom door at home. With his good arm he would pull one handle down while hanging onto the other handle with his bad arm to gain a better range of motion upwards.

When he started physical therapy, Keeghan’s arm only had 11 degrees of mobility instead of 180 degrees. The latest measurement was 135 degrees of mobility.

In May 2009, he went in for surgery to scrape away scar tissue from around his shoulder. “Then it was back to more physical therapy. I just want to get my whole self back,” Keeghan says. “Anything other than normal is not good enough.”

Generally, people who have sustained injuries feel more gratitude about what they are able to do after recovery, whereas before the accident they may have taken their abilities for granted, deKubber says.

DeKubber says she believes every event can be transformative, and that a person can benefit from even traumatic events in a positive way. The key, she says, is the emotional component.

“If you have an opportunity for personal growth and will grab at every opportunity through that process, you will be transformed in a positive way,” she says.

Keeghan’s accident pushed him to try not to worry about things so much, and instead has made him more happy-go-lucky.

“I’ve learned to never take things for granted,” he says. “I know it sounds cliché, but you never know when your time’s gonna be up.”
When Western junior Moses Garang was first separated from his mother, it was 1989 and he was only 7 years old. Startled in his sleep by gunshots in the darkness, he was swept into a stampede of frantic citizens fleeing the tiny city of Pachella, Sudan. By sunrise, the troop had swelled to nearly 20,000 displaced people. More than half were like Garang—young, orphaned boys who, disinherited from their families and unwelcome in their homeland, would come to be known as the “Lost Boys of Sudan.”

The uprooting in Pachella was only the beginning of the relentless relocation that would plague the boys, who ranged in age from 8 to 18. A civil war had erupted in Sudan, setting the Muslim North against the Christian South. Representing the future generation of Southern Sudan, the boys were honed in by the North and over the next four years, the Lost Boys (affectionately named by United Nations aid workers after Peter Pan’s parentless posse) navigated thousands of miles in search of a place to call home.

Like cattle, they traveled in protective columns and clusters across unforgiving deserts, callous savannahs and merciless mountains, facing ethnic and religious persecution in every city where they dared to pause. It would be three grueling years before Garang and the others would step foot in what they thought would be their final destination and a chance to start anew—a U.N. refugee station in the sweltering desert of Kakuma, Kenya.

“When we arrived, there was nothing except U.N. workers waiting for us,” Garang says. “We were really starting over.”

For many individuals fleeing their homeland, refugee camps mark the end of one harrowing journey and the beginning of another—reemergence into a new life.

Garang says he and the first Lost Boys who arrived had to build the huts and dig the wells that would sustain them for an indefinite number of years. The boys began to attend school, and in some cases, start families. Despite hardships, it appeared they were creating a new beginning for themselves.

“The first three months was hard,” he says. “I was 8 years old. You had to build your own house. But we liked helping and being a part—helping build something.”

But, Kakuma was not intended to be a permanent residence for the boys. By definition, a refugee camp is considered a temporary place of sanctuary for those fleeing their homeland. The next step is for camps to foster permanent resettlement of refugees into the countries they have fled to, says Sandra Van Der Pol, the refugee project coordinator for World Relief in Seattle. However, she says this is frequently not possible, as many refugees are often unwelcome in even their shelter countries.

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Each day after that first departure, the remaining Lost Boys huddled around the Kakuma camp posting board, waiting for their names to appear on the mysteriously calculated U.S. Embassy departure list. The list, Garang says, became a source of hope for the Lost Boys.

“The United Nations were taking care of us. They were like our family,” he says. “And I had this in my mind that the U.S. government would take care of me too and provide me with resources and get opportunities to go to college.”

As the plane lifted off from the ground, Garang waved goodbye to the arid, three-digit temperature climate, sparse meals and recurrent violence associated with life in an overcrowded refugee camp. On the plane, talk of the violence associated with life in an overcrowded refugee camp posting board, waiting for their remaining Lost Boys huddled around the refrigerator, onions in the freezer and milk in the cupboard of newly resettled refugees.

But these adjustments come quickly, Garang says.

“Before, I never had a snack. I didn’t even have breakfast,” he says. “Now, I love snacks.”

Eventually the euphoria of starting anew begins to fade, and a harsher reality of life for a foreign-born in America often surfaces—one of cultural confusion, oppression and discrimination.

“Here they come with such high hopes to start a new life,” Van Der Pol says. “But sometimes, when they arrive, they can’t even hold a pencil.”

For some refugees and immigrants, the new start is overwhelming. They may find themselves victims of their own cultural misunderstandings.

“Most come from the countryside,” Said says. “They have never seen a city. They have never seen freedom. So when they come here, it’s the end of the world. They have too much freedom. So sometimes they just go the wrong direction.”

The new freedom can often lead to legal issues.

Anne Wennerstrom is program manager of the Newcomers Resource Project at the King County Bar Association. The Newcomers Resource Project provides volunteer attorneys for low-income immigrant, refugee and newcomers to King County.

“Even if you were born here, it’s really hard to understand all the various hurdles of getting what you need legally,” she says. “And if you come from a system where the courts are completely corrupt, there’s a lot of distrust with the court system.”

For the most part, however, stories of new beginnings for refugees and immigrants in the U.S. are stories laden with success.

“Growing up [in Ethiopia], you don’t have a dream of what you want to be,” Said says. “But up here, they ask you in kindergarten what you want to be. I had never imagined that. I had never been asked that. I think it is good.”

The chance to come to the U.S. as a refugee or immigrant offers a new start on life that would be impossible otherwise, Garang says. It also offers individuals searching for an identity, such as the Lost Boys of Sudan, the chance to become a part of and have an effect on the community.

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On a sunny afternoon outside of Houston, Texas, Danielle Watts stands on a 30-foot railroad bridge running over a rocky creek bottom behind her mother’s house, staring down an oncoming train.

The wooden planks and steel tracks of the trestle begin to tremble beneath her feet as the locomotive speeds toward her—at times horn piercing the air in a throaty warning. Get out of the way, it urges her. She refuses.

Instead, Watts remains, gazing at an imminent death.

Tired of being called a ‘fag’ by what she describes as her conservative, gun-toting, archetypical Texas family, and mired in sorrow because she was born male, instead of female, she stands in the way of becoming her true self.

Her youngest brother was recently married and told her she could not attend the wedding unless she came as who she was “before [she] started all this weird fag shit,” she says. “I didn’t go because that person never really existed in the first place,” she adds.

Watts’ uncles proceed to spend two hours admonishing her—telling her how if she continues to be a fag, she will die.

“Ten years of my life have been spent living in a prison,” Watts says. “I was so angry, so mad at myself, for failing so hard in my family’s eyes that I headbutted a tree,” she says.

At the end of a six-year bout with depression, Watts, now 28, realized she was not the problem. After graduating from high school, she began to live what is referred to as a “16-7,” which means she immersed herself in school and work for 16 hours a day, seven days a week. She now holds four different degrees, including an associate degree in computer programming and master’s in creative writing. In 2006, Watts moved from Seattle and landed a job with Microsoft, where she worked directly under founder Bill Gates and CEO Steve Ballmer. Most family members, including her mother and grandparents, did not attend the wedding unless she came as who she was “before [she] started all this weird fag shit,” she says.

Not all transgender individuals’ familial relationships are so strained. Cory Hoffman, who identifies as transgender and is the coordinator of Western’s transgender support group, TransFor, says he had his parents’ support early on. Both of Hoffman’s parents, who are gay, sent him to a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Alliance camp when he was young, where he quickly realized that the female body he was born into felt wrong.

“I didn’t really wrestle with it,” Hoffman says. “I woke up every day thinking about having breasts, and if I could avoid it, I would have.” Hoffman quickly entered counseling with a therapist specializing in gender-identity issues, and with his parents’ consent, began to take hormones in high school. He also recently had chest surgery to remove breast tissue, casting aside the last vestiges of his previous gender.

Today, he is a young man with a voice as deep as any other and sports a thick, black chinstrap beard that lines his jaw.

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Family

A 7-by-4 foot table sits in the middle of Watts’ grandmother’s living room—the kind of table you would expect the Cartwrights to sit down at, she says. A 16-year-old Watts sits at the head of the table while several of her uncles, who live outside of town, occupy the other seats. Her mother and grandparents stand off to the side in the living room, looking on.

The mood is tense as Watts’ uncles proceed to spend two hours admonishing her—telling her how if she continues to be a fag, she will die, how disgraceful homosexuality is and how it is a sin against God.

When they are finished, Watts stands up, walks out of the house and across the yard. In a fit of anger and frustration, she proceeds to bash her head into an oak tree, knocking herself unconscious.

“I was so angry, so mad at myself, for failing so hard in my family’s eyes that I headbutted a tree,” she says.

This “intervention,” as Watts terms it, sent her into a deep depression, during which she began to drink and smoke copious amounts of weed throughout high school. In addition, her weight ballooned from 150 pounds as a sophomore, to almost 300 pounds as a senior.

“At the time, it wasn’t ‘my family betrayed me,’ it was, ‘I betrayed my family,’” Watts says. “That’s the mindset I had.”

Across the yard, her family sits in the living room—the kind of table you would expect the Cartwrights to sit down at, she says. A 16-year-old Watts sits at the head of the table while several of her uncles, who live outside of town, occupy the other seats. Her mother and grandparents stand off to the side in the living room, looking on.

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“I didn’t go because that person never really existed in the first place,” she says.

Of her three brothers, one sister and two parents, Watts’ sister and father are the only people who openly support her, she says.

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Employment

One of the hardest things to do while transitioning to the opposite gender is to stay employed. Those who can make the transition without losing their house, family and job are considered success stories, Yadle says.
Washington state’s transgender community is plagued by chronic unemployment, says Rory Gould, a full-time FTM transgendered person and president of the Washington Gender Alliance. Most transsexuals are unable to survive in their current place of employment once they come out, especially if their job requires contact with the public, he says.

“Dealing with the public spooks employees because they think [transgendered persons] will hurt business,” Gould says.

Transitioning is often harder on MTFs working in “macho” industries—such as construction, truck driving and auto repair—where the work force is typically male-dominated and prone to harboring prejudices, Gould says. But, the same can be said for women who assume male bodies in female-dominated industries such as food service at certain restaurants.

Finding work after leaving an old job can be equally challenging when one’s credentials, work history and other pertinent information are all under an old name, Gould says.

“When you’re newly transitioned you have no life history,” he says. “Many transgendered individuals are then faced with a choice.”

Do you lie about your past, or tell the truth?” Gould says. “Their day-to-day survival depends on the outcome of these types of decisions.”

Unfortunately, accurate statistics regarding transgendered employment are nearly impossible to come by, Gould says.

“Any statistic you see is bogus, because there are vast numbers of transgendered persons who are unwilling to publicly raise their hand and say, ‘I’m one,’” Gould says. “They’re afraid of the exposure.”

Watts echoes this sentiment, citing Texas’ intolerance as one of the reasons why she left her life there behind in exchange for a new beginning in a more open-minded city.

“One of the great things about Seattle is I can be wearing beach shorts and a tank top, walk into 99 percent of the restaurants there, have money, eat, pay and walk out no problem,” Watts says. “In Texas, if I tried to do that they wouldn’t even let me through the door.”

Hormones and surgery

Watts says the biggest obstacle transgendered individuals face generally revolves around interacting with other people, whether it be a family member or employer. But, the physiological challenge of crossing the gender divide should not be discounted either. Transitioning can be a highly expensive and emotionally disconcerting. Hormone regimens are guaranteed to alter a recipient’s biological makeup, and the average cost of MTF sex reassignment surgery is about $20,000, according to a recent study conducted by Mary Anne Horton, a professor at Berkeley. The average price tag of FTM sex reassignment surgery, which is a less complex procedure, is about $12,900.

Without insurance, transgendered individuals must pay out of pocket. This requires many to save for several years, and those working low paying jobs often have little hope of ever having sex reassignment surgery performed.

While hormones are far less expensive than surgery, they still have dramatic effects. Hoffman says he experienced “roid rage,” where he would get angry more frequently, and his sex drive went through the roof.

“I thought I had a high sex drive before, but I started taking testosterone, but it was nothing compared with afterward,” he says.

Most surprising was how quickly his voice dropped, he says, which literally occurred over a two-day period.

Unlike Hoffman, Watts had to train herself to speak in a higher tone. But unlike many MTFs, Watts says she feels lucky because she has a naturally feminine figure. Physical characteristics matter little to Watts though—she values self-confidence above all, and believes it to be the most telling characteristic a transgendered person can have.

“I’ve seen stunning, beautiful trans girls who just have no self confidence,” she says.

“Even though they put so much work into it, they don’t carry a little bit of that ‘I’m a woman and I’m proud of it’ demeanor with them—and you can tell right off the bat.”

One must identify as the man or woman they wish to become, or else he or she will remain stuck with only one foot in the door, she says.

Awakening

At the bottom of the creek bed, Watts wakes up. It has been several hours since the train came and went. She remembers the tingle dizzing under the train’s weight, the sound of its horn and fleeting images of slowly falling off the bridge. She thinks she might have fainted, but is unsure. Excluding minor bruises and abrasions, she marvels at the fact that she has escaped serious injury.

She slowly gathers herself, stands up, and begins to walk back home. Her family will not notice her when she returns. And no one will question when she leaves a few days later for college, seldom to be heard from again. But at this moment, there is something different about Danielle Watts. She knows she has to get better. Her path forward has been illuminated.

Today, Watts is a confident woman. On April 4, 2010, Watts will finally have sex reassignment surgery, taking the final step in becoming the woman she already is.

Danielle Watts, who was born a male, transitioned to become a woman three years ago when she moved to Seattle. Originally from Texas, Watts says she waited until she moved to the Northwest to fully embrace herself as she felt it was too widely accepted. (Of her friends from college, only one knew their ex-brother by the end of their relationship. “I’ve been blown away by how trans people are,” Watts says.)
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