Dear reader,

It’s fascinating to think back to March of ’99 when I came to America with my parents, six suitcases in tow and about four learned phrases in my pocket: hello, goodbye, please and thank you. Though I’m fluent in English now, the occasional accent slip still reminds me of those years I was frustrated with my broken English. Back then, the TV we bought at a garage sale had only three channels, one of them showing “The Simpsons,” “Supermarket Sweep” and “The Bold and the Beautiful.” This was the quality television that taught me the basis of my colloquial English.

The spectrum of this issue’s theme runs the gamut from lighthearted to deep and serious. It explores a silly phenomenon, gets us in touch with our inner teen romantic and also probes the issues that too often get swept under the rug: emotional pain and abuse and the hopeless feelings they trigger. It’s the kind of break no Superglue can fix. Ultimately, these stories are about moving on, maturing, turning a new page and letting go of the past — that’s the way to heal the worst wounds.

The Gestalt theory holds that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. I like to think of the collection of ceramic shards on the cover as a beautiful plate, a work of art that used to be a whole. To get that one cover photo our photographer smashed tons of dishes. But hey, it was all for good luck.

Cheers,

Olena Rypich
Editor in Chief

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MULTIMEDIA

BREAK IT DOWN
Discover what drives members of the Western Break Dance Club as they break it down to a different beat.

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There are no waves in Washington

THE UNLIKELY WORLD OF SURFING IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

It is 31 degrees and I am about to go surfing. I'm standing on the expansive sands of Hobuck Beach, at the most northwestern point of Washington, in the thickest wetsuit commercially available, complete with gloves and a hood. My bootiefeet crunch in the frozen grass as I hold the board I rented in Port Angeles and try to convince myself it's a good idea to get into the water. It's a bluebird day, and as the shop owner broke icicles off the door to his rental shed that morning, he had said if it weren't for work he'd be out riding as well. He was obviously either crazy or knows something I don't, and I am 100 yards from the beach, there are million-dollar homes right behind that morning, he had said if it weren't for work he'd be out riding as well. He was obviously either crazy or knows something I don't, and I am 100 yards from the beach, there are million-dollar homes right behind that morning, he had said if it weren't for work he'd be out riding as well. He was obviously either crazy or knows something I don't, and I am 100 yards from

For most people, surfing looks like palm trees and bright-blue waves breaking along white, sandy beaches. In the Pacific Northwest, however, the reality is often pine trees and brown, foamy waves breaking against craggy sea bluffs and snow-covered beaches.

Despite what many would consider misery and masochism, these conditions have spawned an unlikely and dedicated surf culture — quiet zealots who will drive eight hours to surf and spend years finding their own secret spots, the locations of which they'll take to their deathbeds.

The room where Kelly Foote builds his surfboards looks like a bag of flour exploded in a quarantine cell. The fluorescent lighting creates a sanitary glow against the sheet-plastic walls and stacks of surfboard "blanks" — chubby blocks of styrene or foam. Fiberglass dust covers everything from his finished boards to his tools to his dog Andre. Foote, a 26-year-old Western alumnus, knows Washington surf — he's a Whidbey Island native who has been riding for more than 12 years. He readily admits that surfing here can seem close to miserable, especially because storms coming down from Alaska make winter the biggest season. But for the dedicated Washington surfer, the gain can be well worth the pain.

"You have to withstand all of this bad weather to get these amazing waves for maybe 10 or 14 hours," he says. "There are so many variables that have to line up." Because almost all surf areas are multiple hours from Bellingham, the cost of hitting the conditions poorly can be a full tank of gas, two days of driving and no surfing. Actually, Foote says, he enjoys the uncertainty.

"Storm tracking and predicting weather has been one of my favorite parts of surfing here," he says. "There are so many things to consider: slope, substrate, water level, tides — timing is everything. The phrase 'being at the right place at the right time' couldn't apply more."

Barry Maxwell, another Western alumnus, created SurfWa.org in 2005 — a detailed, Washington-specific surf forecasting website built to help surfers line up those variables. Maxwell says water temperature is the least appealing part for most people. However, the water is often much warmer than the air — anywhere from about 40 degrees in the winter to 60 in the summer. Maxwell and Foote agree that with the right wetsuit, once you're in the water, you're fine. It's getting in and out that's the painful part.

"The longer you do it, you start to forget what's going on," Maxwell says. "Really, the most challenging part is getting into your wetsuit in some parking lot if it's snowing or something like that. But once you get past that, you're good."

I repeat Maxwell's words like a mantra as I jog out into the surf at Hobuck Beach and toss my board over the first breaking wave. A few seconds later I feel the legs of my wetsuit soak up the foamy, coffee-colored water, and the spray blowing into my face threatens to shock away my resolve. I hop onto the board and with only 5 millimeters of neoprene between me and hypothermia, I start paddling.

PREVIOUS PAGE: The writer makes his way out into deeper (but not colder) water at Hobuck Beach, near Neah Bay. LEFT: Kelly Foote displays one of his boards at his home shop on Lake Samish. Starting with "blanks," Foote designs, shapes and fiberglasses all of his boards himself in the shop, including creating his own custom graphics. At the time of publication, he has built 25 boards, 14 of which have been sold around the state. BOTTOM: Fully suited up, Western alumnus Jeff Johnson, 23, carries his board out into light surf at Hobuck Beach.

It took Adam Aguilar a few months to give in and switch to a thicker wetsuit. Aguilar is new to Washington; he moved from California to Bellingham a year and a half ago with the U.S. Coast Guard. He has surfed all around North America, and has been nothing but impressed with Washington surfing. As much as with the waves, he's been impressed with how accepting the surf culture is, particularly Surfrider Foundation. He's been an active member of the foundation since he attended his first meeting in Bellingham, and now has no trouble finding people to make the long drive for surf with, whether it's to the coast, the Straits or the Sound.

"The best part for me is camping and being out there; it's something I didn't get to do down in California," Aguilar says. "Even if you go camping at the beach, there are million-dollar homes right behind you. Here, you're on your own. I lose cell phone service halfway out to Neah Bay."

The appeal of the sport can be seen in the state's growing number of surfers. Aguilar says there is some overcrowding during the summers and weekends at popular spots such as Westport, La Push and Neah Bay. In March, Surfrider Foundation's 10th annual Clean Water Classic surf competition will attract professional surfers from places as distant as Australia and Brazil. Maxwell attributes a lot of this popularity to spillover from Washington's thriving snowboarding culture. Foote says it just fits the style of the Pacific Northwest.

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Choosing a wetsuit:

...howtheywork

Wetsuits are usually made from neoprene and work by trapping a thin layer of water between the inside of the suit and the skin that’s warmed by the surfer’s body temperature. A wetsuit must fit tightly to accomplish this, as any baggy areas won’t trap water.

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**type**

Wetsuits come in all shapes and sizes; they range from 1- to 2-millimeter thick 3/4 suits that only cover the torso down to the thighs to full suits that cover the entire body and can be as thick as 7 millimeters. These full suits are often worn in conjunction with neoprene hoods, booties and gloves. Wetsuits can be labeled with multiple numbers, such as 5/4, numbers that refer to the thickness of the suit in different areas; the torso will often be the thickest, while areas such as the shoulders and arms will be thinner.

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The thickness and type of wetsuit depend on the season and water temperature you’ll be surfing in. In Washington, where water temperatures usually range from 60 degrees to 45 degrees, a 3/4 wetsuit is a good standard. Another option is a dry suit, which seals out water completely. However, these can be much more expensive and, in most cases, less flexible.

Choosing a board:

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**size**

Surfboards come in a huge range of sizes, and choosing one depends on your ability, your slab, the type of surfing you want to do and where you will be doing it. Usually, the larger the surfboard, the more stable and easier to get up on, and beginners should look in the 7- to 8-foot range. Smaller, narrower shortboards, anywhere from 5 to 6 feet long, are quicker and more maneuverable and appreciated by more advanced surfers.

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**type**

Likewise, there is an infinite number of surfboard shapes, from tiny, swallow-tailed, 5-foot shortboards to massive, ellipse-shaped 18-foot longboards, again dependent on the surfer’s size, ability, location and personal preference. In general, beginners benefit from the stability of longboards, while advanced surfers appreciate the agility and feel of shortboards or the power of a big wave board. Talking to a good surf shop is the best way to guarantee that you choose the perfect board.

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Other accessories:

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**leash**

A wire running that runs from the tail of the board to the surfer’s ankle and prevents losing the board in the water.

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**wax**

Surf wax is rubbed onto the top of the board to add traction.

“...what I surf now is a 7-foot, 4-inch, Tavai shortboard that’s a good all-around board. I’ve been surfing it for about two years now and I’ve been loving it.”

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The breaking of a bong is a sound every stoner dreads. It can happen a number of ways: a happy dog’s flicking tail knocks it off a coffee table, a drunken fool loses grip and it shatters on the floor, the owner breaks it while trying to clean out the musty-smelling resin that builds up inside. Regardless of how it happens, hope is not lost — broken bongs can be put to creative use.

Jake C, as he is professionally known, is a local glass blower who sells some of his one-of-a-kind pieces through Gathering Glass Designs, of which he was one of the founding owners. Ninety-five percent of his “sculptures that bubble” are sold over the Internet to collectors as far away as Australia and Germany.

Jake C doesn’t normally fix bongs because he’d rather make a new one, but it wasn’t always so easy. “Back in the day, you know, you’d duct tape it, do whatever you can. I wouldn’t recommend that — I don’t think it’s clean or sanitary. I’d recommend using duct tape probably isn’t good to be inhaling.”

He says the viability of repair depends on how the bong broke. “If the thing snapped in half and it’s, like, jagged-edged, chances are with the money you’re going to pay to get it fixed, you could get a new one. But a lot of people have emotional attachments to their pieces, so a lot of people will pay to have their pieces fixed.”

If the bong is not worth fixing, Jake C says it can be used as a jar or put in a fish tank to add some funk. If it isn’t salvageable enough for that, he suggests crushing it up and putting the shards in a rock tumbler to smooth them out.

The end product looks like beach glass and can be put in potted plants for a splash of color.

For the less creative, recycling might be an option. The Associated Students Recycle Center accepts bongs because they are made of glass, and it doesn’t matter if the glass is colored. The recycling center receives one or two bongs every week, says Liz Getty, a recycling center employee. She says bongs can be recycled even if they are broken, small, funny or have resin in them. “Sometimes there’s only a little piece broken off and people are like, ‘Oh dang it, I would have taken that home,’” Getty says.

However, Rodd Pembble, recycling manager for Sanitary Service Company in Bellingham, says bongs are not accepted for curbside pickup. His rule of thumb for recycling glass is if it is purchased from a grocery store holding food or beverages, then it can be recycled. Anything else, including drinking glasses and Pyrex, should be thrown away.

Or in the case of bongs, put to some wacky, creative use.
It’s a Saturday night and downtown Bellingham is bustling. People are looking to play after working hard all week. Some prefer to have a few drinks and hit the dance floor to let off some steam, while others just end up hitting other people. When put into a fight-or-flight situation, some people won’t think twice and will enter a fight with both arms swinging. Others will choose to pass on the opportunity for fear of losing face… and possibly some teeth.

When Toby Kittoe and his friend tried to break up a fight in April 2009, quite a bit more than just Kittoe’s teeth were damaged; he needed facial reconstructive surgery after the encounter. While walking home with a group of friends, Kittoe saw a group of about 15 people outside the Wild Buffalo House of Music causing a commotion. At first, he didn’t think he knew anyone involved in the fight, but as he approached the scene, he noticed one of the bouncers trying to break up the brawl was his friend.

The reason for the scuffle was that two beered-up bros were arguing over who had been a better emcee the night before. When Kittoe stepped in and tried to help break up the disagreement, it left him with a Le Fort I facial fracture. The injuries in this kind of fracture span from ear to ear, all the way across the face and under the nose. One side of his face was completely shattered, but salvageable. Kittoe says he doesn’t try to break up fights anymore.

“If you come upon a situation when you’re just walking around a corner, try to keep an extra few feet away,” Kittoe says. “I mean, don’t be neurotic but, you know, if it’s 3 a.m., and you’re walking home from the bars, keep a safe distance.”

**Blame it on the booze**

Alcohol plays a big role in fueling the fists and furies of these combatants. Mike Surratt, a bouncer at Glow Nightclub in Bellingham, says all it takes is the mix of alcohol and an accidental bump to start a fight.

Surratt also says that sometimes even the music playing can inspire a fight. If angry club music is playing and someone isn’t in the best mood, it can provoke someone to take out the hostility on another person. Every once in a while, the person on the receiving end of a first punch will be the DJ who was spinning the music that got the aggressor so worked up in the first place, Surratt says.

**Eyewitness accounts**

Through the crowd of Axe and cigarette-smoke-covered clubbers, not far from the doors where troublemakers are thrown to the curb, the savory smell of sausages wafts through the air.

Sarah Reichle runs a curbside hot dog stand between The Royal and Glow Nightclub on Friday and Saturday nights. As she tends to her customers and the meat on the grill, Reichle gets a front-row seat to any fights that may occur outside the clubs. After working at the stand for a year, she feels safe being close to bouncers that frequent her table. “Our bouncers are pretty fast,” Reichle says. “They’re pretty much on their game and always on the lookout.”

The bouncers aren’t the only people who try to break up fights. Reichle says some girls will even approach men and flirt with them as a means of distracting them from continuing on in a fight.

Reichle says she usually doesn’t have much of a problem with people pouncing-up the dough to suppress their drunk munchies, except for one particular incident that has remained singed in her brain like the grill marks on a hot dog.

One man came to her table on his 21st and said if she didn’t give him a free wiener for his birthday, he would show her his. She told him that she couldn’t do that and he whipped it out. Reichle’s shriek immediately drew the attention of her bouncer buddies and they chased the man before tackling him with his pants down.

“He had a court date, but I didn’t press charges,” Reichle says. “Besides, I bet he got a pretty good rash from that fall.”

With nothing to break his fall, the man’s ego never stood a chance after his display. Broken egos are not easily mended after a humiliating defeat in an altercation.

**SARAH REICHELIE**

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**Shay Flaherty, a former University of Washington student and current Bellingham resident, has seen egos deflate faster than they were inflated over the past few years. She says she has witnessed the occasional Bellingham fight here and there, but not as much as she said she did in Seattle.**

“I don’t see fights here as much. Maybe because it’s a smaller town,” Flaherty says. “Bigger cities mean more attitude. I could be totally wrong, but it seemed like people were more opt to fly off the handle in Seattle.”

Flaherty recently had to pull one of her friends back as she was yelling at a man in downtown Bellingham. The man had not only insulted her friend, but he had also punched a man who was in her group of friends that evening.

Flaherty doesn’t consider herself a fighter, so all she could do was hold her friend back and try to stop her from egging on the man. “If you’re drinking and get upset, you’re going to defend yourself,” Flaherty says. “Not many people will realize the next day that they were probably out of line and they aren’t going to be the type of people to humble themselves. We all have our own egos to protect.”

Some people watch fights from afar, some people will intervene and some will let the cops and bouncers take care of it. The same basic principles still apply. Come out of battle with the majority of your appendages still intact and your dignity in tow.
Ten years ago, Jose Cruz walked into Barnes and Noble and bought three English language books. After long shifts at a Mexican restaurant in Lynden, Cruz sat at home for hours studying his books and looking up the meaning of words he encountered at work. This is how Cruz learned to speak English.

Broken English can limit immigrants, foreign exchange students and world travelers from finding the opportunities and new experiences they have come to the United States for. Language barriers can prevent immigrants in America or to travel abroad teaching English classes and offering General Education Development classes, customer service skills, computer basics and preparation for the citizenship test. “It’s always a real fun day when [a student] comes in and says ‘I’ve passed! Yay!’ or when students get their GEDs,” she says with a smile.

Cruz earned his GED certificate at Whatcom Community College in 2005. However, teaching himself English was not always easy. “The hardest part was sentence structure,” he says. “I used to talk like everything was in the present. I didn’t know how to use past or future words.”

Learning to apply a new language to real life can be challenging, but there are many outlets in the United States for non-native speakers to learn and for her to teach. “Lots of times people get these texts that are just writing, no visual cues, and it’s very high-level language that’s used. That’s so difficult when there are no visual cues to give meaning to the text,” she says. The hard part for Burkhart is figuring out how to paraphrase textbooks or use words the students might know. By trial and error, she is able to explain the text in multiple ways until they understand.

When Cruz took an algebra class at Whatcom Community College, the academic terminology made learning math twice as hard. “It’s confusing to do a word problem. They take a simple word we know and put it in a different way we’ve never heard before,” he says. “Some of those words I just can’t understand.”

Cruz says getting words confused was humorous in one case while he was working at Priority One Health & Nutrition in Ferndale.

Cruz noticed some errors while filling out a worksheet, so he wrote a comment on the bottom of the page to clear up the confusion. He wrote: “Next time, can you please put the correct date on the work sheet?” After his manager called him into the office to ask why he swore on the worksheet, Cruz had no idea what he was talking about. “I thought that’s how you spelled ‘sheet’!” he laughs.

Learning how to speak English did not cause Kato and Cruz to quit speaking their native languages. When Kato hangs out with Japanese exchange students, she speaks in Japanese, while Cruz speaks in Spanish at home with his wife, Kimberlee, and their children.

Cruz speaks to his son and two daughters, ages 10, 6 and 2, in Spanish while Kimberlee speaks to them in English. “I am teaching them Spanish. I want them to have more opportunities when they are older,” he says. He hopes raising his children to be bilingual will influence them to learn more languages in the future.

Ten years ago, Cruz’s priority was learning English in order to achieve what he came to the United States to do. “I didn’t want to work as a cook or a rancher; I wanted to — you know — be someone important,” he says. Although he is now fluent in English, one of his priorities is teaching his English-speaking children Spanish as a way for them to understand their identity and break barriers of their own.

Burkhart hopes to help immigrants get involved in their communities and pass citizenship tests. “Most people are coming to look for a better opportunity. There is something that pushed them out of their country, and that’s how most of us got here too.”

The best way for Eiko Kato, a Japanese exchange student at Western, to improve her English skills is by immersing herself in American culture. After her arrival in January 2011, Kato has slowly adjusted to college life at Western — a university somewhat different from her school in Akitma, Japan. At Akita International University, instructors teach students a given subject while they learn English at the same time. She says class lectures at Western challenge her most because it’s hard to catch up on what professors are saying. Sometimes her lack of confidence in English limits her from asking another student for help. “I am not shy in Japan. I have lots of friends there and I think I’m talkative,” she says. “It’s challenging for me to talk to a person I don’t know about class. I should try. I know if I don’t try, I don’t improve my English, but understanding is hard for me.”

Burkhart says academic texts can be one of the more challenging areas for non-native speakers to learn and for her to teach. “Lots of times people get these texts that are just writing, no visual cues, and it’s very high-level language that’s used. That’s so difficult when there are no visual cues to give meaning to the text,” she says. The hard part for Burkhart is figuring out how to paraphrase textbooks or use words the students might know. By trial and error, she is able to explain the text in multiple ways until they understand.

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JOSE CRUZ

OPPOSITE: Eiko Kato uses her electronic dictionary to help her translate words from her psychology book from English to Japanese.

LEFT: Jose Cruz holds one of the English language books that he bought 10 years ago to teach himself English.
Finding a voice
BREAKING FREE FROM RELATIONSHIP ABUSE
Story by Marianne Graff
Photos by Jeremy Smith

Dark purple bruises, unsuccessfully hidden behind dark sunglasses, makeup or long sleeves are considered the telltale signs of domestic violence. Yet for the women who experience domestic violence, abuse can extend far beyond the physical. Breaking the silence and seeking help is just the beginning of a journey to freedom.

Western alumna Talina Marie, 29, suffered relationship abuse during the two years she spent under the control of a boyfriend.

Although she broke free and left him seven years ago, she asked to have her middle names used in order to stay under the radar and avoid contact with him. As with many domestic violence cases, Talina struggled to speak up and seek help. Domestic violence is often a silent epidemic. Although some women escape their abusers, Kirsten Hammer, the executive director of Womencare Shelter, an emergency shelter organization in Whatcom County, says it takes a woman an average of seven attempts before she successfully leaves.

Talina says she was lucky to succeed on her first attempt, but it took weeks to work up the courage. The relationship started out promisingly, but began to spiral downward quickly.

She met her boyfriend when she was 20 while working as a disc jockey during college in another state. What she originally saw as sweet gestures she now sees as warning signs of the control to come — buying her a cell phone, knowing her schedule, wanting to see her daily and proposing after less than a month of dating. “It was all happening so fast that I just got swept up in the moment,” she says, sighing. “I thought it was the most romantic thing ever.”

When her boyfriend moved to Bellingham for a job, he convinced her to move in with him. Upon her arrival, Talina planned to finish college, yet she was repeatedly discouraged. “He told me I didn’t need to finish college, that no one would care if I got a degree because it doesn’t take a degree to change a diaper,” she says with a look of disgust. “I gave up. He wasn’t going to let me go.”

Bit by bit, his control of her everyday life tightened. She didn’t have a car, and he stopped letting her borrow his. He controlled her money, cell phone and Internet use; he dictated the length of her hair and with whom she could speak. Her contact with the outside world nearly ceased.

Kristin Anderson, a sociology professor at Western who has studied domestic violence, says a potential factor of abuse is a man’s response to feeling inadequate in regard to traditional gender roles. Much of the abuse that goes unreported is psychological, such as isolation, as it was in Talina’s case.

Although many reported cases of domestic abuse cite men as the perpetrator, Anderson says men can also be victims of relationship abuse. However, it is rarely reported. Men are supposed to be strong and in control, and reporting domestic abuse could damage that stereotypical façade.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention state about 4.8 million women and 2.9 million men experience assault by an intimate partner annually. According to the National Institute of Justice, accurate data is difficult to achieve due to differences in survey methods.

Although physical violence is easier to see, Anderson says recent studies find psychological abuse is just as damaging.

Talina knew the abuse was wrong, but love overruled logic. “My world was slowly getting smaller and smaller,” she says. “I had nowhere to go. He controlled everything, and nothing I did was ever good enough.” She says she started contemplating suicide.

She began to prepare for what she felt would inevitably escalate to physical abuse. “He would drink and go into violent rages, and I went into ‘any day mode’: any day now he is going to hit me,” she says, clenching her fist. She ran through scenarios, trying to decide what would be enough to make her leave.

“I thought to myself, if he hits me in the face, I’ll definitely leave — unless he really apologizes and promises never to do it again,” she says. “By the time I was done rationalizing, he could punch, kick, bite or throw anything at me at least three times as long as he was sorry enough.”

When Talina was later allowed to get a part-time job, she noticed a sign for a domestic violence hotline and began to memorize the number. Using a prepaid cell phone, she contacted support groups and her family. With their guidance and support, she became determined to leave.

Beth Sartain, who works at Womencare Shelter, says many women, such as Talina, use shelters to escape abuse instead of contacting police or initiating legal action.

Sartain says she sees all types of women seek help at the shelter. Some have been physically abused, while others suffer from psychological abuse. “A lot of women think, ‘Well, he didn’t punch me in the face, so it’s not abuse,’” Sartain says. “Abuse can be so much more than physical.”

For Talina, the day her life changed was Sept. 11, 2003. That day, while her boyfriend was at work, she packed her belongings and never went back. She says she doesn’t regret being with him and loved him until the day she left. She sought shelter at Womencare, where she stayed for almost a month as she learned how to start a new life.
A friend from Talina’s support group gave her a rock with the words “letting go” on its surface, which she keeps as a reminder of the weight of life’s obstacles and how she can’t let them pull her down.

Anderson says women often stay in abusive relationships because it can be safer than leaving — the risk of serious assault or homicide increases after a woman leaves.

Women who do leave, Sartain says, must learn to see themselves as human again, not as an object or victim. “I’ve seen women come in who have completely given up taking care of themselves,” she says. “They had even stopped brushing their hair.”

Womencare provides a 24-hour hotline for women from Seattle and more remote cities. “Women think the farther they can get from their abuser, the better,” Hammer says. “We’ve had border patrol agents bring us women who were trying to flee to Canada to escape domestic violence.”

The shelter takes single women and women with children. Once, a woman seeking shelter brought seven children with her, Hammer says.

For many women, the most difficult part of breaking the cycle of abuse is the uncertainty associated with leaving, Hammer says. To make their transition easier, the shelter provides legal advocacy, financial management classes and support systems.

Years after she broke her silence and left her abuser, Talina holds onto the memories because she says they give her strength. She finished college at Western and found a job she loves. Sitting on a couch in her apartment, she plays with her 8-month-old kitten.

And found a job she loves. Sitting on a couch in her apartment, she plays with her 8-month-old kitten.

A friend from Talina’s support group gave her a rock that a friend from a support group gave her.

RIGHT:
Talina takes a break during her busy work week. She now has a job she loves and the freedom to make her own decisions. This photo was darkened to protect Talina’s identity.

A good time

Breaking dishware brings joy, remembrance to celebrations

Usually breaking dishware is a cause of frustration – an appropriate time to curse and mourn clumsiness as another plate hits the floor. In some situations, dishes are broken out of joy, remembrance or hope. In Greek culture, it is customary to break plates at weddings and other celebrations. Breaking plates while dancing at Greek celebrations is a way to express happiness, says Soula Christopoulos, part-owner of the Greek restaurant Five Columns in Bellingham. Participants dance in an open circle, and two people enter from outside the circle to throw down plates in the midst of the dancing, she says. When the plates break, everyone yells “Opa!” as an exclamation of joy.

In recent times, it has become customary to break plates during a Greek celebration after an individual performs a song or dance, says Nicholas Zafaratos, a Western Huxley professor, in an e-mail. A person will perform a self-expression dance or song that shows his or her deep personal essence, representing a personal emotion known as “kefi.” Others witnessing the dance will then throw down plates as a sign of support and applause. However, Zafaratos says, plates have been increasingly replaced by paper napkins to cut down on costs and injury.

Tina Tsoulouhas, a Greek woman and part-owner of the restaurant Cascade Pizza in Bellingham, says she has seen many people suffer from minor injuries as a result of breaking plates, but nothing too serious. Once, while doing a traditional male Greek dance, her uncle accidentally cut his hand on a piece of glass. She says people often get nicks on their ankles from shattering plates, but they just slap on a bandage and continue celebrating.

In Jewish culture, glass is not broken for fun, but instead to remember past sadness. When the Jewish temple Biet Hamikdash was burned to the ground by Roman forces 2,000 years ago, the destruction broke the hearts of the Jewish people, says Rabbi Avremi Yarmush of the Chabad Jewish Center at Western.

Now, glass is broken at every joyful Jewish celebration to keep the ruin of the temple in their memories, he says. One of the biggest ideals Judaism stresses is to remember sadness in the world before celebrating happiness, says Talya Kurland, president of Western Jewish Gals.

After the glass is broken at weddings, the moment is met with yells of “Mazel tov!” or congratulations. At traditional weddings, the groom stomps on a glass object that is covered with a cloth, says Brad Kurland, a prayer cantor at a synagogue on Mercer Island. In some contemporary weddings, both the bride and groom smash a glass. Kurland has seen many grooms miss the cup or fail to break it on the first try. It can get pretty funny, he says, though the moment is supposed to be the cheerless part of the ceremony. At his wedding, Kurland used a delicate wine glass and was careful to break it on the first try. “All rituals are important because they help us remember things,” Kurland says. “Without rituals, we forget.”

Rituals are special traditions in every culture that can help to preserve memories from the past, even if doing so means breaking something in the present.
Saddling up
A PHOTOGRAPHIC STORY ABOUT TRAINING A COLT

Wearing green patterned boots with spurs, a crisp black cowboy hat and a well-worn pair of faded blue jeans, Mac McLeod looks the part of a movie cowboy. He grew up in the panhandle of Texas, training and showing horses until he moved to Ferndale in November. He started riding horses before he could walk and has saddle broken more than 500 colts and fillies in his lifetime.

McLeod releases the 2-year-old colt into a small round pen. It has spent about a week inside a stall, with no room to stretch its legs. He stands in the pen and clucks to the horse; it starts moving around the perimeter throwing in a few small bucks for good measure. The colt trots around the ring, not scared, just playful. McLeod waits for the horse to break from its circular motion and turn its attention to him.

McLeod explains that when a horse has spent more than a day in a stall it needs time to play before it can start working. Horses, like any human athlete, need time to play and warm up before starting to train. “No sense in me trying to do anything with him when he wants to run and play,” he says.

The colt’s ears are angled forward, its breathing slightly elevated; it is not thinking about the man in the pen with it. McLeod walks back to the barn to retrieve a well-worn saddle and saddle blanket. He drops them both in the middle of the round pen and gives the colt a moment to smell them and realize this is not a threat.
McLeod does not want to force the saddle, but the colt seems uninterested in the object; he picks up the saddle blanket and rests it on the colt’s back. The colt skirts away from the unknown object, but McLeod continues setting the saddle blanket on its back until the colt stands, without objection. He places the saddle on the colt and tightens it so it will not slip. He releases the colt into the pen, allowing it to get a feel for the saddle. “Instead of fighting, let go,” he says while the colt hunches its back with a small buck. “If he’s really bucking and throwing a fit, leave him until he stops bucking and then be done.”

McLeod waits for the colt to stop moving. The colt stops after McLeod says, “Whoa,” and the trainer decides this is a good ending point. He swings his legs to one side of the horse and lands with both feet on the ground. He walks the colt out of the round pen and hands the rope connected to the horse to his wife, Tru. She walks the sweaty colt back to his stall for a well-deserved rest.

This colt is content. He is not broken down or defeated. He is inquisitive, trusting and will welcome the next training session without fear. In about a year this horse will be tearing down the fence after a cow, executing perfect spins and sliding stops. But for now, the colt will wait in its stall for the next training session.
I’m sitting on a rotting picnic bench in the World Famous Up and Up beer garden, surrounded by a haze of cigarette smoke and the stench of stale beer. My two best friends and I are on our third pitcher of Milwaukee’s most award-winning brew, and then I feel it. My bladder has reached full capacity. Slapping down my pint glass, I hurry toward the bathroom. Intoxicated, wobbly steps mask my determination more than I care to admit. I finally reach the two urinals in the cramped men’s room. Digested Pabst Blue Ribbon bursts onto the chipped porcelain and I feel instant relief; walking out of the bathroom, I am a new man. Returning to my spot on the bench, one of my friends asks, “Dude, you didn’t just break the seal, did you?”

“Sorry man, I couldn’t help it,” I reply.

This scenario has played out countless times in bars everywhere. “Breaking the seal” is a phenomenon that has plagued drinkers since the discovery of alcohol’s intoxicating effects. Urban Dictionary defines it as “Your first piss in the pub, usually after two hours of drinking. After breaking the seal of your bladder, repeat visits to the toilet will be required every 10 or 15 minutes the rest of the night.”

Booze, like soda, is a diuretic. “Diuretic” is what smart people call substances that make you pee a lot. It makes you pee because it lacks things the body would normally take time to absorb and use, such as nutrients. Instead of spending time replenishing our bodies with the things we need to stay healthy, it flows right through our systems.

Dr. Emily Gibson, director of Western’s Student Health Center, says via e-mail, “breaking the seal” is slang for what happens when alcohol inhibits the release of an antidiuretic hormone. The kidneys use the antidiuretic hormone to conserve fluids and produce concentrated urine, Gibson says. The absence of antidiuretic hormone makes kidney systems impermeable and unable to absorb liquids normally, causing them to produce diluted urine. She says the increased flow of diluted urine can lead to dehydration.

Alcohol can cause urine flow within 20 minutes of consumption, according to research by Dr. Murray Epstein published by the National Institutes of Health.

Don’t call it a “broken home.” When a marriage isn’t working, when fights are an everyday soundtrack to spouses’ or children’s lives, in cases of truly irreconcilable problems such as abuse or abandonment, home is far more broken before divorce than after it. The family may have been physically together, but the people in it were shattering. After a divorce, they call fixed what society calls broken.

The stigma-laden term “broken home” is never accepted in fields that study divorce — sociological researchers prefer terms such as “divorced family.” Although it’s often hard at early ages, when children of divorce reach their early 20s, they almost always view their parents’ divorce as a positive change, according to sociologists. However, some studies have found that children’s concept of “home” after their parents’ divorce is altered and is sometimes completely torn down.

Whatcom Community College student Tanner Newman was 9 years old when he learned his parents were divorcing. Newman’s mother had already moved to Oregon to be with a man she had met on the Internet. Newman, now 19, says he didn’t see the breakup coming.

“I was pretty young,” he says. “I didn’t realize what was going on until after they’d gotten a divorce and she’d moved out.”
Above: Whatcom Community College student Tanner Newman, 19, holds up a family photo. Newman’s parents divorced when he was 9 years old.

The Strains

The myth remains that more marriages each year end in divorce. In truth, the divorce rate has been dropping since about 1980. This could be because people are waiting longer to get married, says Western sociology professor Dr. Jay Teachman, who has focused his research on divorce for more than 25 years. People spend more time finding a spouse than they used to, he says, so they are surer the person is the right one by the time they marry.

Still, people in the United States marry and divorce more than people in other parts of the world, according to the 2009 book “The Marriage-Go-Round.” Not all families have children, but once children are involved, divorce becomes more difficult. “Because people have this idea that people are supposed to stay together if they have children, the underlying conflict has to be pretty strong to encourage people who have children to go ahead and end their marriage,” says Western sociology professor Dr. Mick Cunningham, who researches divorce and end their marriage, “I can always ask, ‘What would this look like for your child if this went well?’” she says. “They can usually be there in their mind on behalf of their children.”

Sometimes, Ostman says, people take their anger from the marriage to their lawyers and try to embarrass each other, take revenge on each other, take each other’s money or play their children against their spouse — but that doesn’t have to happen. “People don’t always end up friends, but they don’t have to hate each other,” she says.

“Broken home” is a limiting metaphor, Ostman says, because every divorce is different. The term sets a negative reality for divorcing people before they even go through the experience. “If we didn’t use that term, people might be able to leave a relationship with more options of how to feel about it,” she says.

The Rubble

At first, Newman and his siblings spent summers with their mother in Oregon, but after a few years, his mother moved to Washington and lived nearby. While Newman says he doesn’t blame his mother for his parents’ divorce, he sometimes feels her new husband split his family apart. “I’m still not too fond of who she went and married,” he says. “He’s a nice guy and everything, but it’s just that one thing.” Newman says his three older brothers are either indifferent toward their stepfather or outright dislike and avoid him. Newman says he thinks divorce was the best option for his family because his mother was obviously unhappy. “It’s better that they weren’t constantly fighting around us,” he says.

Sociologists describe the long-term consequences of divorce as “distress”— somewhere between trauma and something inconsequential, Cunningham says. The term captures the idea that although the experience strengthens children who go through it, divorce still makes life harder for children and they seldom bounce back from it as if it didn’t matter. However, young adults whose parents are divorced almost invariably think the divorce was for the best. Cunningham guesses this could be due to something called cognitive dissonance, a psychological concept in which people match their beliefs to their actions or what happens to them.

Divorce is undeniably difficult for the spouses and children involved. Children of divorced families miss out on the income and supervision of both parents at once, and their experience of home and family changes. Spouses are forced to start somewhat anew socially and financially. But sometimes the challenges of splitting up are not as daunting as the prospect of staying together. However “broken” a home may seem after divorce, it may have been more stressful, more painful — more broken — before.
A line to forget

A PROPER INTRODUCTION: HOW PEOPLE BREAK THE ICE

Story by Kathleen Marriott
Photo illustration by Jaynie Hancock

On a chilly Friday night, Ian Netherda finds himself sitting on a worn-down bench in a high school football game stadium. In this moment, he notices a stranger sitting in the previously unoccupied spot next to him. With no hesitation, the girl immediately starts playing 20 questions with him. After each question, she scoots closer and closer, until she finally comes close enough to pop the dividing bubble. “The reason I’m doing this is because I think you’re really cute,” she says to bring the conversation to a close. Before he can utter a response, the girl speeds off without another word. Netherda says he never heard from her again.

The art of successfully breaking the ice — meeting someone new and striking up a conversation — can be challenging. Some people make the mistake of using a cheesy pickup line as a strategy to avoid an awkward situation. Others find it comedic to lighten the uncomfortable encounter with a joke. “Do you like this?” Western junior Ricky Leuzzi says as he echoes a pickup line he’s heard. He explains that the person who used it was extremely awkward, but everyone found it funny. “Sometimes it’s OK,” he says. It’s the corny one-liner comedy that doesn’t receive a positive response.

“Research on pickup lines suggest that, in general, being direct and open with someone is more effective,” says Dr. James Graham, a Western psychology professor. “I hear some folks try and do some clever pickup lines,” he says. Rather than resorting to pickup lines, a better way to engage in meeting someone new is to just start a conversation. “Or going up to someone and saying, ‘Hey, I noticed you from across the room and I wanted to come over and maybe chat with you a little bit, to get to know you a little bit better,’ is a completely reasonable way to go about things,” he explains. Graham says research showed the latter two methods, indirect and direct openers, are much more effective than pickup lines.

Jesse Norton did just that when he met his girlfriend, Kristi, in a game of pool. Among the poorly lit green-felted pool tables, Norton and his friend saw Kristi, with her roommate, on numerous occasions playing free pool on Sundays at the Beaver Inn downtown. Finally, to break the ice, the two decided to ask the girls to shoot a game. “We’ve been dating now for five months,” Norton says.

While some go for the straightforward approach, others find it comedic to lighten the uncomfortable situation, he says. The most embarrassing of all is walking into someone, then having to start a conversation to relieve the humiliation of the situation, he says.

Graham recommends putting some thought into initial meetings. First impressions are incredibly influential because they can influence all subsequent interactions, Graham says. “When I interact with someone, I don’t just pay attention to what’s in front of me and how they’re behaving, but I also pay attention to the way that they behaved before.” The best advice he gives for meeting a person is to be genuine, direct, honest and polite.

“One of the most widely researched things in the area of attraction is what’s referred to as the beauty bias, which is basically, We think someone is physically attractive, and then we tend to infer all kinds of other positive traits about them,” Graham says.

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Cutting the financial cord

WESTERN STUDENTS SHARE STORIES OF FINDING THEIR OWN MONETARY SECURITY

It is midnight, and Amrit Dhillon is just arriving home to her sleeping parents, her belated dinner, and her grandmother waiting up for her. After a 16-hour day with barely a break, Dhillon wants nothing more than to watch TV, crash onto her bed and sleep for hours. But she has homework to do, and besides, she has to be up early to start work at 8 a.m.

Two years ago, as a sophomore at Washington State University Tri-Cities, Dhillon broke away financially from her parents. She undertook a busy schedule of full-time school and two jobs to support herself. She found two jobs — at Victoria’s Secret and as a secretary at school, but living at home was tough during that time. Dhillon’s relationship with her parents was tense for a while. “It was hell,” she says. “It was a tough situation because they were still trying to accept my point of view but they didn’t necessarily respect it.”

After a semester of hard work and not enough sleep, Dhillon saved enough to transfer back to Western. She continued to work full time in Bellingham, finding a job at JJ’s In & Out. It was hard to find time for a social life. Dhillon is not alone in her busy schedule; about half of college students in Washington balance school and work. According to the Washington Higher Education Board, 54 percent of women and 50 percent of men were working at the same time as attending college in 2007.

Like Dhillon, Western senior Robbie Park is one of the students working and attending school. He was raised in a Mormon household, and every member of his family graduated from Brigham Young University. Park does not practice the religion, and when he decided to attend Western to be near his girlfriend and to get the liberal arts education he wanted, his parents told him they would still support him emotionally, but that he would have to pay for his own tuition and living expenses.

Park has cystic fibrosis, a chronic lung disease, and must stay on his father’s health insurance so he can get medical treatment. This also means that he cannot claim himself as an independent on his taxes, and therefore has to cite his parents’ income information when applying for financial aid. During his freshman year, Park applied for aid by filling out the FAFSA, but his parents’ income was high enough that all he was offered were unsubsidized federal loans.

He is among the half of Western’s undergraduates who receive educational loans. The U.S. Department of Education prohibits financial aid from being awarded to students who do not cite their parents’ income information on their FAFSA, says Clara Capron, Western’s director of student financial resources, in an e-mail. Park says it doesn’t make sense that he cannot get aid; there should be some facet of the FAFSA that accounts for students who have been cut off financially. “People who have parents who can’t provide are just as able to pay back loans as I will be,” he says.

Park’s loans pay for his tuition, but he must work to pay for rent and food. He says it can be difficult to commit to both work and school, so he has a routine: during the week he works and goes to classes, and on weekends he studies. According to a study by Richard Buda and Janet A. Lenaghan of Hofstra University, students who work and attend school have stress that negatively affects their well-being.

Finding the balance between work and school has been trial and error, Park says, but after almost four years of supporting himself, he is learning to commit to studying and working. Park found a position as a pharmacy technician at Walgreens. He commutes to work in Ferndale in the car he paid for and insures. Park was recently admitted to a pharmacy school in Colorado. After he graduates with his doctorate, he estimates that he will be $200,000 in debt from loans. Despite the debt, Park is glad he learned to support himself, he says it boosted his work ethic and efficiency. Supporting herself helped Dhillon learn to manage money, she says. Even so, she had her fair share of breakdowns throughout the experience — especially on days when everything seemed to go wrong. One day, she went whitewater rafting with her friends in the morning before work. Their raft slipped and capsized while going over a rapid, and she thought she was going to die. Still feeling shaken up, she arrived back home an hour before she had to go to work and called her parents to talk. She and her dad got into a fight because he felt he wasn’t as involved in her life anymore and she started crying.

“That added on to the whole drowning thing earlier, added on to me having to go to work… that was definitely one of the days when I just definitely had to rethink what the hell I was doing,” she says. Although she came out of the experience with a fear of water, Dhillon says she always had friends to lean on that would help her during times like this. Her roommate in Bellingham would talk to Dhillon when she was feeling stressed and gave her confidence. “For someone like me, who can’t say, ‘You are doing this and you’re pretty amazing and you should be proud of yourself for doing this and don’t let people bring you down… that was a good moment,’” Dhillon says.

After watching their daughter support herself for a semester, Dhillon’s parents apologized and offered to pay for school again, but Dhillon declined. She wanted to learn the value of a dollar, she says, and she supported herself for two years. Last fall, at the beginning of her senior year, she agreed to accept her parents’ help for the rest of the school year so she could concentrate on school and relax a bit. She and her parents have reconciled, and they agreed to let her choose whom she wants to marry. She hasn’t ruled out an arranged marriage, she says, but now she will have the power to decide.

Sleepless nights, stressful days and financial debt fill the lives of at least half of today’s college students. But their lives are also full of increasing work ethics, strong senses of pride and the feeling of controlling their own fates. Breaking financially from the parents’ nest may be scary, but for Dhillon and Park, it paid off.
At 10:30 a.m. on Tuesday the phone wakes Matt Affleck.

Affleck, 23, had gone to bed just three hours before. He wasn't out partying or logging hours in the library. He was up until 8 a.m. playing in the L.A. Poker Classic in Los Angeles. Affleck, a professional poker player and recent University of Washington finance graduate, gambles daily with more money than many college students’ cars cost. In Monday night’s game, the buy-in was $10,000 — not an uncommon amount in the professional poker world.

“Three years ago I was playing $5 tournaments with friends and now in L.A. I’m playing $10,000 buy-in tournaments,” Affleck says.

And Affleck isn’t just breaking even. He is one of the success stories of college poker players who attempt to turn the game into a profession after graduation.

But for all the fame and the money, it doesn’t come easy. Steven Garfinkle, Western history professor and fellow poker player during the summer World Series of Poker, says he’s seen far more people fail as professional players than make it big. It’s not surprising. Stakes are high, the stress is intense and the emotions run deep. But that, it seems, is part of the appeal.

Like many college poker players, Affleck started his career quietly during high school and college, playing with friends for small amounts of money and watching poker on TV. At the University of Washington, his skills quickly improved and the money he made in online poker allowed him to quit his cashier job at Fred Meyer in order to play more. Since then, the game has earned him fame and money, though he shies away from revealing how much.

In 2008 Kris Martonik, now 25, and his three roommates were living in a parallel poker world two hours north of Affleck at Western. Their converted living room — called the Grind Factory, not so subtly named for the hands they would “grind” out — served as their office, with upwards of four computers running multiple games of online poker at once, generally Full Tilt or Poker Stars. When Martonik started getting serious about it, during his senior year, he was playing 20 to 30 hours a week and making $50 to $100 per hour while getting his degree in finance.

“My senior year, I actually made more money playing poker than I could expect to get out of a job in finance,” Martonik says.

Affleck made the switch from online to live poker. He liked the more “passive” and slower atmosphere of live poker, and has become somewhat of a celebrity as a result of his decision. ESPN and other poker networks have covered the games he played. He’s won almost $1 million playing poker since he graduated in June 2010, though he’s quick to point out that those numbers don’t account for the often $10,000 or $20,000 buy-ins he pays for each game.

Martonik, on the other hand, embraced the online world he learned about at the Grind Factory. His roommates, however, began to focus on live poker. The house would travel to Vegas for two-week or monthlong trips, but Martonik’s preference for online poker prevailed even with the draws of Vegas outside the condo door.

“[My roommates] really liked to play live in the casinos and stuff and a lot of the time I’d just stay back and play online,” he says. “I was more focused, and I could make more money that way.”

Online poker is particularly enticing to college students, Garfinkle says. Many are younger than 21 and unable to gamble in casinos, so they avoid the age limit online. Students also don’t have to get dressed and drive to the casino because they can play in pajamas at home. They can also put more hands on the “table” at once while playing online. Joel Graves, a Western alumnus who considered turning pro in poker after graduation, played almost exclusively online in college — before the Washington State Supreme Court ruled in 2006 that online gambling, just like any other type of unlicensed gambling, is a felony.

“When you’re playing from home, you can control your environment a little bit better and you can put...
in 10 times as many hands as you would in a casino, which inevitably helps you get to the long term a little bit sooner," Graves says. "It helps you realize your winnings according to your skill."

Susan Arland, public information officer for the Washington State Gambling Commission, says more inherent risks go along with online gambling than live gambling. Many of the gambling websites are located offshore, and because players have to give up their credit card information, games can be more easily rigged. If the website rips a player off, no laws require it to pay the player back.

But the law seems to be a scare tactic in the context of the players. Martonik says he’s stopped playing poker online partially due to the law, but no one has actually ever been convicted in Washington for playing online poker. Arland says that while gambling websites and service providers are the primary focus of enforcement, players also risk a felony by participating in an illegal activity.

It was extremely extravagant. Like, $500 bottles of wine — super extravagant. It was just a lot of fun, Martonik says. "It was totally surreal. We were pretty young guys, definitely just started getting into poker. We just kind of got swept right into that. Very high stakes, kind of celebrity lifestyle for one night, which I thought was pretty cool."

Regardless of the poker glamour that Affleck agrees he has experienced, he says there are downsides, beyond the late nights. He doesn’t get to come home to Seattle as often as he’d like — he spent only 10 days there during January and February. Though it’s glamorous at times, Affleck says he spends a lot of hours just sitting at a poker table with headphones on.

Garfinkle says the downsides are the parts that people don’t see. The high stakes of poker and the resulting stress make it unsuitable for many people.

"The idea of the everyman competing with the world champion is tremendously alluring," Garfinkle says. "And there is some truth to it that anyone can give this a go, but that doesn’t mean anyone should give it a go. It’s a profession with a lot of highs and lows. I know some young players who are very successful but they will still talk to you about how difficult it is sometimes to fade the emotional swings between tremendous success and heartbreaking failure."

Neither Martonik nor Affleck plan to continue as professional poker players for life. Martonik is already looking at graduate schools. Affleck prepares for another all-nighter of gambling with poker’s greats, he doesn’t seem to have any good reasons to stop. It’s hard to quit when you’re so far ahead.

The end of innocence
TELLING KIDS THE TRUTH ABOUT THE TOOTH FAIRY, EASTER BUNNY AND SAINT NICK
Story by Sakeus Bankson
Photo illustration by Jaynie Hancock

Tristan Wood was playing four-square when he found out Santa isn’t real. Christmas was coming up, and Wood and some friends were out at recess when one of his classmates broke the news.

"Someone said, ‘Santa’s totally not real. My parents told me,’ ” Wood says. “I was devastated. I couldn’t play for the rest of recess. I sat down on a bench and was like, ‘Oh god, my life is a lie.’

Santa, the Easter Bunny, the Tooth Fairy — all central figures in a child’s perception of reality. But when the news breaks that these icons are in fact fabrications, the results can take all forms, from devastation to disbelief to indifference. Whatever the reaction, for most, that moment of truth is unforgettable.

Collin Buckley, a teacher at Mount Baker Junior High School, says his 5-year-old son Isaiah has always been a skeptic, although Buckley says Isaiah is a willing enough participant when a prize is involved.

"My wife’s parents mention the Easter Bunny and he’s kind of like, ‘What do you mean a bunny is coming to my house and leaving me candy?’ Buckley says of his son. "But then he’s like, ‘OK, well, it is free candy.’"

Isaiah’s doubt came to a head when “Santa” visited at an after-school sing-along at his preschool, and he asked his dad for the truth. His suspicions confirmed, Isaiah then proceeded to tell all his classmates — something, Buckley says, that made them quite unpopular among the other families for a while. As for whether he’ll try to convince his youngest son, 20-month-old Oliver, that Santa exists, Buckley says, “Oliver has no hope. His brother will just tell him, ‘There’s no Santa. He’s going to be the most jaded 3-year-old around.’"

For others, the figures are a philosophical issue. It’s not whether they exist that matters; it’s what they represent that determines their validity.

“I still think Santa is real,” says Alex Woehlbrandt, a Western sophomore. “My parents taught all of us that Santa is real, but he just has helpers, and Santa’s helpers are all around us, and one day it would be our turn to help Santa out. Kind of like the notion that ‘Santa’s an idea or a feeling, and isn’t true or false or real or not real. It’s an opinion and a tradition that you can choose to partake in or not.”

Whatever your position, it’s hard to argue that these stories sound anything but ridiculous out of the light of childhood — a fat old man dressed in furry pajamas, breaking and entering to fill socks with candy; a fairy that pays money for bits of little kids’ dental structures; and a giant DayGlo rabbit hiding painted eggs in the name of Jesus. Even so, breaking the news to children can result in trauma, cynicism, or even a sense of humor. Maybe sometimes it is best to let the lie live.
KLIPSUN
is a Chinuk Wawa word meaning sunset.

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