Swapping Syringes
A simple trade can save a life

Bearing The Burden Of Stress
Hidden danger of saving lives

Closure
The search for answers in adoption
I sometimes like to think of myself as clever. Yet I still find it nearly impossible to come up with a witty answer when asked, “If your house was burning down, what’s one thing would you save from the fire?”

Trying to imagine the walls ablaze around me, I close my eyes and scan the eternal mess that is my bedroom. My line of vision crosses my bike, heap of clothes in the corner, musical instruments and laptop, as I evaluate which of these things I wouldn’t be able to live without.

“Assuming my family is safe, I would throw my mandolin on my back, grab my copy of “The Great Gatsby” and the Bible my grandma gave me, and then hop on my bike and jump it through the flames like Evel Knievel,” I would answer. But that’s cheating.

As I listen to others answer the same question, I realize the items I find vital are drastically different from what the people around me would save, and none of their items are similar to each other. As we start to hear about the family photos, laptops, cameras and cats that people would save, we start to see what each person values the most.

In this issue of Klipsun, we get a glimpse into the vital things in life, such as the Olympic hopeful’s decision to ensure his path to the podium, and the adopted woman finding closure in search of her birth parents. We also sweat along with a wrestler who has to lose 10 pounds in fewer than 24 hours.

In this issue, we see vitals in a new way. We give up our own idea of the things that are necessary, and we start to think about what the people around us might hold while leaping through the flames.

Branden Griffith
Editor-in-Chief
CHASING GOLD
Olympic dreams take a path less traveled

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The search for answers in adoption
By the time Van As arrived at the hospital with his amputated fingers, they were turning blue, he says. Doctors told him there was only a 30 percent chance of successful reattachment.

Forgoing attempts at reattachment, the ordeal motivated him to develop a device to regain some of his hand's functionality, Van As says.

“I was told I was a crazy man and a fool,” he says, “and that made me more determined than ever.”

Six months after his accident, Van As discovered a mechanical-hand prop on YouTube that piqued his interest. He emailed creator Ivan Owen, an inventor who lived 10,000 miles away in Bellingham, and invited him to collaborate on his own device. After eight months, countless emails and Skype sessions, the pair successfully engineered Van As’ robotic hand.

The success of the robotic hand inspired Van As and Owen to share their low-cost prosthetic design with people around the world. Medical-grade prosthetics cost more than $50,000, which makes them unaffordable to many in need. With donations, Van As and Owen now build devices for individuals at no cost to themselves.

The first challenge in teaming up was overcoming long-distance communication. Working so many miles apart on a project like this would not have been possible 20 years ago, Owen says.

To aid in the design process, Van As sent Owen a precise replica of his hand cast from plastic, giving him the exact dimensions for Van As’ prosthetic fingers.

“We had been doing as much as we could up to that point, but holding an exact model of his hand with its missing digits made it even more real,” Owen says. “This was happening, and it needed to happen faster.”

Using 3D printers donated by the company Makerbot, Owen produced fingers for Van As’ robotic hand. The printer operates using computer-aided design, constructing a physical representation of the designs, Owen says.

The addition of the 3D printer accelerated their design efforts and they built two functional prototypes, bringing them closer to a final device for production.

After working collaboratively for almost a year, Owen flew to Johannesburg, South Africa, where he met Van As for the first time. They worked in Van As’ home workshop, where they finalized his robotic hand.

“Our ideas flew back and forth,” Owen says. “We built like madmen.”

For the first time in more than a year, Van As regained vital functionality in his right hand — he can even use a keyboard with his robotic hand, Owen says.

The men had accomplished what doctors said would not be possible. Van As’ device cost a total of $500, 40 times less than a comparable prosthetic hand, which would cost $20,000, Owen says.

“If you’re dissatisfied with the way the game is played, you change the game, one piece at a time,” Owen says. “That’s what we did with Richard’s device.”

After they completed Van As’ device, the pair received an email from a parent whose 5-year-old son, Liam, was born with Ambiotic Band Syndrome, and did not have fingers on his right hand. Soon after, they began the building process for Liam’s own robotic hand. Building the devices for children like Liam really puts the entire project in perspective, Owen says.

“[Richard and I] only facilitate in helping kids like Liam with the vital ability to continue living life unhindered,” he says. “The device only does as much as the person who is wearing it; it’s up to them to be their own [advocate] for change.”

The experience of building Van As’ robotic hand exponentially accelerated the build time of Liam’s device. The process was shaved down from eight months to three weeks, Owen says.

The devices Owen and Van As build are mechanically simple, focusing on functionality and the ease of repair, Owen says. Their designs have no electrical components of any kind.

Liam’s device uses cables that flex each finger. These cables run along the back of his hand, where they are anchored to the forearm. When Liam bends his wrist downward, each cable stretches, causing his fingers to close, he says. When he bends his wrist upward, it releases tension on the cables, causing the fingers to open.

Van As says his brain blocked out most of his experience. He does remember the resistance of the saw against his fingers and how it eventually lost power and shut down; it was struggling to cut through bone.

Van As, a South African carpenter, removed his fingers from the saw, and placed them into his apron pocket. He then wrapped his injured hand in the apron — the most painful sensation he has ever experienced. Quickly he realized he was missing two more fingers. He looked down at the saw’s dust collector and saw his ring finger, but decided it would take too long to retrieve. At that moment, he decided he could live without his ring and pinkie fingers.
The advantage of this system is its simplicity, Owen says. He and his family will never need to buy expensive electrical components if something breaks. Larger versions of the hand can be printed easily as he grows.

A few short months after he got his device, Liam could use his robotic hand to throw balls, pick up coins and do things most other children can do, Owen says. The device cost less than $150, and was given to Liam at no expense to his family.

After building Liam’s device, Owen and Van As began receiving press for their efforts. Soon after, their website, comingupshorthanded.com, began receiving thousands of visitors. They cannot keep up with the current demand for devices, Owen says.

“We want to expand our efforts, but we’re trying not to bury ourselves,” he says. “We’re taking it one step at a time.”

Currently, Van As and Owen are working on a project for a 4-year-old boy named John. He was born without fully developed fingers on his right hand, and his device is near completion.

Forging profit, these men work from home, operating only on the money donated from people who believe in their shared vision. With the support of family, friends and the global community, Owen and Van As embark on the next stage of their journey: sharing the technology and knowledge they’ve developed, while living on opposite sides of the globe.

EDITOR’S NOTE: As of March 2013, Owen stepped down from his role within the hands project. He noted philosophical differences with Van As for his decision, but has decided to serve as a consultant for future developments. He will continue working with Makerbot to design open-source devices.

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Below: Plaster hand castings for Liam, a 4-year-old born without fully developed fingers on his right hand, are used to make a new, mechanical hand. Photo by: Patrick Downing

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Currently, Van As and Owen are working on a project for a 4-year-old boy named John. He was born without fingers on his right hand, and his device is near completion. The entire building process has taken less than a week and Owen is confident they will soon be able to build two devices in the same amount of time, he says.

Van As and Owen have given away their right to patent their robotic hands. By keeping their designs open source, others cannot patent them either, which keeps the designs free to the public. Owen and Van As do not wish to profit from their designs but only want additional funding to continue creating devices for those who can’t afford medical-grade prosthetics. Their detailed designs are viewable online through the website, Owen says.

“The further Rich and I have gotten into this, the more we have discovered what a large-scale problem this really is, and how little access these individuals have,” Owen says.

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Erica Reed and Clara Thomas drive around downtown Bellingham at 9 p.m. on a Saturday on a mission. Black beanies cover their long blond hair and both wear dark jeans and old hooded sweatshirts. Reed packs her red 1994 Chrysler New Yorker and the women walk into the dark alleyway between Railroad Avenue and Cornwall Avenue. They have arrived at the Dumpsters the women visit weekly. Dinner is served.

Reed and Thomas dumpster dive in businesses’ trash in hopes of finding relatively clean, expired food that has been thrown out. Reed and Thomas’ first stop of the night is Espresso Avellino’s trashcans on Railroad Avenue. Reed flips the lid open and uses her pointer finger and thumb to pull trash bags to the surface and rip them open. Reed has been Dumpster diving before, but is noticeably disgusted by most of the trash.

“Someone else has been here already,” Reed says. “Look, some of these trash bags have already been ripped apart.”

Looking through trash that is not your own is illegal, University Police Sgt. David Garcia says. “Businesses have a ‘reasonable expectation of privacy,” he says.

If he sees people rummaging through a trashcan, Garcia says he will advise them to stop or he will cite them for trespassing.

Reed shuts the lid and they continue down the alley. The women have two more stops in this alleyway.

Reed first started Dumpster diving about two years ago. “It is such a waste,” Reed says. “Good food does not need to be going into the trash.”

Upon hearing that Reed and Thomas eat the Dumpster loaf, Ryan cringes and shakes his head. “Yuck,” he says. “I wouldn’t eat that.”

Reed and Thomas return to the Chrysler with their garbage runoff and pulls a large turkey-sized loaf of burnt bread to the top of the Dumpster.

“Are you seriously going to eat that?” Thomas says. “It wasn’t even in a trash bag.”

Bagelry owner Kim Ryan donates leftover bread from the shop to various homeless shelters every day. But at the end of each day, the bagelry staff collects all the dough that has fallen on the ground and cooks it in one big loaf, then throws it in the trashcan.

Reed rips an opening in the burnt loaf and exposes the untarnished interior. “Try it,” Reed says. “They eat a handful, look at each other and nod in approval.”

Reed and Thomas return to the Chrysler with their appetites only partially satisfied — they will need to spend money on their dinner tonight after all.

The Bagelry’s Dumpster is next, which supplies Reed and Thomas with bread on a weekly basis. Reed delicately shifts over black bags dripping with garbage runoff and pulls a large turkey-sized loaf of burnt bread to the top of the Dumpster.

“Here we go,” Reed says.

“For you seriously going to eat that?” Thomas says. “It wasn’t even in a trash bag.”

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Karen Cole is a freelance ghostwriter. She also proofreads, rewrites, copy edits and writes books. She is the founder, owner and executive director of Ghost Writer, Inc., a Seattle-based company. Cole manages a team of more than 100 writers, editors, illustrators, marketers and promoters for books, manuscripts, screenplays and music lyrics. Each team member assists her on projects. Slipping into the shadows, as Cole has done, seems to be a puzzling choice. If writers can produce publishable work, why not take credit for it with their own names? One of Cole's college English professors had an answer for this. "The professor said that women make the best editors, and should leave upper level writing to the men," Cole says. "I frowned, but I did start a copy editing business based on that assumption."

She says she learned this stereotype did not necessarily hold true in the writing field, and she yearned for more than a life of copy-editing work.

In the 1980s, Cole signed on with Harlequin Romance and had her first taste of ghost writing when she worked on a romance series and helped authors write their books for the company. It was during this time she realized she could make a career out of ghost writing.

"I enjoy the anonymity," Cole says. "It can be hard to [develop] your own ideas, so it's nice to be able to write while using other people's ideas."

While building on other's ideas is arguably a bit easier than formulating stories from scratch, Cole says she has written hundreds of articles and short stories under her own byline. She is working on her own book, which she expects to hit shelves in 2014. She is drawn to ghost writing and the money that comes with it.

"The most prestigious ghost writers say they [often] take the pay, complete the job and put it completely behind them to move on to the next job," Cole says. "I don't quite operate this way, but I tend to think the pay is the most rewarding aspect of being this type of freelance writer."

Pay depends on a variety of factors, and each job is unique. Cole says she determines contracts based on how much time the job will be, the client's overall budget and how fast the client would like it to be completed. Cole will either direct an assignment to her staff, or she will take a job herself. Ghostwriters usually take a paycheck in lieu of credit for a work, though in some circumstances a ghostwriter can arrange for partial credit or a co-author listing. Cole says she usually earns about $25,000 for a typical solo project. A $25,000 paycheck may not be pocket change, but the unpredictable workload may deter aspiring authors from pursuing ghostwriting as a career. Cole says business is usually slow during the Christmas holiday season and the weekends, but she is always finding clients through her social media networks such as her LinkedIn account and her company's website and blog.

While working on these projects, her hours are up to her discretion. She enjoys sleeping in as late as 2 p.m. some days. Aside from a few breaks or short walks outside, Cole says she sits down and doesn't stop until her work for the day is done, and logs about five straight hours at a time. Not even her chronic dystonia gets in the way of her schedule.

"My left side is spastic, and so is my neck," Cole explains. "My head turns involuntarily to the left, and my left arm sticks out. Both are very painful and I have to take pain medications on a regular basis."

Cole does not see her condition as a hindrance to her career. Other things about ghostwriting, however, are a pain for her to deal with, such as when she disagrees with what an author writes.

"Sometimes I differ with what I'm writing, such as when I was working on a book that advised medications for pregnant women," Cole says. "When I don't agree with the author… I don't feel quite right about things."

She has given projects like these to her other writers, or dropped projects completely. She says this is rare, though, she views herself as an open-minded ghost writer. Even open-minded writers have their preferences. While most of Cole's clients need help with memoirs, biographies, and autobiographies, she prefers to work on fiction projects. "I have to restrain myself forcibly sometimes from telling the world about something really good that I wrote under someone else's name," she says. "But over time, the rewards of the job have overcome my need to boast!"

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A 4-year-old girl is eating a snack when she feels her throat begin to tighten. She can’t breathe. Her parents rush to her and frantically try to dislodge the food from her throat. They can’t, and they call 911. It takes four minutes for the emergency responders to arrive.

Veteran paramedic JW Foster and a team of emergency medical technicians arrive to find the little girl unconscious, turning blue, and her pulse slowing — all signs pointing toward the unthinkable. She has been unconscious for nearly five minutes and is moments away from dying right in front of her parents.

Foster takes out two tools — one that helps him locate where the obstruction is in her throat and another that removes the obstruction.

Her parents stand feet away, watching in shock. Foster tilts the girl’s head back and guides the forceps down her trachea. He spears the obstruction and pulls the tool out of her throat — a grape is clasped between the forceps’ tongs. The girl begins to breathe.

Emergency-response jobs come with respect and glory because each has the opportunity to save lives. Not all emergencies have a happy ending, though. Not every 4-year-old starts to breathe again. Traumatic events don’t only affect the victims and their families; they affect the professionals who are there to help. The stress of traumatic events can take a devastating, emotional and physical toll on those who respond to emergency calls.

About 10 percent of paramedics suffer from severe depression, and 25 percent suffer an above average level of anxiety, according to recent study published by News Medical. In Foster’s 33 years with the fire department, he has seen firsthand the effects of having a job with a high amount of emotional and physical pressure.

“‘There is a strain that manifests itself on firefighters and paramedics through a higher level of alcoholism, a higher level of divorce and higher levels of suicide than people in other fields,’” Foster says. “‘It’s obvious it is because of the work.’”

When a person is under stress, the brain releases a chemical called cortisol. Cortisol is responsible for heightened senses and alertness throughout the body. When a person gets frightened or stressed, adrenaline pumps through the brain putting the body into a “fight-or-flight” mode. To balance out the chemical equations in the brain, the hypothalamus, a part of the brain that controls metabolism, sends signals to decrease the levels of cortisol, bringing a person back to a normal state.

When a person is under continuous or extreme stress, like emergency responders can be, the hypothalamus can stop sending signals that control cortisol levels. Over a long period of time, too much adrenaline in the body becomes a neurotoxin and can lead to heart problems, sleep problems, depression, weight problems and memory loss, according to the Mayo Clinic.

Two firemen have committed suicide in Thurston County, where Foster is from, in the last six years.

The average shift for a firefighter is 24 hours working, 48 hours off. When 5 p.m. rolls around and most working people head home, firefighters keep going.

Firefighters go to sleep at the station and when a call comes in, all the lights turn on and speakers blare. After they return from a call, they go back to the station and go back to bed, just to be woken up by another alert going off a couple hours later, Foster says.

When the alerts go off in the fire station, firefighters’ heart rates increase, their blood pressure spikes and they have a large release of adrenaline.

“Your body is ready to fight,” Foster says. “If you do that 10 times a day, your body goes crazy, and that’s wear and tear on your body.”

Firefighters relax at the station, playing basketball, cooking and watching movies. During their down time, a subconscious layer of stress is running through them because at any moment, the alarms will go off and they have to be ready immediately, Foster says.

Some shifts Foster may only get a few calls, but the next day his body is exhausted from being alert the whole shift, he says.

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Last New Year’s Day, firefighter Captain Scott Hansen and other Bellingham firefighters rescued a mother and her two daughters from their burning house on 24th Street. Hansen says, “After the fire was contained and the family was safe, one of the firefighters had such an intense emotional response that he called his wife and was crying while on the phone, Hansen says.

“Everyone reacts to stress in a different way,” Hansen says. “After the fire, some of the guys were overwhelmed for the rest of the shift. Some of the guys have post-traumatic stress responses afterward.”

To help firefighters cope with traumatic events, Whatcom County has an officer-support group, which provides group counseling and helps firefighters vent, Hansen says. “As a group, we help each other,” Foster says. “When we get back from a call and it was distressing, we immediately start talking about it, and that’s a huge stress reliever.”

If there was a particularly stressful call, Foster and his station will do a Critical Stress Debriefing exercise where they get everybody to talk it out, he says.

Throughout Foster’s long career, he has resuscitated countless people, skillfully saved many lives, helped a baby breathe its first breath and has had people die in his arms and under his care.

The highs are high, but the lows of his job are very low, Foster says. “We don’t save everybody,” Foster says. “And we carry that around with us.”

Foster is able to keep doing his job by keeping a positive frame of mind after losing people under his care. “I was there to help them,” Foster says. “I did my best, and I gave them a shot at life that they would not have had if I had not been there. It’s sad and I feel bad about it, but I know I did the best that anybody could do.”

Foster loves the thrill of his job and he says the people who can’t handle the pressure or who get burned out will ultimately choose a different career. But Foster says the fulfillment of his job outweighs the disappointments. “There is a level of achievement and satisfaction you get in this job that would be hard to find anywhere else,” Foster says.

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The oils are typically grown in the field where the plants are grown, because the process requires access to large quantities of freshly harvested plants, Schulman Sanger says. “It is not something you can ship hundreds of miles or wait several days to do because the plant material will turn and the oils may dissipate,” Schulman Sanger says.

An identifying quality of essential oils is their potency. Living Earth Herbs apprentice Arielle Stein says, “With teas you have a whole glass or cup, and with a tincture you might have dropper full, but [with] essential oils you only need a drop or two and you can see benefits and results,” Stein says.

People looking to improve their health used to feel assured doctors could provide what they need to feel better, but Schulman Sanger says that is becoming less of a sure thing.

As healthcare becomes more expensive, people are becoming more selective about what they spend their money on and what risks they are willing to take, Schulman Sanger says.

“It’s driving individuals to do more self education and try harder on their own to become more educated and empowered around issues of their own health,” Schulman Sanger says.

Schulman Sanger says she sells essential oils to everyone, like people who are interested in reclaiming a healthier state, no matter what their generation or political leanings.
Donn Cabral’s heart races as he walks toward the end of the nearly pitch-black tunnel leading into the Opening Ceremony of the 2012 Summer Olympics. He follows a long line of Olympians into the arena, flooded with the sound of 80,000 people from across the globe cheering in support of their respective countries.

“I’ve never felt something so significant before,” Cabral says. At the height of his Olympic dreams, Cabral would have never imagined living in a small Pacific Northwest town just a few months later.

After competing in the steeplechase event in London, Cabral moved to Bellingham to begin training with his former coach Peter Oviatt. Since his move, Oviatt has created a vigorous training schedule to prepare Cabral for future races and the next summer Olympics. Cabral’s training with Oviatt is essential to bettering his skills.

During Oviatt’s second year as a high school track coach, Cabral joined his team as a freshman, Oviatt says. After becoming a professional runner, Cabral had discussions with coaches from Nike, but decided to work with Oviatt instead.

“There are a lot of athletes who think that the reason they’re great is because of themselves…I don’t think so much like that,” Cabral says. “What makes me great is largely the coaching and direction I’ve received. If I were left to my own devices, I probably wouldn’t have gotten here.”

Coaching ability was not the only factor in his decision, he says. Cabral’s training history with Oviatt also influenced his decision to train with him. While it wasn’t an easy choice, it was the clear one.

“He’s probably worth more than I’m paying him, but don’t tell him that,” Cabral says. Instead of being trained traditionally in a classroom and learning from people who have never coached, Oviatt gained almost all of his knowledge through practical experience.

“I’m always experimenting and I’m always throwing out things that used to work great but either don’t work anymore or something else works better,” Oviatt says. “No matter how well something is working, I’m always looking for less chance of injury, less chance of overtraining, less chance of burnout, and by not going quite as hard but still getting as good or better results.”

Having an Olympic runner choose him over other coaches not only made Oviatt feel great, but it also put pressure on him to make sure Cabral continues to succeed, he says.

“I owe him as good as or better than he would have gotten from [Nike coaches] Jerry Schumacher or Alberto Salazar,” Oviatt says.
But instead of letting the pressure affect his coaching, it inspires him to work harder, Oviatt says. “It’s such a great compliment and it justifies a lot of work, sacrifice and choices I’ve made,” Oviatt says. If the duo’s relationship were anything but strong, there probably wouldn’t be a relationship at all, Oviatt says. Oviatt may feel the pressure, but he doesn’t let it affect his training. “I think Pete is very confident in coaching. If he does feel pressure, he doesn’t show it,” Cabral says. During their years of working together, Oviatt has helped educate and mold Cabral into the athlete he is today. But Cabral is not the only one who has put in work to this relationship. Oviatt says he works to help support Cabral’s talent as much as he can. “I have to give him the right philosophy,” Oviatt says. “It’s that huge philosophy that I have to present of ‘This is what makes the best athlete possible,’ and I say the best athlete possible, not the best runner possible. Because you have to be the best athlete before you can be the best runner. Being the best runner is the icing on the cake.” Oviatt attributes Cabral’s background in sports outside of running to be what helped shape him into a strong athlete.

During the week, Cabral and Oviatt do three morning workouts with strength training and five afternoon running practices that are often with Oviatt’s running team, the Whatcom Tesseract. Weekends are spent doing timed miles or long runs for two or three hours.

While working with Whatcom Tesseract, Cabral has met several local runners and has inspired them to improve their running abilities. Tom Bradley, a local senior at Blaine High School, says training with an Olympic runner showed him that hard work pays off. “Having him to train with picks up everyone’s work ethic and gets everyone to run a little faster,” Bradley says. Other than training for the 2016 Olympics, Cabral is working year-round and competing across the globe. He competes in steeplechasing, an obstacle race which derived from the steeplechase in horse racing. One of his goals is to be the best American steeplechaser, but he says the title won’t be obtained easily. “Ivan Jager [the first place American steeplechaser] is running great, so it’s not like he’s going to give it to me,” Cabral says. “I’ve got to make some big jumps to be able to overtake him.” If he can do that, Cabral says he can probably break an American record, win a medal at the world championship and possibly a medal at the Olympics. It’s because of Cabral’s dedication to his training and his drive to succeed on and off the track that will keep him competing for many years to come, Oviatt says. In retrospect, it is hard for Oviatt to realize that this young man, who he’s been working with since he was a freshman in high school, has been to the Olympics, and he played a major part in him getting there, he says. Coaches ask him what it is like to train someone who has gone to the Olympic final. “It’s weird because part of it is just Donn,” Oviatt says. “The guy [I] knew since he was 14 years old, and he kept getting better and that’s where it led to. And then I step back and I look away from the fact that I have been [a part of] it the whole time and I say, ‘Oh my gosh, I’m that coach now,’ and that’s really exciting.”

There are a lot of athletes who think that the reason they’re great is because of themselves…I don’t think so much like that. What makes me great is largely the coaching and direction I’ve received. If I were left to my own devices, I probably wouldn’t have gotten here.”
Morticians and their dying art

Story and photos by Samantha Heim

Green burials involve biodegradable caskets and a formaldehyde-free mixture, usually alcohol, for embalming. Aase says the increase in green burials has not affected his work because people specifically choose the traditional embalming process for the viewing. Since it is a new technique, burial in a “green” cemetery and using the alternative forms of embalming is often expensive. Regardless of what method an individual chooses to leave this world, the embalming process and viewing ceremony allows the living to say their final goodbyes. “It’s definitely important for the grieving process to have that closure,” Wilcox says.

“One woman even requested for her funeral to be changed three times. She prepared one outfit for the viewing, one for the funeral and pajamas for the burial,” Wilcox says. Following specific requirements for burial allows those closest to the deceased to complete one last favor. “It makes them feel good knowing that mom or dad is wrapped in a blanket or has their special outfit on,” Aase says.

“The machine is kind of serving as an artificial heart, pumping fluid into the body,” Wilcox says. 

Chemicals used for embalming are stored in a protective cabinet at the Lake Washington Technical College for funeral services degree program.

Hochstetter, who specializes in the history of colonial America, says that the practice of embalming in North America emerged during the Civil War, when many people were being killed. In order to have traditional burials, bodies needed to be preserved for transportation. The process applied for embalming used then is still practiced today.

Most funeral homes are family run, such as Sig’s Funeral Services.

History and the work surrounding death have intrigued Aase since the eighth grade. At his school in Entiat, Wash., a small city near Wenatchee, Aase took a death and dying class through which he visited various cemeteries and funeral homes.

After graduating from college, he was not able to find a job. Instead, Aase completed a two-year apprenticeship for his best friend’s uncle, who was a funeral director. After working with Molé’s Funeral Home for 25 years, Aase was laid off. Thus, in 2010, he opened Sig’s Funeral Services, which is now a family business run by Aase, Marva Aase and their son, Justin Aase.

Since opening, the business has grown, but the majority of their work is not preparation for burial. “About 90 to 98 percent of our business is cremation,” Aase says.

In Washington state, the cremation rate is 70 percent, the second highest in the nation, behind Nevada. Hochstetter says this may have to do with the growing trend in "environmentally friendly deaths."

The main issue regarding traditional embalming is the formaldehyde or other chemicals that are released into the ground once the casket breaks down. Since hollow organs cannot be drained through blood vessels, a special instrument is used to reach them near the umbilical. The removal of organs before burial is often a misconception, Wilcox says. They are left in the body.

Regardless of what form of embalming an individual chooses, it is important that they make their wishes known. “Identification is a very important part, especially if they’re doing cremation, since it is so final,” Wilcox says. Once a decision is made regarding burial or cremation, the body is taken out of its holding cooler, then left to thaw. If they’re doing cremation, since it is so final, Wilcox says. Following specific requirements for burial allows those closest to the deceased to complete one last favor.

“Basiclly, embalming is trying to perpetuate this fiction that death didn’t happen.”

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After being weighed, the wrestlers are allowed two hours before their matches to rehydrate.

Crawford is majoring in Kinesiology and Spanish. He has been interested in health and fitness from a young age. From a sports-fitness and biology standpoint, Crawford says he is fully aware of the danger and health risks he takes while cutting weight. Anyone who is still growing and developing should not be trying to cut weight, he says.

Once the week arrives for Crawford to drop the weight, the way he views food changes, he says. "As a wrestler, every bite of food is valued not just on how many calories it is, but how much it physically weighs," Crawford says. "Because when you eat that, you take that weight on,"

His girlfriend of more than two years, Michela Lecoq, says she finds it hard to watch Crawford cut so much weight. "Just caring about him, and wanting what is best for him," Lecoq says, "it’s really hard for me to see him not eating and not drinking, looking dehydrated and tired and not being able to do anything about it,"

Lecoq has recently become interested in health and fitness, and says Crawford’s dedication and passion for living a healthy lifestyle encourages and inspires her.

Crawford is only 6 percent body fat, nearly 20 percent lower than the national average, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

To drop 10 pounds by the wrestling tournament, Crawford starts his process about one week earlier by tricking his body into producing more of a hormone that stimulates urination. He eliminates all sodium from his diet, and then drinks as much water as he can for the next day. The combi-
Percieved obsolescence — a behavioral and psychological pattern defined by a desire that renders past generations of technology obsolete. Its effect on society was exemplified in September 2012 when more than 5 million iPhone users upgraded to the newest generation in the first three days of sales, breaking iPhone sales records in less than an hour.

The desire to obtain the newest electronics continues to feed America’s consumerism based on the way society perceives these new gadgets, not by the product’s vitality to everyday life.

Tony Prichard, an English professor at Western who focuses on the history of technology, believes our society is so absorbed with the exterior of a new product that the depth and complexity of the interior is often left out.

“The way we perceive technology is not based on the functionality but the design,” Prichard says. “This makes it easier for carriers to manipulate users to view their current technology as ‘broken’ because it doesn’t support the newest software.

The desire for a faster and more efficient interface is often the leading factor pushing people to purchase the newest technology. However, Nate Wetterauer, a 23-year-old freelance filmmaker at Pyramid Staging & Events says he believes the willingness to upgrade a product is predominantly dependent on the price.

It’s easy to impulsively upgrade a $200 phone or tablet, but Wetterauer has to put more thought into exchanging his filmmaking gear, where prices start at $5,000 for a new lens.

On the contrary, Dan Gross, the founder and executive director of DNA, an advertising agency in Seattle, says he is willing to purchase the latest Apple product around 70 percent of the time a new generation is released. He says he has owned every version of the MacBook, iPod and iPhone since the rise of Apple products in the 1980s.

Gross says he enjoys the new-toy factor of having the newest technology becomes infinite, and the belief that buying a new product which is specifically marketed to fix a problem seems more convenient than taking the time to find out how to make previous products go further.

“When you rather use two sticks or a lighter to make fire? Lighters are sleeker, more efficient and have an easier interface, but you can only use a lighter for as long as there is fluid to run it,” Prichard says. “Instead of using the lighter to its full potential and refilling the fluid, most would rather go to the store and simply by a new one.”

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When a new product is released, different limitations are often overlooked because of the new design. This desire to acquire the newest technology becomes infinite, and the belief that buying a new product which is specifically marketed to fix a problem seems more convenient than taking the time to find out how to make previous products go further.

“Would you rather use two sticks or a lighter to make fire? Lighters are sleeker, more efficient and have an easier interface, but you can only use a lighter for as long as there is fluid to run it,” Prichard says. “Instead of using the lighter to its full potential and refilling the fluid, most would rather go to the store and simply buy a new one.”

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van Edwards gets out of his friend’s blue Nissan pickup truck carrying two grocery bags full of used syringes. He has all too frequently witnessed his friends passing needles from one raw, pink forearm to the next. He knows the harm this second-hand handoff can cause. He continues across the street toward Whatcom County’s health department.

Edwards says the bags weren’t heavy, but the contents weighed on his thoughts. “This is a lot of needles and they weren’t just used once,” Edwards says. “Just makes you think.”

Intravenous drug users like some of Edwards’ friends may be sharing more than just a their needles.

Sharing syringes comes with the risk of contracting deadly blood-borne diseases such as HIV and hepatitis C.

Syringe-exchange programs across the nation work to remove contaminated syringes from the community and help intravenous drug users take the first step to cleaning up. Running on shrinking budgets, these programs, including Bellingham’s, face an uncertain future.

Edwards, now 34, says he has used a variety of drugs including cocaine, methamphetamine and LSD in the past, and was 19 years old when he first used heroin.

Edwards, who is now clean, says he shudders to think of what he injected with used needles.

When Edwards did use drugs, he did not always have access to new needles and would sometimes inject with used ones.

“I looked at what I used and said, ‘Oh my God, I can’t believe I stuck that into my vein,’” Edwards says. “It's like using rusty barbed wire.”

Manufacturers designed syringes to be used once and then disposed of safely. Even if one person only uses them more than once, needles quickly become dull and bent after repeated use and can damage skin and build infectious bacteria. To ensure needles are not used repeatedly, needle exchange programs like the one offered by the Whatcom County Health Department encourage members of the public to bring in used syringes to trade for clean ones at no cost.

“These people aren’t destroying themselves, damaging themselves, mutilating themselves, trying to get another hit,” Edwards says. “They aren’t forced to mangle their body if they have new needles.”

Edwards says he has personally dropped off “a few thousand” syringes at the Whatcom County Health exchange program that his friends have used.

Whatcom County’s syringe exchange program is a vital service to the community, he says.

The HIV epidemic that first captured the public’s attention in 1981 inspired exchange programs with the goal of curbing the spread of the communicable disease.

Edwards says he is most concerned about the spread of hepatitis C.

“Hepatitis C is rampant [in Bellingham],” Edwards says. “Everyone has hepatitis C that I’ve met in the community who uses needles.”

Amy Washburn is a public health nurse who works in the syringe exchange program. She says it’s important that people feel respected there, because they often come in feeling shunned by society.

“Judging someone on going to the needle exchange or being an IV-drug user is taking it out of context,” Washburn says. “There are so many layers as to why they ended up using in the first place.”

Washburn says even though the program has generally been used by people under the age of 30, they have seen all ages and walks of life since its opening in 2010.

“People over 40, people in 20s, 30s and even teens,” she says. “We have all economic backgrounds and education levels. We do not discriminate.”

Washburn estimates they are 40 to 70 people each night. In 2012, Whatcom County Health logged 3,169 encounters in the program. The syringe exchange is only available on Thursdays from 2:30-5 p.m. at the department offices on North State Street.

Alice Simmons, who supervises the syringe exchange program at Whatcom County Health Department, says a counselor is always available in the lobby in case a client wants to talk.

“We realize that’s an issue that we’re only open one day a week,” Simmons says. “Hopefully funding will eventually catch up with the needs of the community.”

Washburn says.

Syringe exchange services rely on state or local dollars. The federal government has denied funding to needle exchange programs.

Washburn says in July, funding could be reduced by a transition to the general county budget.

“If they stop doing needle exchange, it is going to hit the fan,” Edwards says. “People are going to start dying [from hepatitis C] more.”

Until the federal funding ban is lifted, Washburn says, Whatcom County is going to have a difficult time funding its syringe-exchange program. In the meantime, the program remains open and accepts as many bags of needles Edwards or anyone else can fill.

**Infographic:** In the 2011 National Survey of Syringe Exchange Programs, it was reported that 36.9 million needles were exchanged in the U.S. Source: nasen.org
After journeying from her home in Seattle, Angela Tucker stood in front of a small brick house in Chattanooga, Tenn., belonging to the woman she believed gave birth to her in 1985. When Tucker began the search for her birth parents at age 16, the names Deborah and Oterious were the only pieces of information she had to guide her as she scoured the Internet for clues. Teresa and David Burt adopted Tucker after she spent 13 months in foster care. At the time of her adoption, the family was given a three-page child summary document with the ages of her birth parents, a list of medical conditions and the names of both parents with last names omitted. In 2007, Tucker attempted to obtain her original birth certificate from the Tennessee Office of Vital Records in hopes of finding the names of both parents. After excitedly ripping the envelope open, Tucker found the exact birth certificate she already had with the Burts listed as her parents.

“That felt like an injustice, why can I not know what is mine to know?” Tucker says.

As an infant, Tucker had numerous health issues and doctors said she was possibly quadriplegic. Because of the issues with Tucker’s health, the Burts were given numerous medical documents detailing Tucker’s health — one of which contained the full name of Tucker’s birth mother, Deborah Johnson.

“I had a great upbringing and great parents, but there’s always a desire to know why you are here and how you were created,” Tucker says. But finding the answers to these questions was not easy.

According to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 120,000 children are adopted in the United States each year. Closed adoptions like Tucker’s do not provide identifying information about birth parents.

Historically, most domestic adoptions in the United States were closed. But Emily Sigler, client services coordinator at a Seattle based nonprofit adoption agency, says the trend has been moving away from closed adoptions since the 1980s.

Adoptees can have fantasies about why their birth parents did not want them or notice they do not look or act like anyone else in their family, Sigler says.

In a study of American adolescents, the Search Institute found 65 percent of adopted adolescents had the desire to meet their birth parents.

“There were always questions,” Tucker says. “Where did you come from and how did you get here?” When people would see me with my parents, they would ask, “Who are you with?”

The questions never got easier to answer, but Tucker says she chose to make them mean less.
Searching

When Tucker discovered her birth mother’s last name in the medical document, she tried to look up every Deborah Johnson in Tennessee. Staying up late, Tucker, her mother and her then boyfriend, now husband, Bryan Tucker and her mother would make long-distance phone calls to Tennessee, hoping to find the right Deborah Johnson.

“I would always think, ‘Could I be talking to my birth mom right now?’” Tucker says.

But each Deborah Johnson said she was not the woman Tucker was searching for.

“When you don’t know, you just make stuff up,” Tucker says. “When I was growing up, my birth mom was Haile Berry one week and my birth dad was Magic Johnson the next week.”

Discoveries

Tucker’s search eventually led her to a Facebook fan page with nearly 4,000 “likes” for a notorious Chattanooga, Tenn. man, Sandy the Flower Man, also known as Oterious Bell. Looking at photos on the fan page, Tucker says she instantly saw a resemblance.

Tucker says her first response was “Holy crap, let’s just go, let’s just fly to Tennessee and try to find him.”

Before leaving for Tennessee, Tucker asked her husband to film everything during the trip.

“I really thought if I found someone, it would be the only time I would ever see them or hear them.” Tucker says. “I knew that I would be so overwhelmed in the moment that I would never get it again.”

After traveling to Chattanooga with her family, Tucker rang the doorbell at the address she had been given for Bell. A woman answered and Tucker explained she was looking for Bell. The woman said he was not there, but invited Tucker inside the apartment.

Inside, Tucker found out the woman was Bell’s mother, but she said Bell could not possibly be her birth father because he was unable to have children.

Tucker ran out of the apartment where her family was waiting outside.

“Pretty soon [Bell] rides up on his bike and she tells him right away, ‘I think you might be my birth father,’” Teresa Burt says. “[Bell] goes ‘I can’t be, I can’t have kids,’ but they sat down together face to face.”

Bell had no clue that he had a daughter, but he saw a striking likeness. Tucker says. Tucker and Bell swabbed the inside of their cheeks and sent the DNA samples for testing, which confirmed he was her father.

Bell and his brother later offered to drive by Johnson’s home with Tucker and her family. The family thought it wouldn’t be too intimidating for Tucker to just drive by and see where she lived, Burt says.

The families piled into two cars headed toward Johnson’s home, but when they reached her home the first car pulled over to the side of the road. Bell opened the car door and darted towards the house to knock on the front door.

When there was no response, Bell went to the back door, where Johnson finally emerged.

Surrounded by her family, Tucker met with Johnson out in the street where the birth mother she had spent years searching for told her she had four kids and Tucker was not one of them.

“It was total rejection,” Tucker says. “I felt [she] made the choice to abandon me and I am coming in complete respect and curiosity,” Tucker says.

Closure

The rejection was confusing, but Tucker continued her search. She turned her energy to finding Johnson’s other children.

After traveling with her siblings, a year later she flew back to Chattanooga, where Johnson was ready to accept Tucker as her daughter.

Everyone knew Johnson was her birth mother, but nothing could be done to make her accept it, Burt says.

“She just needed another year, she wasn’t ready,” Burt says.

The second meeting with Johnson was more joyous occasion compared to their first meeting a year earlier. Tucker says.

“From the day we got Angela, I thought ‘I hope someday we could thank [Deborah],’” Burt says. Burt expressed her gratitude to Johnson, but was surprised when Johnson did the same.

The relationship Tucker has with Johnson is a balancing act, she says. They talk on the phone, but Tucker says email is a more comfortable way to communicate.

Knowing how hard Johnson’s life has been has helped Tucker understand how shocking it was for her to appear, she says. Someday, Tucker hopes Johnson will explain to her why she placed her for adoption.

Helping Other Adoptees

When Tucker returned home, she began watching the footage her husband filmed on repeat, looking for every similarity in gestures and movements.

Tucker and her husband decided to create a documentary with the footage centered around Tucker’s journey, to help other adoptees who might be in the same situation.

The documentary, called “Closure,” is still in post-production, but Tucker says she wants other adoptees who are in closed adoptions to see an example of what an adoptee’s journey can look like.

Tucker says family is more than just genetics, but before she met her birth parents, it was hard to know where she was going without knowing where she had been. Today, Tucker has a better clue about her past, which has helped clear the path for the future.
KLIPSUN
Is a Chinuk Wawa word meaning sunset.
Western Washington University
Volume 43 - Issue 5