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Reflections from a Holocaust survivor

Cyber love

Tips for post-grad success

Graffiti

MUDSPORT:
Bikers boldly go where land developers have gone before
Articles that feature ordinary people living extraordinary lives are some of my favorite to read, and two stories in this issue of Klipsun illustrate this theme. The people in these stories are admirable not because they have fame or power or money, but because they have been confronted with countless horrors and tragedies, and their ability to keep everything in perspective remains. Their experiences reiterate a valuable lesson: The power of the human spirit to overcome adversity cannot be underestimated.

Our center spread profiles a local woman who is a mother, a grandmother, a retired teacher — and a concentration camp survivor. Noemi Ban now spends her days and nights contently in her house near the ferry terminal, but she vividly remembers her months at Auschwitz. Who wouldn't? She lived through a hell that is unimaginable to most of us, and she shares her story to remind people that, 50 years later, the lasting effects of the Holocaust reach even Bellingham.

On page 24 you'll find the inspiring story of Vi Childs, a 68-year-old woman who has converted the heavy blows life has dealt her into material for her stand-up comedy routine. Every Friday and Saturday night she delights crowds in a small bar near Puyallup; laughter has been her therapy.

What makes both of these women truly outstanding isn't only that they have used painful events from their past to help others; it's also how they have taken their struggle in stride, and their strength is simply chalked up to "living life the best way they know how."

The editors and myself (or "Six in the Klip," as we're fond of saying) believe these two articles provide a solid foundation for this issue. While Noemi and Vi have felt the kind of pain many of us are fortunate enough not to have experienced, their outlook on life is one we can all strive to emulate.

Thanks for reading,

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Cover and back photos by Tim Klein.
A congregation of youths on mountain bikes converge at the north gate to High Street in the shadow of Nash Hall. The sharp snap of special shoes locking into clipless pedals and the tap of toes finding pedal straps clutter the air. The pod begins to crank out the first 50 yards of a three-mile traverse to the head of a well-known dirt trail.

Riders laugh and call out random jokes as they accelerate down the gentle incline of Indian Street. Their helmets secure, brakes at least operative and shifters responding with one or more hard clicks, these fit young gentlemen are starting to free themselves from the grip of the college campus.

Conversation about exams and professors wanes. Past the I-5 overpass on Lakeway Drive any speech uttered has something to do with biking and traffic, but the newly liberated students are not pensive. Relaxation is key even as cars rush by the single-file procession. Breathing becomes slightly more audible as they pedal against a mild incline. Each rider regains an even breathing pace within a minute of cresting the hill. They press on.

The sky is clear for the most part. The sun casts heat directly onto the group, but a mild breeze keeps the working bodies cool enough for the water bottles to remain in their racks.

It would not be too hasty to say this is perfect riding weather.

The knobby tires on their bikes make riding on asphalt extra work, but the bikers tolerate the painful grind so they may reach the more forgiving dirt and gravel on a single-track bike trail. Sweat glistens on brows, yet smiles are still exchanged among these riders. They've experienced this part of the journey before. They know it's going to be worth it.

Where Electric Avenue veers off Lakeway toward Bloedel Donovan Park on Lake Whatcom, Birch Street cuts right. The warmed-up clan of bikers follows Birch Street to the end where they unanimously stop to recuperate and breathe heavily without shame.

After a few minutes of rest, the group pedals forward onto the first section of the trail. A Saint Bernard-sized dog known to some local riders as Cujo bounds out to

Mountain bikers in search of trails try to deal with Whatcom County's rapid development.

By Collin Coyne
the end of his 50-foot leash. Crying out in a brief moment of terror, the last rider scarcely escapes its seemingly vicious jaws.

After the riders pass all obstacles between the dorms and the rain-soaked woodland path, they pound the slope of what is known as the Ridge Trail at Galbraith Mountain.

Formally named Lookout Mountain, the area holds the most popular system of mountain bike trails in Whatcom County. These trails provide the core of the talk in all local bike shops.

Randy Gregory is a music education major in his second year at Western. His consistent riding style on the root-laden, rolling trail reflects the concentration he puts into mountain biking.

"It's so awesome to come up here because it feels like you're so removed from the city," Gregory said. "You can look down on it, but it feels like you're miles and miles away."

Toby Steere darts in and out of obstacles like a fifth or sixth-year biker despite his mere year-and-a-half of serious participation in the sport. The engineering tech major, in his second year at Western, is not ashamed to speak passionately about mountain biking.

"We usually try to make a loop of it. We come up here, dink around in these trails on Lookout, and then drop down Galbraith Lane and then into Padden," Steere said.

Aaron Ignac rides his mountain bike like a BMX, throwing in wheelies and bunny hops off of small obstacles along the trail.

A psychology major in his second year at Western, Ignac is proud to have become skilled without sinking the dollar value of a good used Subaru into the sport like some bikers do.

"I bought my bike for $350, and I picked up the helmet, used, for $20," Ignac said.

Entry-level models of bikes cost around $750. A helmet like Ignac's is about $40 new.

Findley Gillespie, a sophomore at Seattle Pacific University, likes to come to Bellingham to ride with his friends on trails that don't turn into housing developments between seasons like those near his home in Woodinville have.

"I took a year-and-a-half off from biking, and I went back at the beginning of this year, and there was a subdivision going in. They were just putting in a road for a house," Gillespie said.

In Gillespie's words appear an issue that has loomed over Bellingham's mountain biking community like a heavy storm cloud for the past few years.

Gregory and Steere didn't do much mountain biking before they came to live in Bellingham, but both riders speak very seriously about the art of riding mountain bikes on trails.
Whatcom County literally makes mountain bikers. The trails these bikers learn on, however, are soon liable to decrease in number.

The Lookout Mountain area is a prime example. The entirety of Lookout is zoned for forestry, and more than 75 percent of the land belongs to Bloedel Timberlands Development Inc. A large portion of the remainder is owned by Trillium, a land development company.

Last year Bloedel cleared half a square mile from the second stage of the Ridge Trail. A biker accustomed to riding among towering conifers is likely to find heartbreak in the sprawl of red dust and tattered stumps where the property's legal owner took away trees.

For some riders, access is the heart of the matter.

"I think it's cool that they let us ride on it still. A lot of people would just say, 'This is our land. We're going to log it. We don't want any bikers on here at all,'" Gregory said. Though he respects property rights, Gregory is not indifferent to clear cutting. "They just cut their own logs and took them ... it does make you kind of sick though."

The trails at Lookout remain open to the public for hiking, biking and horseback riding. Still, local bikers discuss how they'd react to the closure of their favorite trails.

"Come back on the weekends?" Ignac offers with laughter. Gregory frowns because he knows the mountain bikers' code of ethics would prevent the trespassing trend Ignac suggests.

"I doubt they would shut down the whole Galbraith Mountain area. They'd probably just shut down part of it," Gregory said.

At Kulshan Cycles, repair technician Pat Horne explains land use terminology.

DNR LAND

DNR land, as it's commonly called, belongs to the public under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Department of Natural Resources. The department's job is to remove natural resources from the land it controls, but Horne said if bikers, hikers and horse clubs display their frequent use and involvement in restoring the trails in DNR areas, they stand a pretty good chance of being recognized by the department for their interest. The Blanchard trail in Skagit County is an example of DNR land.

PARKS AND RECREATION LAND

This land is protected for use by the public. The trouble for bikers is that parks see a lot of hiker traffic. For mountain bikers, who are obligated to yield to everybody else on the trail, heavy traffic of any kind is dangerous. Parks and Rec land is great for light riding, but the trails are too accessible and have too many users on them for high-speed mountain biking.

OPEN SPACE LAND

Open space preserves are purchased or donated for public use for the purpose of outdoor recreation.

These utopian gems are cropping up in the San Francisco Bay area, Horne said. Currently, none
exist in the Northwest.

Horne said trail conservation is crucial for mountain bikers who want to continue to ride trails. Contributing to the restoration of trails and showing courtesy to other users who use the trail broadens the tolerance organizations have for trail users.

Concerns of this nature are heard from individual bikers more and more.

Gregory gets upset, "... when (mountain bikers) don't slow down for pedestrians or other obstacles or horseback riders. Either that, or when they pass you, they rear-wheel skid and destroy the trail ... It makes me mad."

Concern for the fate and state of local mountain biking can easily be converted into constructive group activity.

The Mountain Biking Resource Guide is full of organizations, companies, and scheduled events related in some way to riding bikes with knobby tires on dirt.

The guide is published by Whatcom Independent Mountain Pedalers (WHIMPS).

The integrity of Whatcom County's mountain bike sub-culture is evident in the voices of those who've gotten the rush from a grueling power-climb or a velocitizing downhill session.

Scott Brookens, a math major in his second year at Western, opts for a run on the milder Interurban Trail in Fairhaven when he's short on time.

Brookens' six-and-a-half feet of height are elongated further by his Spandex bike shorts and jersey.

"I like going 15 or 13 miles an hour down the single-track because you're not just looking ten feet in front of you. You're looking 20 feet in front of you," Brookens said. "You see that rock, you make a correction, and then you're seeing a dip ahead, and you're slowing way down, then you're cranking really hard to get going fast again ..."

Like Brookens, Toby Steere has an affinity for description of the mountain biker's groove.

"I mostly like single-track because it keeps you constantly focusing. You're all weaving in and out and going, 'This is rad!'"

Land managers and developers who allow riders access to trails are likely to see more of the noble, courteous riders like Randy Gregory who implore fellow riders to follow the codes outlined by biking organizations.

Managers and developers who proceed to excavate trail property, ignoring conscientious bikers, might find rebellious new visitors on their land regardless of clearly marked gates and closure signs.
So declared a wall in the men's bathroom in the Environmental Studies building. Someone undoubtedly thought himself quite clever for this "joke." However, I, and everyone else who will use this toilet have been vindicated by another clever individual:

"Oh yeah ... I do see your reflection in the toilet water."

I am a person who uses bathrooms constantly. If restroom attendants gave frequent flier miles, I'd have a free trip to Alpha Centauri by now. So I consider myself a bit of an expert on bathrooms.

And in my twenty years of experience, I've discovered only one thing can make this periodic chore somewhat entertaining — graffiti. Well, yeah, there's "Reader's Digest," but its jokes make Peanuts look wicked. I'm talking about real entertainment.

GETTING RID OF THE REPUBLICANS

I contacted the Physical Plant to learn more about washroom defacement. I was presented with Lead Custodian John Timmermann.

Timmermann, clad in his powder-blue "Building Services" uniform, gladly gave me a restrooms tour of Miller and Bond halls. Bond Hall is a graffiti-lover's paradise — one must wonder what future archaeologists will learn about us from these bathrooms.

Timmermann hunted down his associate, Dennis Quimby, who was busy emptying trash cans. Quimby, a custodian at Western for more than 20 years, knew all about bathroom art. He led us to the second floor men's room and dashed inside a stall.

"Right now the trend is gay-bashing," Quimby interpreted for me. "OK, Led Zeppelin is very popular still .... (Students) really want to get rid of the Republicans."

While I have no qualms with the latter, a stall seems an odd place to make such a suggestion. Perhaps this isn't so odd, if one considers what goes on inside.

Quimby said the workmanship in men's rooms tends to be "grosser" than in the women's. Women write about great places to pick up guys (Bellevue? What the heck is in Bellevue?). But before I could ask, the nimble custodian dashed for the elevator.

I barely kept up with Quimby as he hurried into the fourth floor men's room. "We've found a gold mine," he announced.

"Why are you reading this — the joke is between your legs!"
QUIMBY'S GOLD MINE

Quimby, in his green and white flannel, donned his reading glasses and clambered into a stall. He perched on the toilet seat like an overgrown parakeet, and parroted the words on the walls.

"This is pretty funny," Quimby said. "Save your drama for your momma.' Ha ha, that's pretty good. I saw that one last night."

Quimby exemplifies the bathroom-going American male. He reads the graffiti. He may even laugh. This doesn't mean he agrees with what he reads, or even approves. He's merely enjoying some free entertainment.

Timmermann, guzzling a soda, announced it was break time. Quimby didn't hear him.

"You gotta see this," Quimby said, motioning me to enter the stall. He pointed to a round doorstop, no wider than the top of Timmermann's pop can. Thin, black letters pointed to the doorstop, proclaiming, "Hippy chick, no bra."

Before Timmermann dragged Quimby to his break, a historical piece of graffiti was discovered — "Tina Chopp is god."

Chopp allegedly was a student here about 14 years ago. She had had a fight with her boyfriend, who then began scrawling "Tina Chopp is god" all over the campus. Apparently the situation became bad enough that Chopp left Western. But the scrawlings didn't stop. Quimby said the slogan has even been spotted in out-of-state bathrooms.

A HIGHLY SCIENTIFIC POLL

The opinions expressed are often hurtful to women, minorities and the gay and lesbian community. While there are some actual jokes on the walls, they're typically surrounded by gratuitous diagrams of ejaculating penises and women spread-eagled.

Yes, this is deplorable. Yes, something should be done. No, I don't write graffiti. But I am guilty of reading these scribblings, as are millions of Americans. It's a guilty pleasure. We're not proud of it, but we read the trash on the walls.

To prove my point, I conducted a highly scientific poll wherein I cornered six Western students as they entered the men's restroom on the second floor of the Wilson Library and asked them about their bathroom habits. Only Brian Main, a senior business major, would admit to reading the restroom discourses.

"I'm against (graffiti), but I read it," he said, eyeing me anxiously. "I read it 'cuz it's there."

Joon Song, in his second year here, said he doesn't read graffiti.

"I just skim over it," Song said. Coincidentally, this is the same answer most Americans will give if asked whether they read tabloids.

Conducting the poll was rather awkward. I prowled in and out of the bathroom, waiting to trap an individual washing his hands. I've no idea how many times I faked passing water so as not to alarm my prey. But I do know I haven't been in a restroom that many times (about once every four minutes) since I made the mistake of ingesting Marriott's clam chowder my freshman year.

When I wasn't conducting my poll, I would wait in the hallway near the bathroom, discreetly observing bathroom traffic. A couch was parked in a key location that unfortunately left me facing the women's room. I received many glances from its patrons, most signaling that they would make Lorena Bobbitt look like June Cleaver if I so much as dilated a pupil.

But the men had to deal with me mano a mano. I would wash my hands, then turn and ever-so-congenially say, "Excuse me, I'm doing a story for 'Klipsun' magazine and I was wondering: do you read the graffiti in the stalls?"

I thought this was a safe question, but the panicked looks it did draw told me I'd broken a prime rule of manhood — I'd invaded their comfort zones.

Men don't normally mind packing together like sardines. But in a bathroom, we won't get any closer than is humanly possible while still standing in the same room. We are otherwise willing to crowd until air molecules burst, but in the men's room, our personal space expands to the approximate size of the Atlantic Ocean.

This is why men never use the bathroom in pairs, and why we NEVER, EVER, use adjacent urinals. Men would sooner hike from a bathroom in Old Main to one in Parks Hall, before using an airport toilet.

Sigmund Freud said this need for personal space arises from penis insecurities and fear of impotence. More likely we just don't need to know what the other person is doing.

Needless to say, the men in the bathroom were suspicious of me. Maybe it was because I was wearing black socks with shorts. Maybe it was my fuzzy goatee. Or maybe, just maybe, they were hiding something.

After all, none admitted to having ever written graffiti. Someone must — it doesn't just appear when little elves decide to draw diagrams of their genitalia on a stall door.

Ron Henspeter knows this. Henspeter, the paint supervisor (I assume there's more to his job than supervising cans of paint), is who gets called when offensive exhibits need to be covered. Swastikas and anything racially intolerant take priority over other jobs.

"Some of (the graffiti) is pretty offensive," Henspeter said. "Some people think it's art, but I don't know. It gives us work," he laughed.

Henspeter said graffiti sometimes appears before the paint is dry, which is consistent with the male ego's need to be first at everything.

Henspeter said the men's rooms in the Viking Union and Miller Hall tend to have the worst graffiti problems.

"I'm not saying it's limited to men's rooms, but it's more prevalent (than in the women's bathrooms)," he said. Nearly $200 is spent each month covering and removing bathroom graffiti.

Interestingly enough, an effort was made more than a decade ago to decrease graffiti — small chalkboards were mounted in stalls in both the library and the ES building.

Timmermann said this effort failed when students used the chalk to draw on the walls of the bathrooms. More likely, students scratched their fingernails on the blackboards and broke their neighbor's concentration a few too many times.

READ WITHOUT GUILT

Despite the many headaches this defacement gives the Physical Plant, men who use the john don't care if the graffiti is offensive — if so, we ignore it. And sometimes, we enjoy it.

Let me clarify that I am not endorsing graffiti; it's a manner of expression that's liable to get its creator in as much trouble as O.J. Simpson — none, unless you're caught.

So, guys, next time you're looking for a way to pass the time while staying regular, look no further than the wall next to you. Read without guilt and don't get too close to anyone else. And say hi to Tina Chopp.
It was 2:30 p.m. on that overcast Friday afternoon when seven women from Mathes Hall decided to take the challenge.

The gray sky was scattered with dismal white clouds and a light, chilling breeze blew through the trees. They gathered in the large, lodge-type room with wood-paneled walls and a cold, rocky floor and proceeded to sit on the three green couches and two plush chairs that formed a circle in the center of the room. Karrie Sullivan, Mathes Resident Director, handed each of the women a release form to sign.

"You didn't think that you were signing your lives away, did you?" Sullivan says with a smile.

The women didn't know what they were in for, but by the time the afternoon was over, each of them would have learned something new about themselves and the others that they would be able to take with them for years to come.

The challenge course at Lakewood was just beginning.

Located in a forested section of the beautiful Lakewood complex on the shore of Lake Whatcom, the challenge course was designed and built in 1988 by Project Adventure, an internationally recognized leader in ropes course construction. It contains a unique sequence of challenging activities intended to increase social and individual awareness and appreciation through safe physical and mental challenge, discussion and reflection.

The women would be participating in group initiatives where they would have the opportunity to organize themselves, generate strategies, test and refine solutions and reflect upon the processes they employed. The initiatives are designed to foster cooperative problem solving, compassion and understanding.

"Consider this a full-value contract," Sullivan says. "You are going to need to value yourselves and everyone in the group as well."

Sullivan tells the excited women, who are leaning in closely to listen to her instructions, "Remember that this is a 'challenge by choice' activity. It is your right to sit out if you feel uncomfortable with any obstacle. There are some risks with the type of activity we are about to enter into."

The faces of the women have now turned to a blank stare on Sullivan and they grow ever more anxious.

"Challenge yourself and take some risks," Sullivan says.

After the women hand their release forms to Sullivan, she places a large, white piece of butcher paper on the floor in the middle of the circle.

"We are going to begin this activity by drawing a two-headed monster," Sullivan says. "With all things, there are always two sides to the story. What are you looking forward to today? What are you nervous about? I need someone to lie on the paper."

After a short moment of silence, the two heads of Tiffany Buchert and Kari Benny turn to Beth Wolf who is sitting at the end of one of the couches.

"Okay," Wolf says as she pops up and lies on the paper, while Buchert grabs a fat purple marker and begins to trace her petite body. As Buchert finishes, Sullivan asks a blonde, Kami Nelson, to lie on the paper to make a second head for the "monster."

"They are drawing a 'two-headed beauty,'" Nelson says, and gets a warm laugh from the others in the room.
As she gets up, Sullivan hands each of the women a pen and asks them to write down their fears about the activity they are going to begin in one head and the things that they are looking forward to in the other.

Some of their fears included being embarrassed, asking for help and being put on the spot. The participants looked forward to supporting each other, learning more about the people they were with and achieving their goals. “These are great,” Sullivan says. Just remember these things when we are out on the course.”

The women grow more anxious to get started.

“Okay,” Sullivan says, “I think we’re ready to begin.”

The women, along with Sullivan and a male assistant, begin to head up a muddy trail to the first obstacle on the challenge course. The air is very cold.

As they pass by a rope, at least 30 feet in the air, connected between two tall trees, a nervous Penny Sharrett, who is in the middle of the group stops.

“Oh my gosh,” she says nervously.

“Don’t worry,” Sullivan says, “that is a high ropes obstacle.”

A sense of relief falls over the group.

Before they make it to the first obstacle, Sullivan rounds up the group in a clearing between the high evergreens and tells them they first must learn how to fall and how to spot.

“Ready to fall.”

“Ready to catch.”

“Falling.”

“Fall away.”

The women practice for ten minutes and are now ready for the first big obstacle.

They come to a long rope that is hanging down from a tree. Sullivan explains the rope is hangs over a “pit of despair,” in which no one can fall. The obstacle is to get everyone over the pit onto a small, square platform by using the rope and keeping every part of their bodies out of the pit. They must also get a pail to the other side without spilling its contents of rocks and shrubbery.

One by one, the women make it over.

Wolf is the last one left, holding the pail.

“Be sure to catch me,” she says.

She makes it over easily.

“I am very impressed,” Sullivan says. “I have never seen a group do that activity so quickly.”

A quick applause comes over the group. The challenge had just started, though, and the women knew that.

The second obstacle involved the women being blindfolded and having to sit, one next to the other, on a large fallen tree. The key to this obstacle was to get the order of the women reversed without talking or touching the ground.

“What do you think the consequences should be if you step off the log?” Sullivan asks.

“I think that if you step off you should tell the group and we should have to start over again,” Wolf says.

The group agrees.

As they sit, spaced evenly on the log, Wolf begins to move to the other end of the log.

She falls off quickly and has to begin again.

Wendy Cooper and Heather Romano, who are at the opposite end of the log, seem frustrated.

Wolf tries again and falls.

Sharrett is in the middle and keeps slipping off because her shoes are muddy.

“I’m sorry guys we’ll have to start again because I keep slipping.”

Fifteen minutes has gone by and Wolf has only made it past two people on the log when she falls again.

As she squats by the log, Sullivan tells the women they have thirty seconds to talk about new strategies and if they wanted to change the rules.

They decided that if someone
Just ACKNOWLEDGMENTS, CLARIFIES AND DESCRIBES THEIR FEELINGS AND EXPERIENCES.

The mood was one of great happiness and accomplishment. As they headed down the muddy path, their heads were high, knowing that for each of them the afternoon was one of personal accomplishment as well as group triumph.

They sat back in the circle before they left and reflected on their afternoon.

“I learned that I can overcome any fear. I was afraid of heights, and with my team helping me it was all done,” Nelson says.

Buchert was proud of how the group worked together. “All of us really supported each other. When one person wasn’t sure, there were six other people with encouraging smiles to give each other faith. It really brought us all together.”

“I am not invincible, but I am definitely loved,” Sharrett says as Romano gives her a big hug.

“What a great group of people,” Romano says. “I really feel as though we worked together to accomplish something. It feels good to know that I can trust people and they can trust me.”

“I can’t believe that I allowed you guys to hoist me over that log,” Cooper says with a smile. “It’s scary to put all of my trust into someone else. You pulled through for me and I felt like I was walking on air.”

“Even though you guys are my floormates, I found out so much more about each of you. I learned your fears and your real personalities,” Benny says.

“Everyone of us had something good to contribute, whether it be knowledge, support and praise, good spotting efforts or the willingness to sacrifice,” Wolf finishes. “We learned not to be afraid, and to overcome any embarrassments we had. I love all of you guys.”
Meredith Edstam slowly braided her long brown hair on that special night last December. Her hands trembled as she carefully secured the ties that held her strands of hair together. She gazed into the mirror, then quickly at the clock. Anticipation and a slight feeling of nausea overcame her, but her eyes sparkled like a child’s on Christmas morning.

She raced to the dining room of parents’ home in Minnesota and switched off the lights just as a little blue truck coasted into the driveway. Meredith immediately crouched behind the front window when she heard the door of the truck slam shut. Her heart was pounding as she slightly raised her head above the window sill just enough to catch a glimpse of the visitor. She inched her head up slowly until the tall, slender man came into view. She watched him non-chalantly adjust his baseball cap as he strolled toward the front door.

The doorbell rang, and Meredith knew it was time to meet this man she’d never seen before but felt closer to than any other person she’d ever known. She swung the door open, and a feeling of ease and familiarity overcame her. She was finally looking at the man that she had fallen in love with.

Is it possible to fall in love with someone you’ve never met? Meredith and her boyfriend Josh Grambart think so. They found each other on the Internet.

And they aren’t alone. According to an Internet analysis survey, more than 20 million Americans are zipping down the information superhighway and ten thousand more are going online daily. The potential for finding...
ing romance online is skyrocketing.
America Online (AOL), CompuServe and Prodigy are the three major online services in the United States. All three offer meeting places called "chat rooms," where people from all over the world can meet online and talk with each other simultaneously.
Members can "chat" about a myriad of subjects ranging from fishing to law. Somewhere in between those subjects, people talk about love. AOL representative Janine Dunne says one of the most popular chat rooms AOL offers is called the Romance Connection.
Meredith and Josh met on AOL. After a few months of writing to each other online, they finally met when Meredith flew home to Minnesota from Western for winter break.
Meredith, a sophomore chemistry major, said she knew the moment she met Josh online there was something special between the two of them. After a few months of talking online and on the phone, they both felt it was time to meet. Fortunately, they were both from Minnesota and decided to meet as soon as Meredith could fly home.
"It was really neat to meet him," Meredith commented with excitement. "I already knew all of his personality traits and I knew what he was like mentally. I just didn't know what he looked like physically."
Meredith and Josh had never exchanged pictures before they met because they wanted to be surprised.
"And surprised I was," Meredith laughed. "He was just how I expected him to be and look."
Meredith says it's hard to meet what she considers to be "normal" people online, and she feels fortunate to have met Josh.
"I've only met a couple of other people I'd be interested in online," Meredith said as she tossed one of her braids behind her shoulder. "You can be attracted to people online, but you really don't take it too seriously because everybody is a flirt, or everybody is really horny or something."
She rolled her eyes and explained how most guys who talk to her online ask questions about her appearance, age and if she has a boyfriend.
"Josh didn't ask those questions," Meredith boasted. "He was different. He didn't ask what I looked like — we just had a fun and normal conversation."
A frown stole Meredith's smile as she explained that the couple has crossed one rocky road already. But she blames that time of arguing on the distance between them. That's one of the reasons why she's chosen to move back to Minnesota this summer.
"He's not the only reason why I'm going back, but it will make it easier to be really serious once I get home," she said as she adjusted one of the straps of her overalls. "I'm not seeing anyone else and neither is he. Who knows, maybe marriage is possible someday."
Is this relationship out of the ordinary? Compuserve representative Daphne Kent says finding love online isn't as rare as most people think.
"We receive hundreds of testimonials every year from members who tell us that they've found love online," Kent said.
Online relationships usually follow a pattern, the AOL representative said. First, two people talk online and begin exchanging e-mail messages. The curious couples usually send each other pictures of themselves as the relationship grows. Most couples feel the need to hear the other person's voice, so they begin calling each other on the phone while they still continue to talk online. The final step of an online relationship is to meet in-person.
Shannon Carlson, a sophomore business major at Western, is another one of the many people who say they have found love online. She's followed the pattern up to the last step of an online relationship — meeting her "cyber love."
Shannon uses the Internet Relay Chat system, to which all Western students have free access. That's where she met her "cyber boyfriend" Reggie Gaither. They've been talking online and on the phone for about a year.
Shannon explained it wasn't love at first "type." When she first chatted with Reggie, he had just ended a four-year relationship, and she was just beginning a new one. After Shannon called off her relationship, she and Reggie exchanged pictures.
"We just get along really well," she explained. "I feel like I really know him and what he's all about."
Because those feelings are mutual, Reggie is flying from Indiana to Bellingham to visit Shannon in June.
"I'm a little nervous about the visit, but I figure that it's no different from blind dates or those computer dating service things," she said defensively. "We can
Do all online relationships result in love?

“No way!” exclaimed Jenny Brown, a Western sophomore and accounting major. “Some of the people that you meet turn out to be totally psychotic.

A Prodigy online representative suggests that people use caution when meeting others online. All of the online services give customers the same tips of caution when meeting people online.

First, don’t give out your full name, address or phone number. Second, don’t ever type your social security number, credit card numbers or any other financial information to a chat room buddy. And, third, don’t give out any information that you wouldn’t give a complete stranger.

Sometimes people feel that because they’re behind a screen, they’re safe,” Dunne said. “That’s just not the case. Many people think they can write without any consequences; those people aren’t exempt from danger. The person on the other end could be anyone.

Daphne Kent recommended that once a person takes a cyberspace relationship off-line they should follow the same precautions as if they had answered a personal ad or agreed to a blind date. The representative said to be safe, people should meet in a public place.

Last year Jenny met Robin, a student in California, online. She admitted she was initially interested in him, but after three months she realized he was obsessive and even scary.

“Hey, really strange,” Jenny explained. “He’d write to me constantly. One day, I made a huge mistake and gave him my phone number.

Some of the people that you meet turn out to be totally psychotic.

— Cyber-single, Jenny Brown
It is a story shared by six million, yet none have the same recollections. All shared pain, anguish, fear. Some shared release, liberation and survival.

It is the story of the Holocaust.

But this is more than just a story of despair and suffering. This is a story of hope, the desire to live and the want to survive.

Noemi Ban is a survivor of the Holocaust, but she is so much more. She is what those who died in the Holocaust wanted to be — free. Noemi, a retired teacher, lives in Bellingham. She still teaches — by sharing her experience with those who want to and need to learn. She teaches about the hatred, the pain, the sorrow, but she also teaches about the yearning to be free and the passion to live.

This is her story.

**Life Was So Simple**

For Noemi, life was so simple; so secure and loving and comfortable. She was born on September 29, 1922 in Szged, Hungary, 10 miles north of the then-Yugoslavia border.

For the first nine years of her life, Emi, as her mother affectionately called her, was an only child. The jet-black haired, brown-eyed, rosy-cheeked girl learned to swim in the Danube River, which wound itself around the Tacoma-sized college town. Noemi learned to play, and love, the piano. She learned German, Russian, Latin, just about every language but English in a nearby town. Noemi learned to play, and love, the piano. She learned German, Russian, Latin, just about every language but English in a nearby town. She and her mother, Juliska, would go to the town's library to quiz each other on books and authors and titles.

Noemi's family lived close to the school where her father Schawmu was the principal and her fourth-grade teacher.

When Noemi was nine, Juliska gave birth to a girl, Erzebet (Air jay bet).

"Because of age difference, she always looked up to me. I was her big sister, and I loved her. I loved that little kid," Noemi recalled fondly. Ten years later when she was almost 19, her brother was born.

His birth had been a painful one for Juliska. Noemi remembers her mother being in extreme agony while waiting at home for her father to arrive to take her mother to the hospital. When they left, she ran down the hallway and into her room, slamming the door behind her. She vowed two things: to never get married and if she did get married, never to have kids.

When Juliska came home from the hospital, she wasn't allowed to move. A blood clot had formed in her body, and the doctors were afraid to have her move in case it traveled to her lung. It eventually settled into her leg.

Noemi had to become her brother's mother. Life went on. Germany was stomping across Europe. The news of the war and of Adolf Hitler's hatred was known to Noemi and her family. But, like so many before them, they never thought the army would reach them.

**Hate Comes to Hungary**

On March 19, 1944, Hitler's army of hatred marched into Hungary. The Arrowcross, Hungary's Nazi army, greeted them with open arms. Soon after, the Jewish codes were enforced. All Jews were forced to wear yellow Stars of David. A symbol of deep religious value was turned into a branding symbol to label those whose beliefs and ways of life were mocked, ridiculed and hated. Juliska stood up for the first time since giving birth to her son. It was to watch, from a window, the army sweep
HOPE SURVIVES

The ruins of Auschwitz, August 1995. Photo courtesy of Ray Simmers-Wolpow
into her town. Soldiers swept homes; all items had to be listed.

Noemi sadly recalls that day. "My little sister was at school and they let them (the children) come home. And she was running all the way home saying, 'You know what I saw? You won't believe it what I saw! So many soldiers coming! Who are they?' and 'Oh I was just so afraid!' It was terrible."

It would get worse.

Noemi and her sister, Erzebet, before their homeland was torn apart by Hitler.

The Ghetto

All Jews were removed from their homes and forced into a sealed-off section of the city — a ghetto. Lives were displaced; valuables had to be left behind.

The entire Jewish population was enclosed in four walls. Noemi's family lived at the ghetto's border. She, her family and her grandmother shared a six-room, one-and-a-half bath house with eight other families.

The ghetto was filled with depression, fear, anguish and nervousness. "We literally bumped into each other," said Noemi.

"It was amazing how we did it. I know why, though," she said with affirmation. "We were so afraid and that was the overwhelming feeling—though fear. Anything else was secondary."

To escape the life of the ghetto, Noemi and her sister would watch the residents across the street, who were free. Soon, soldiers came to board the windows, except for a small one in the attic that they forgot about.

In defiance of the soldiers, Noemi and Erzebet would sneak up to the attic to keep watching across the street. "It was pitiful that we were able to see the other side of the street, which was free, and it was closed up for us," Noemi said.

Despite the sadness, Noemi also felt pleasure in looking out of the window. "For us it was still fun that we tricked them," she said. It was one tactic she used to survive the pain of the ghetto. Not everyone could do the same. "Somebody said: 'You know, I feel that I am in my own coffin. That the lid is slowly coming on,'" she recalled. The person didn't know how right they were at the time.

The lid was sealed when the Russians began bombing Hungarian cities. Everyone had to go down to the candlelit basement. The bombs made a difficult situation even more so.

"We didn't know which one was worse — go upstairs there again where the Nazi's are or downstairs where the Russians are bombing. It was terrible," Noemi said.

Besides dealing with the ghetto and the bombing of the city, Noemi had to take care of her family. Three weeks after the Bans were moved into the ghetto, all males were taken away and forced to labor camps. Noemi was almost 20; Erzebet was 12; their grandmother was 76; Juliska was 43; and her brother was six months.

"I was the one who took care of everybody—constantly running back and forth," Noemi explained.

She could have escaped the ghetto. A friend told her it was possible to change her religion on her document. By doing that, she could go to Budapest to become a maid for a sympathetic Christian family. Many young women chose this and were able to escape the concentration camps. Noemi chose not to.

"Think about it. If I would have gone and they all perished, which they did anyway, I would have felt guilty. But no, I don't because I was with them till the last second.

"And although the final result is the same, I know that I was with them, and that helped them until the last, last minute. And that gives me peace of mind," Noemi said.

The Road to Hell

After living six weeks in the ghetto, the Jews were ordered by soldiers to the brick factory. It was 10 days of wonder and fear of what might happen.

Soon the Jews were loaded onto cattle cars. Noemi's car had 85 people in it. The cars were packed, cramped. They were semi-dark, with two windows, one on each side, allowing the only glimpses of the outside world.

Each family was allowed to bring a minimal amount of their possessions and only dry food.

Noemi and her family brought a small package to sit on but others were not as lucky to have a package.

The only relief for the sardine-packed passengers were two buckets of water. At first, Noemi said, everyone was polite about the distribution of water, no one went without it.

By the third day, no one cared. The darkness was filled with screaming, fighting, nightmares and no conversations.

"Constantly we had the feeling, 'We are not somewhere else. Where are we? What are we doing here?'" Noemi said. "The cattle car was the pure human existence. And the smell, and the fear were terrible."
AUSCHWITZ

July 1, 1944, was a hot, clear day in Poland. The doors of the cattle car were opened after six days, and Noemi finally saw her destination. It was Auschwitz-Birkenau. They would be the last group to enter the concentration camp before the end of the war.

Polish prisoners were digging trenches alongside the railroad tracks. They were guarded by barbed wire. Other prisoners helped the new ones down from the cars.

They knew what was going to happen. The wide-eyed wondering Hungarians did not.

The new prisoners were separated; men in one line, women in two. As she and her family moved forward in line, prisoners were guided by a white-gloved S.S. guard to go either to the right or left. When it was their turn, Noemi’s family was waved to the right. She was waved to the left. Noemi looked at her mother. With her eyes, her mother said, “Take care, I love you.”

She watched as her family filed down a long road toward an enormous brick building with two chimneys. A grove was off to one side; they used it to wait for the others in front of them. They walked to the end of the road and stepped in the building. The building was gas chamber #5. It would be the last time Noemi would ever see her mother, brother, sister and grandmother.

She was marched to a shower, her head shaved and her dress replaced with a rag. She was terrified. It had been two hours since she had arrived at Auschwitz.

Noemi lived in a barrack with 600 people; 100 people were in one room. The bathrooms were trenches outside. If someone got up, they had to step on those sleeping on the floor. “Screaming, crying, yelling, fighting, that was our night — just to go to the latrine.” Noemi said.

Noemi did not know where her family had gone at first. She kept asking about her family, her "dear ones." The guards told her they had been transferred; no one knew where they had gone. She kept asking why. Noemi’s family was moved to a better camp.

At first she felt relieved. She was grateful the rest of her family was together. But when she didn’t hear anything about them, she asked the guard again. He pointed toward the billowing smoke and ashes in the sky and told her that was all that was left of them.

Noemi tried not to give into the hopelessness and despair that surrounded her. She recalled the happy times in her childhood, like the times she and her mother would go to the library, but it didn’t always work.

Noemi made herself feel and think like she was still human. Her key to survival was to try, try, try and not let go. Many others, she said, had let go.

BUCHENWALD

Noemi and 1,000 other women were chosen to leave Auschwitz, by cattle car for Buchenwald. There they worked in a factory making bombs. In a form of defiance, Noemi and the others sabotaged the bombs. It was risky, but so satisfying.

Noemi and the others stayed at Buchenwald for seven months. It was the beginning of the end of the war, but they didn’t know it. They had no idea what month, day or even what season it was.

ESCAPE AND LIBERATION

All the prisoners who had been transferred away from the camps were brought back. The “Death March” was the reward for those who had survived. Noemi was in a group of 25.

She knew something wasn’t right when the S.S. guard who led them changed into civilian clothing. One by one, 12 prisoners dropped toward the back of the group. When the guard wasn’t looking, they ran into the dense forest and found a small shack.

With no food and no light, the group waited for either liberation or death. After a couple of days in the shack, Noemi remembered hearing footsteps. She thought for sure it was an S.S. soldier coming either to retrieve them or kill them. The door opened. A man stood in the doorway.

“I know who you are.” It was an American soldier. “Just stay put, don’t move. You will hear some fighting; some fire. We’re coming closer.” The frightened Hungarians stayed put. They could hear gunfire and shouting outside.

“The next day he comes in and opens the door. And I always say he said the most beautiful sentence I ever heard. He said, ‘All of you are free,’” Noemi remembered fondly.

Everyone was laughing and crying. The Hungarians ran to him, Noemi remembered, and hugged him so hard he had to remind them they still needed him alive to help them leave.

The soldier tossed to them the only rations he had — chewing gum. Noemi remembered him warning, between tears and laughter, for them not to swallow it.

That April day in 1945 was clear, but quite windy. Noemi remembered the German army had used anything that was white as surrender flags. Linens, shirts, underwear — all were flapping in the breeze. After 19 months of imprisonment, Noemi was finally free.

LIFE AFTER AUSCHWITZ

Noemi returned to Hungary soon after being liberated. She had heard her father was still alive. He had come home to the ghetto from his labor camp to find his family gone. He had heard rumors of

AND ALTHOUGH THE FINAL RESULT IS THE SAME, I KNOW THAT I WAS WITH THEM, AND THAT HELPED THEM UNTIL THE LAST, LAST MINUTE. AND THAT GIVES ME PEACE OF MIND.
them being in Auschwitz, or hopefully, Austria. Noemi found him in Budapest. Schawmu wanted to know what happened to her and his family. Noemi didn't want to tell him, but he asked.

"I had to tell him. It was terrible to tell. He was devastated. As much as he was happy that it was me and that I survived, I was the one who made the final statement. Up till that minute he was still hoping," Noemi said.

Three weeks after being liberated, she married her boyfriend, Earnest Shoenberg. He was 10 years her senior. And for 10 years Noemi couldn't talk about her experience.

"I was afraid. I was in terror and for a long time; that they will know that I'm Jewish and it will start over again," Noemi said.

Whenever she was asked if she was Jewish, Noemi would peer around her to see if anyone was listening. And if she felt safe, she would whisper, "yes."

Noemi and Earnest became teachers in Budapest. They had two sons, George and Steven. When Communism began to take hold over the Eastern European nations, they decided to escape to America. Noemi had always wanted to live in America because of the soldier who rescued her.

In their first attempt, they were caught. In their second, the family hid inside a giant wool ball stored in a factory. A sympathizer drove them in a truck across the country.

While inside the ball, they could not eat, drink, move, sneeze or go to the bathroom. Noemi recalls the boys had thought of the trip as one big adventure. They didn't know the seriousness of the situation. At one checkpoint, a Russian solder took a bayonet and began poking the ball. It came within inches of the family's faces, but they weren't caught. They crossed the border into Austria and into freedom.

Noemi recalled when they landed in America, a soldier at the immigration processing building hauled out a huge book. It contained a list of cities which were willing to accept Hungarian immigrants. The family had a choice between Cincinnati and St. Louis. They chose the latter.

The family stayed in St. Louis and Noemi and Earnest went to school, learned English and got their teaching certificates.

RETURNING TO AUSCHWITZ

Noemi and Earnest moved to Bellingham in the late 1980s after they both retired from teaching. Steven had already moved to Bellingham in 1976 and George moved to New York. In June 1994, Earnest died of Alzheimer's, dementia and Parkinson's diseases.

Noemi decided the Holocaust was an event that needed to be taught to everyone. Noemi began giving presentations to schools about her experience and about the Holocaust. She cherishes these times dearly.

What Noemi wants her audiences to never forget what happened during World War II. Her speeches are her way of passing on a story, an event that had such a devastating effect on so many lives.

Noemi has taken the word 'hate' out of her vocabulary and has inserted the phrase 'never forget.'

Last August, she took a further step. She decided to return to Auschwitz. Noemi wanted to prove she was a free woman; that she wasn't afraid. She wanted to settle something; to see the end once and for all.

A friend of hers, Ray Simmers-Wolpow, accompanied her. Simmers-Wolpow is a secondary education professor at Western. He wrote his doctoral thesis on Noemi's experience in Auschwitz.

Simmers-Wolpow is a tall man, somewhat imposing with black thinning hair, a black beard and glasses. His voice is surprisingly quiet. "I could feel the screaming and the pain," Simmers-Wolpow said as he talked about the atmosphere surrounding the gas chambers.

"I could feel a million people senselessly and horrifically slaughtered in one place." The pictures Noemi and Simmers-Wolpow took at Auschwitz are a document; a permanent reminder of what happened at Auschwitz.

Life is now simple again for Noemi. She lives alone near the ferry terminal. Her hair is a supple light shade of gray.

The jet-black hair may have turned gray, but the rosy cheeks remain. She looks younger than her almost 74 years. But she is not really alone. Steven, his wife and their three grandchildren live next door to the house she and Earnest bought in 1992.

"After Auschwitz," she said, "I'm not afraid of anything."
Jake Waschke drives his sunken VW Rabbit with laid-back posture, but with determination in his green eyes. Similarly, his pizza delivery job is a series of contradictions. Helter-skelter nights laden with panic about the ever-growing stack of pies riding shotgun segue into a rhythmic flow of faces and traffic lights, prompting a zen-like placidity of the soul.
With its passenger seat removed to make room for up to 12 pies, the Rabbit careens over the potholes and cracks of Bellingham’s backstreets. “... tears will burn, alone I wallow,” blasts Biohazard from a set of Kenwoods in the back.

THE LITTLE TIPPERS

“Gotta have the tunes, man. I’ll be back in a flash,” Waschke says, and he is. He barrels back to the rattling rabbit after handling a large veggie to a pajama-clad, sockless girl at the base of Mathes Hall. She stiff Waschke on the tip — typical of the freshman dorms, although Waschke offers no theories on why Fairhaven and Highland residents are more generous. He estimates that Mathes and Nash Halls stiff drivers about 60 percent of the time.

Pizza couriers are the modern-day sisyphus, but as the seconds peel away and the pies grow colder, Waschke squints at a haphazardly scribbled address, grits his teeth to hold back a growl, and longs to be saddled with the simple task of pushing a boulder up a hill.

A woman at the Forest Hill apartments says she didn’t order a pizza, and Waschke is forced to write this one off as a prank.

Next he pulls up to a large house on 16th Street, has a brief chat with the owner, and settles back, expressionless, into the Rabbit as Pantera roars from the speakers. Again, no tip.

“He ordered canadian bacon no sauce and we gave him Canadian with pineapple, so he got the pie for free.” Waschke explains. Though every pizza is delivered with haste, less generous customers find their way to the bottom of the delivery order.

A driver who speaks on the condition of anonymity wrinkles up his face behind long, flour-dusted hair, and he is. He’s a bellhop, a taxi driver and a man living on the south shore of Lake Samish. By not tipping Waschke for the 30-mile trip, “He basically told me to go pound sand.”

Some customers, however, are more appreciative — much more.

THE BIG TIPPERS

A driver who speaks on the condition of anonymity wrinkles up his face behind long, flour-dusted hair, and says he averages two or three invitations to smoke out with munchie-ridden customers.

When a door opens to a hazy dorm room or apartment, “I perk my head up and say, ‘Hey, nice scent,’ and they’ll usually say, ‘You wanna puff a bowl?’ If I don’t have to drive anymore that night, it’s usually a good capper on a tough evening.”

One such interlude fell in his lap just two nights before.

His eyes widen as he describes “… an exquisite glass pipe like none other. It looked like some sort of magnificent Nordic hammer. The guy stuffs in this bud that’s about an inch-and-a-half across and, well ... it’s a good thing I was on dishes the rest of the night.”

As a driver for Brewery City Pizza in Olympia, Thad Dickson delivered to students of The Evergreen State College, and not surprisingly, had a few such offers as well. For Dickson, now 23, such tips pale in comparison to the night a woman tried to pay for her pie with a $100 bill.

“She ordered a weird pizza — like an anchovy and jalapeno I think — and she didn’t tip me, but she showed up to the door in just a robe. I told her I didn’t carry that much money and I couldn’t change it, so she had me come inside. She rustled around in a back room for a while and came out with change, but left the robe behind. I took the money and left — I was only 19 and I wasn’t what sure what to do.”

Other creative tips spice up the job for the rest of the drivers as well.

“Five bucks and two beers, two bucks and three beers, three beers by themselves,” Waschke recalls. Such offers are spurned. Sharp reflexes and a clean head are paramount to getting the pies to their destinations on time. “But one guy gave me 32 bucks in change. It was a Thursday and we rolled change forever.”

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

Jeff Yoder delivered Mr. Gatti’s pizzas for a year to students in Lake Jackson, Texas, and found ways to compensate for their thin wallets and miserly habits.

“We sliced our own pies, so if we got hungry we’d cut a thinner slice on each one, chow it down while driving and shake the pizza to space the rest out.” Yoder recalls without a hint of guilt in his voice. His justification comes easily: “You’re hungry and you don’t get paid that much, and nobody ever suspected a thing as far as I know.”

THE ODDBALLS

Pizza Time Manager Mark Mitchell relishes the fervor with which customers long for his muse.

“We'll have people call and say, ‘Hey, we're naked over here, what kind of discount does that get us?’”

— MARK MITCHELL
Pizza couriers are loved by society with the same passion that IRS agents, litigation attorneys and the LAPD are reviled. Occasionally, however, a customer's comfort level with a pizza driver breaches

Domino's in Issaquah, was cajoled into sharing a cold beer with "a bunch of rockers" in lieu of a tip. "Their girlfriends kept dropping stuff on purpose and asking me to pick it up so I'd bend over — I felt emotionally violated," Waschke guesses. One

"That stuff never happens to me," Waschke says, but continues to recall an episode that "really made me sketch."

Tinges of disbelief and disgust crack Waschke's voice as he guides the Rabbit along Kentucky Street. Three months of incident-free deliveries haven't washed his mind of the night an elderly gentleman "opened his door wearing only a dress shirt and one of them old-school vests. There's some ... special people out there."

**WHEN THE HONEYMOON'S OVER**

On Waschke's broad shoulders sits a world of famished college students, but this atlas doesn't shrug, or even tremble under such a burden. While the Mariners were making their frantic playoff run last fall, Waschke was a rock. He steadily delivered pizzas to 50 homes on game nights, with an apocalyptic 65 deliveries on the night Randy Johnson sealed his team's division title. If only the Rabbit were as durable as Waschke. "The Limo," as he refers to it with both pride and exasperation in his voice, seems held together by nothing more than Ozzy Osborne and Slayer stickers.

"Fuel pump, transmission, CV-joints, I had the second motor overhauled and the bearings packed, the tires ..." Waschke's voice is muffled by Pantera's "Strength Beyond Strength." Phil Anselmo is belting out "Fuck you and your college dream, fact is we're stronger than all ..." Waschke considers the weight of the hardships wrought by his craft compared to the meager tip he will be lucky to get as he approaches Mathes once again.

Bill Peaches, a former driver for Yoder's female customers greeted him at the door au naturel, "But I still charged the full price," he insists.
Golden garlands and red balls are a few of the Christmas decorations used to liven the small bar in Buckley, Wash. The walls in Vi’s Place, or 737 Main as it is sometimes called, are concealed beneath a collage of songs, limericks, bumper stickers and favorite quotes. These decorations exhibit Vi Childs’ personality. The words to a song she wrote, “I’m the hostess with the mostest of them all,” could never be more accurate. One particular quote catches the eye. Written on a paper yellowed from age, it reads: “Humor is the basis of sanity and medicine is for the sick and depressed.”

These are the words comedian Vi Childs lives by. Sixty-eight years old and full of more energy than a teenager, Childs runs a bar where, through her comedy, she brings laughter and happiness to a sold-out crowd every Friday and Saturday night.

Childs has suffered some extreme tragedies throughout her life. She has a mentally retarded son, another son died from a brain tumor at 14 years old, her daughter lost her family in a fire, and her husband has had 10 heart attacks, a quadruple bypass and a stroke last January, which left him blind in one eye.

As a way to heal and deal with unfortunate happenings in one’s life, Childs believes “you just have to laugh.”

“I am a comedian and comedy comes from the miseries, worries, stress, hardships, sadness, sex and just the strain of every day existence. To keep our heads on straight we must laugh, love and enjoy the beauty of our world and try to help ourselves enjoy it more,” she writes in her book titled, “The Good Book.”

To support her mentally retarded son, who lives in Florida, Childs sells two self-published books at her show for $5. “The Good Book” is a collection of her favorite sayings, songs and poems which have a positive outlook on life. “The Bad Book” is a collection of jokes she has performed or heard throughout her life.

“The Good Book” is 30 pages of inspirational thought. “I thought a lot of people need inspiration and that’s why I wrote it,” she says.

Childs has gone through a lot of sorrow in her life; however, instead of crying she chooses to laugh and to make other people laugh.

“I’m not going to cry until I have to. Crying isn’t fun,” she says. And for the last 18 years she has gone on stage to forget about the bad things in life.

“I can only think of the good things,” she explains. “I’ve never been a person to hang onto sadness. I get on stage and it quits the sadness.”

Her venture with show business began 33 years ago. Childs always wanted to learn how to play the piano and at 34 years old she did. She has always had the attitude, “You can do anything you want to,” she says.

This is when her performing began. Childs danced and sang in bars full-time after her children were raised.

She moved to Buckley to be with her daughter Darby Childs, who had lost her family in a fire. She wanted and needed to be close to her daughter and grandchildren.

When she moved to Buckley, which is twenty minutes east of Puyallup, she saw a tavern for sale and decided to buy it.

“I thought, ‘What the heck. I’ll give it a shot,’” Childs remembers.

The bar was open every night during the first few years of business, and every night saw a sold-out crowd. In the beginning Childs danced, played the piano and had sing-a-longs with a touch of comedy.

Piano playing and singing are still part of the atmosphere, but it’s mostly comedy and no dancing. Now the bar is only open on weekends, but still has more than 200 people every night it’s open.

Childs’ believes her bar is unique because in addition to the comedy, it’s a “social security bar.”
“People know that the same people will always be here,” she says.

Seventy-one-year-old Robert Griffith, Childs’ husband, has been the bartender since the beginning, despite his heart problems and stroke last January. The other bartender is Dale Falk, who has tended bar for 15 years. His wife Judy, has been a waitress there for 15 years as well. The other waitress is Midge Grant, who has been at Vi’s Place for 10 years.

Walking into her bar, Childs is immediately noticeable. Radiating with energy, she’s a little, thin lady with Las Vegas-style rhinestone earrings and matching brooch, visiting with patrons and giving them a hard time.

“I can get your ass in here,” she says to one of her customers, as people nearby roll with laughter.

Squishing herself to fit through the crowded aisles, she seats people, visits with them and always makes them smile.

“I really don’t know how many people can fit into my bar,” she says with a smile. “One day someone told me I had too many people in here and that it was against the fire code. I told him he could leave. It took care of that problem.”

Soon after, Childs is on the stage playing the piano and rapidly spitting out jokes left and right.

“Ed is out here tonight. He has Alzheimer’s and he hid his own Easter eggs. He’s still looking for them,” she says as people laugh.

“Sorry we couldn’t give you a welcome sign when you entered Buckley. But where the hell would we put a welcome sign in Buckley? It’s only a block long.”

“We don’t have hookers in Buckley. They all give it out for free,” Childs says as she points to a table of women with a flashlight. “And here’s a table of seven of them.”

Before the crowd is finished laughing at her first couple of jokes, she keeps them rolling with another.

“My husband lies. He said he spent the night with George last night. I know he didn’t spend the night with George. You see, I spent the night with George.”

Just before people stop laughing Childs uses her upbeat piano playing and voice to start a sing-along.

“Roll out the barrel,” are the only words she needs to sing before the entire bar has joined in with her.

Childs razzes every group of people: young, old, heterosexual, homosexual, Asian, Indian and Jewish. Her jokes aren’t meant to be mean or to hurt people, but to make people laugh, have a good time and forget about their troubles for about three-and-a-half hours.

Aside from the comedy, another side of Childs comes out during the show. Unlike most comedians, she will speak about her view on life.

“Someone wrote in and said they were upset by some of the jokes I say because they have friends who are ethnic. Who’s ethnic anyway? We are all ethnic as far as I’m concerned,” she says after her act in which she wears a bamboo hat and painted sun glasses with scratched-off diagonal slits, imitating the Asian eye.

“I’m a comedian, but I’m kind of a preacher,” she explains. “I never end an evening unless I have something to say about life. Sometimes maybe I preach too much.”

Childs also makes things very important to her the butt of jokes. She tells a story about a letter her retarded son wrote her.

“He signs it with his last name, like I would forget it,” she says.

Childs stresses that life doesn’t always treat us the way we want, but laughing can help.

“Everybody has shit in their lives. A lot of people want to keep that inside. If you say it out loud, you know you are not alone,” she adds.

People have been going to see Childs for years for that exact reason. Joe Reid, a fan from Bremerton, has been going to see Childs every weekend for the last 16 years, and knows he can always count on her for a smile.

“It feels good to laugh about something,” he says. “People need laughter in their life. Everybody has their stress and I have mine. It’s really good to know I will always have a place to laugh.”

Bob Lloyd has been going to see Childs for five years for the same reason.

“I need to get picked up, rejuvenated,” he says. “She believes if you trip and stumble, you get to get up again. And she’s a great example of that.”

Helping her community is one of the highest priorities in Childs’ life.

“You don’t think I could go to Vegas,” she says during her show. “I want to stay here because I need to make people in our own community happy.”

Recently, Childs has done free shows for a retirement home, the DARE program, Veteran’s Hospital and Mary Bridges’ Home for Retarded Children.

“I’ve done so many of them I can’t keep track,” she says modestly.

“I’m here as a servant, not as an ego maniac. I’m here to serve you and make you happy,” she says adding emphasis to the word “you.”

“I’m a humanitarian, but I don’t do free shows for the people who don’t need it,” Childs says nonchalantly. “We’re supposed to do those things. We don’t need thank-yous.”

Childs strives to make her shows genuinely funny and tasteful.

“I don’t tell filth. I don’t say the f-word,” she explains.

“When you are a comedian you’re under the gun. I have to be careful about what I say on stage.”

“I am sure my comedy does not meet with everyone’s approval,” she adds. “It is difficult to know what everyone thinks is funny. I can only say I have tried to do the best I can.”
When Raquel García moved back home to Oakland, Calif., after graduating this March, she got a summer job at an espresso stand and prepared to take it easy for a few months.

Then the unexpected happened: A “real” job opportunity opened up. García was ready to steer herself onto the road that might lead to a career.

Job possibilities can show up at any time for recent graduates. How does a grad make the right impression with an employer? What tools does a grad need to fix a stalled job search? What’s the best route to finding a job?

Finding a job can be like following a maze of roads on a road map. Some roads lead where travelers want to go while others can lead them nowhere. In their job searches, how do graduates pick the right roads and avoid the dead ends?

Getting help with “directions” can make the trip a success.

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García found her job opportunity at a technical job fair her uncle told her about. When she arrived at the job fair with her 26-year-old brother Agustin, García wondered why she was even there. She was an economics major, not a computer specialist.

“But I decided not to make it a total bust,” she explained.

García, 23, started marketing herself as a technical writer with knowledge of marketing and investment. She completed a fall 1994 internship at a brokerage house in Mazatlán, Mexico.

And, “It just so happened, the senior technical writer (from an information systems company) was there. He went over my résumé and said he was impressed.”

García submitted college writing assignments and became one of three finalists for a writing position with the company. Each finalist had to write a research paper.

García had a plan. “I don’t have the technical knowledge the other applicants might, so I’m going to submit my paper in Spanish, also. I hope to outwit them,” she declared before writing the report.

García did her homework on the company, using computer searches to turn up information she needed. She also got advice from Western’s Career Services Center and Mary Ann Hendryson in the economics department.

It took a week for García to complete her report, which included phone calls to financial institutions.

“It was one of the most intense experiences I’ve ever went through,” she said. Also, “It was fun. I learned quite a bit.”

Her work paid off. García snagged the research associate position, and sounded quite pleased with her new job.

What made her stand out?

“I got the job because I was able to pick up the phone and talk to people, and I wasn’t intimidated,” García said she was told.

Her new employers also noted her writing had more style than the other applicants — and said submitting her paper in Spanish demonstrated she’s an overachiever.

TODAY’S “ROAD CONDITIONS”

“Today’s road conditions”

“This isn’t the employment world of a generation ago,” said Tina Litzsinger, director of Western’s Career Services Center in Old Main 280.

Litzsinger noted job trends her office has seen. For instance, more graduates are working at temporary agencies than in previous years. Also, substitute teaching is becoming more common for education graduates before they get full-time jobs.

Before landing those jobs, a visit to Litzsinger’s office — the Career Services Center — can make the search easier.

In a roomy office facing Edens Hall, the Career Services Center can look intimidating to the job seeker. Books about how to find a job, how to write a résumé and information about the job market line most walls. Bulletin boards list job announcements, and students...
may type their résumés and cover letters into the keyboards of the center's three computer stations.

What draws students to Old Main 280? "The common (realization) is, 'OK, I'm graduating. I need to find a job,'" said Liz Weldin, a Career Services Center paraprofessional.

Weldin is one of seven students trained to help people access the center's resources. The paraprofessionals, along with the Center's career counselors, conduct workshops and mock interviews to aid students with job-searches.

And, it's not too late for seniors who haven't started job hunting.

"Tell them to get over here," Litzsinger said. "Even in one appointment, we can provide a significant amount of assistance."

But the Career Services Center isn't just for students reaching the end of their studies. The center has information for those trying to decide a major, as well as for those who need more information on their chosen major.

Students can also find information about internships, summer jobs, foreign exchange programs and graduate programs.

**What Do Employers Want?**

Knowing what employers want can help graduates find employment.

Sally Wagner is a college relations manager at Weyerhaeuser in Federal Way, a company where Western grads have found employment.

Wagner hires for some of Weyerhaeuser's entry-level positions, in such areas as accounting, industrial sales, production management and engineering. She said she looks for the same basics most employers do in applicants: job-specific skills, clear career goals, strong interpersonal skills, proficiency in communication and the ability to work within a team.

Weyerhaeuser also considers "academic preparation" — a 3.0 GPA or above is standard for those hired, Wagner said.

Weyerhaeuser's hiring specifications mirror national trends. Employers from 527 businesses, industries and government agencies were surveyed for "Recruiting Trends 1995-96," a study conducted by the collegiate Employment Research Institute at Michigan State University.

In addition to qualities Wagner named, the employers said they wanted workers capable of doing research, thinking analytically, speaking a foreign language and appreciating diversity in the workplace. The employers also noted common deficiencies in employees, such as marginal communication skills — especially in writing — and a lack of appreciation for differences in people.

When advising applicants on how to get ahead, Pembie's comments are similar to other employers: go the extra mile.

Volunteering is one of the ways to increase a graduate's mileage with an employer. "Volunteering shows use of time and tells about a student's motivation. Students aren't making money, so it's important," Pembie said.

Hodge said volunteering can help students build better skills needed for employment. Some skills he looks for in recruits include leadership skills — someone who can direct or lead group activities to accomplish goals — interpersonal skills, problem-solving skills and communication skills such as written and presentation abilities.

Another way to get on the career highway is to get an internship to gain job experience and job connections.

"Eighty to 90 percent of those we hired (in the technical field) had a previous internship within the company," Hodge said. "It's easier to have someone work at (the same) company as an intern. You can learn their skills, behaviors and personalities. It's harder to learn that in an interview," he added.

Hodge said internships do three things: They help students decide if they are in the right field; they allow students to see if they like the company where they intern, and they build job experience for interns.

"Students who know their strengths, know what to do to sell their strengths..."
to the company and know about the company can get a job,” Hodge said.

However, getting that first job is not the end of job-searching.

**HOW TO STEER A CAREER**

Once hired, employees need to think about career progression.

“I’m always encouraging students to look ahead to what the next job will be,” Litzsinger said.

“Go back a generation ago. (Employees) relied on employers to help with their progression,” Litzsinger said.

“That’s not valid anymore.” Now, “people need to manage their own careers, not assume someone else will handle it,” she said.

Jeremy Wolf is an example.

Wolf, 27, and a ‘93 graduate, enjoys his job as a geologist. Wolf works for GEO/TEST, a small Bellingham company. Wolf inspects the masonry, concrete and reinforced steel of buildings at new construction sites. He also conducts geological and environmental site assessments.

While his current job suits Wolf, that wasn’t always the case. GEO/TEST is his third job since graduation.

Wolf gained his first career-related job experience during the summer after his sophomore year. He worked in a materials testing lab at an engineering company.

After graduation, Wolf worked at a couple of jobs in his field, but wasn’t satisfied with them.

“In hindsight, I would have investigated the field I was getting into more. I should have had a more focused approach, but I wasn’t really concerned about it (in school),” Wolf said.

Before GEO/TEST hired him, Wolf said he checked in at the company every six months to a year to let them know he was available. He would speak to the owner, whom he knew from his summer job.

“Networking is a really big deal,” Wolf said. “It makes a big difference if you know someone (at a company) versus someone who is a stranger. Even if you have the same qualifications, you’re more likely to get a job through someone you know.”

Wolf recommended tailoring a college education to what employers want. Also, determine any necessary qualifications before looking for a job. Wolf looked into getting special certification he needed in his field before he got out of school.

“You need to find out what you need to do, explore that, and make yourself marketable before getting out of school,” he said.

**THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED**

Some graduates are able to explore other roads before starting a job search.

In July of last year, 1994 Western grad Jason Darling was crossing the Continental Divide, halfway through a 6-month bike journey around the country. He planned the solo trip to accomplish his dream to bike around the country, as well as to think about what his next steps would be.

“The ups and downs of the road matched my emotions throughout the trip,” he surmised.

Darling started the bike trip in March 1995 in Bellingham and ended it in Maine last September. The journey was a chance for Darling to gather and process information outside the university setting, a practice he terms “deinstitutionalizing.” He also visited friends and family, got to know himself better and, “I took my own little pulse of America.” Darling also realized he wanted to settle in the Pacific Northwest.

“I didn’t really come back — I moved forward,” Darling explained. “I came back to Bellingham in a whole new context ... as being part of the community.”

Darling graduated from Western’s environmental education program in December 1994.

After graduation, he wrapped up some projects and worked for the Whatcom Conservation District. Since returning to Bellingham, Darling is a seminar coordinator for Learning Environment Action Discovery (LEAD) and does part-time landscaping and yard work.

“I’m working toward a place in my life where I can work my own schedule,” Darling said. “I decided Bellingham’s the place I’m going to make it happen. I chose a place rather than a job.”

“Everything’s falling into place,” he added. “It’s definitely what I’ve asked for.”

And to those who may wonder if they can do it, too: “Don’t be afraid of trying something different because there are many, many ways to feed and shelter yourself.”

…”

It’s not as easy to find a job as it is to look at a map. A map shows the colored lines and tells which road is which. But, every job search can be a colored line leading along a road map to a destination. All grads have to do is find it, and hopefully those who have taken the road before can lead new travelers to their chosen destinations.
DISCLAIMING OURSELVES TO DEATH

Keeping qualifiers from curbing our communication

COMMENTARY BY BRIAN OLSON

The silence that sweeps over the class is more agonizing than the question just asked. Control of neck muscles ceases and heads drop to dodge eye contact. Intellectual stroking of the chin begins, with hope that this action will pass for pondering. Lips lock up to prevent breathing from being misunderstood as a display of knowledge. Skin seems to be crawling away, when a sudden swoosh of wind blows by.

Finally, someone has raised a hand - let's rejoice! However, upon recognizing who this appendage belongs to the agony returns. The past silence is a delight when compared with the coming disclaimer.

This may sound stupid, but...
"I may be, just may be, a lowly lackey who doesn’t deserve to be here in a place of learning for I will never learn anything and my lips will only allow me to make a bigger fool of myself than I already am, blabbering out nonsense that you (addressing the mighty figure standing before the class, stern grimace on face) have never even conceptualized could be spoken by anyone with an IQ and a working larynx, but I will attempt to sink even lower into my cesspool by speaking now about a notion I had, although this notion could not be anywhere near correct..."

Sound familiar? Sound like a student teetering on the edge of insanity, only to have their own breath blow them into the blue abyss of blabber? It’s time to swim out past our incessant need to qualify our statements. Not only do we soak in our fear of being brainless, we drown in our disclaimers. Where do these waves of worries come from?

ARE PROFESSORS OPPRESSORS?

Ideally, our present level of education should ensure us contact with professors who are concerned with pushing us on, not holding us back. However, students frequently iconify professors, inhibiting themselves in the process.

"I can’t nearly know as much as his tie," I was once told. Authority causes an internal struggle; we automatically assess ourselves as lower. Because of their progress in education, from the benefit of time, professors are who we look up to. Discomfort comes with this view. We believe we are stuck in the position of the subservient student. Professors are then seen as the ones who stuck us there.

Dr. Robert Bode, a Western communications professor who teaches classes with themes focusing on interpersonal conflict resolution and communication ethics, sees why students could blame professors.

"If you’re in a class where you’re in trouble, sort of intellectually, and you don’t know so much about Hegelian philosophy, and you’re wondering out loud about one of the ideas of Hegelian philosophy, it would be easy to tack on that qualifier - 'Well, I'm not sure if I understand this correctly but...' - and the professor may say 'Well, you were right about the first part of the contribution. It does seem like you need some sharpening up,' or others would go 'Oh, my God.' Nobody wants that to happen."

Of course, we would all love to avoid embarrassment. When eyeing our options, a swift kick to the ego is not all that appealing.

Once professors bruise our bravado, we often lose the confidence to step to the front. Instead, we find a way to recoil to the comforts of anonymity. However, the minute we don the glazed mask and slip into the crevices of our chair, we have moved away from our intention in attending college. We are here to learn. Whether it be Hegelian philosophy or hangover cures, each day we drum on to an understanding of our own beat.

Professors are not here to beat ideas out of us, either. Behind the title is a fellow human being, but the image students have constructed of the professor blinds us from this fact.

Every time a tie is tied another wall is not constructed. Ironed pants do not equal a barrier to understanding. Starched shirts should not give us the chills. For learning to occur there has to be someone there to teach.

Dr. John Purdy, the Western English department chair and professor, pushes students to a free exchange of ideas because he says it is elemental to the educational process. Purdy sees the image professors have been supplied with, but makes a conscientious effort to step outside the limitations labeling brings to learning.

"There are a lot of things that can harm open discussion in any class, and that’s one of the reasons in my syllabi I have been putting in the phrase - 'We’re here to discuss certain issues and ideas in an open atmosphere of mutual respect,'” Purdy says.

English professor Laura Laffrado has implemented a pass system in her classes to help students gain confidence in having their voices heard.
in communicating their ideas. If a question she poses a particular student does not strike that student, or is unanswerable at that time, a pass may be used.

"It's a way to avoid 'I don't know' or 'I could be wrong'," Laffrado says. "The interesting question isn't right or wrong, it is, 'What made you think in communicating their ideas. If a question she poses a particular student does not strike that student, or is unanswerable at that time, a pass may be used.

One of the main interests Dr. Laura Shaw, a Western psychology professor, has when coming into a class is establishing a comfortable feeling with her students.

"A disclaimer is just kind of a buffer to protect us from negative feedback. I think if you set up an atmosphere that is more relaxed and not very judging, people don't have to buffer themselves from being judged," Shaw says.

Taking the initiative not to judge professors as almighty will make a few dent in the disclaimer. However, the move that will really make the disclaimer disappear is meeting with your professors. It's what is behind the answer that is interesting.

One thing that I have found that has helped is when students come into see me and have an individual meeting with me.

"Once I've had that personal contact with them they seem to be much more willing to talk in class and I would imagine that would help them with disclaimers." Shaw says.

"They're just comfortable, they're not distrusting of me, they think they have a better sense that I'm not going to be somebody who's going to slam them."

THE JURY OF OUR PEERS

The pressures of impressing a professor are overwhelmed by how much we care about pleasing our peers. It is a very good feeling to have confidence in our own intellect, but this feeling is intensified when others have confidence in our intellect. Displaying brain power in class through witty comments helps frame our intellect.

What happens when our well of wit dries up, though, and we're left with an empty mouth? Do we wait for our mind to fill up, risking reputation runoff, or do we disclaim?

"We generally like to see ourselves in a positive light. We like to see ourselves as competent and capable and intelligent. So we work to protect that image of ourselves," Shaw says. "One way to do that is to offer an excuse now and then, particularly if we are unsure of our answer or how our behavior is going to be judged. If we can offer some kind of external attribution then people are less likely to blame us."

Sitting in class with a dried-up mind and mouth makes stability seem a great distance away. Sitting next to a student who is salivating at the chance to shoot hand, and thoughts, into the air brings on even more insecurity.

Questions pile up as fast as your neighbor's panting pace. What are they getting? What am I missing? How can I avoid being called on?

Students seem to miss a major point when worrying about impressing their peers; just because we speak doesn't mean we're saying anything. Adding disclaimers to our statements doesn't ensure acceptance, either.

"People catch on to that. It's like anybody crying wolf. If every single time you raise your hand you say 'Well, I didn't sleep really good last night' or 'I didn't read this really well' or 'I'm not really sure about this' people will get tired of that, and then you come across as looking wishy-washy. Excuses are nice because they buffer us, but if we use them too much we look bad as well. It backfires on you," warns Shaw.

It's inevitable that we are going to feel a need for acceptance among our peers, but being "cool" doesn't automatically bring this acceptance anymore.

Yes, security can still come with style, but secure stability is a product of strong belief in ourselves. If we were able to step into the "self" and have faith in what we find, we would forge a clear path to confidence.

Right now, this path weaves through the classrooms of Western. However, each person's map will read differently. No route will resemble another. But, if we are all on the same path in the university system - some driving to a set destination, some enjoying a stroll - why do we slam the brakes on our ideas before they're uttered?

RECLAIMING CONFIDENCE

Carrying along confidence on this trip will help us cruise. Dropping the disclaimer will help us avoid dragging along.

Every student wants to steer clear of becoming stagnant, but when we apologize for our own ideas we put ourselves on pause. As a result we sit there still, watching our peers roll on. We trample on our own tongues before they ever unroll.

Professors are not holding us down, they are here to help us climb. Our peers are also trying to ascend, but we descend when we use the disclaimer to hold on to acceptance.

If we do not first take the steps to stop saying "we're stupid" before we even prove it, how can we blame anyone but ourselves for how society sees our generation?

No one enjoys being seen as extremely idiotic, but the continued existence of qualifying statements keeps us in those shoes.

Anyone for a different pair of sneakers? Let's lace up a new pair of lips while we're at it, and run toward some respectability.
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on your tuition-payin',
real life-dodgin',
parent-bummin',
money-grubbin', grunt-workin',
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