Klipsun Magazine, 1997, Volume 28, Issue 01 - December

Jill Carnell
Western Washington University

Follow this and additional works at: https://cedar.wwu.edu/klipsun_magazine

Part of the Higher Education Commons, and the Journalism Studies Commons

Recommended Citation

This Issue is brought to you for free and open access by the Western Student Publications at Western CEDAR. It has been accepted for inclusion in Klipsun Magazine by an authorized administrator of Western CEDAR. For more information, please contact westerncedar@wwu.edu.
Cinema Paradiso?
TechNo Prisoners
24-Hour Church of Elvis
Editor’s Note:

A college campus is supposed to be a place that fosters diversity, open-mindedness, exchange of ideas and, above all, freedom of expression. Congratulations to all of you who may have been offended by the material in the September issue of Klipsun but chose to ignore your own bias and open your mind to new ideas.

Chris Cooper’s art is graphic, even gross. We know that. There have been suggestions that we chose to run the images simply because we had them and wanted to increase our readership through cheap shock value. Some people have questioned the appropriateness of the images for Western’s campus. Many others have told us that they thought the drawings were disgusting—but when we asked what they thought of the article, we heard “oh, I didn’t read the article.”

Yes, there was an article accompanying Coop’s art. A good article, exploring the motivation of a well-known artist and giving equal space to feminist responses to his art. If you read it, you might have understood why not printing Coop’s pictures would have been a cop-out of the very worst kind. Klipsun should not be afraid to print something that may raise a few eyebrows and spark some interesting debate among readers.

I’m excited about the metamorphosis I’ve seen in Klipsun over the past year. The stories haven’t been shy—we’ve covered illicit drug use, religion, gambling, HIV testing and, of course, devil girls in a variety of scintillating poses. This magazine has become a forum for discussion of the serious—and sometimes not-so-serious—issues important to college students.

Drugs, AIDS, sex and censorship. They may not be the gentlest issues, but they’re all out there in the real world. Are you afraid to face them? We’re not.

Klipsun encourages readers to let us know you feel about anything you see in the magazine. Our e-mail is klipsun@cc.wwu.edu. Or, if you prefer the old-fashioned way, we’re in College Hall 137 or at 650-3737. Drop us a note.

Jill Carnell, editor
Steering Committee Julia Paige Grace slips from a dreary parking lot into the black-tie world of limousine drivers.

Watchers Amy King sneaks into the subculture of retail security.

Foul Territory Matt Finlinson profiles gutsy Mariners ballgirl Lindsey Ferris.

Disgraceland Jen Nikolaisen pays homage to Stephanie G. Pierce's treasure trove of King's trash at Portland's legendary 24-hour Church of Elvis.

Declaration of Independents The Grand Bellingham Cinema, the city's only independent movie theater, is slowly being edged out by competition from national chains. Alex McLean tells the true tale of one man's struggle to remain autonomous.

TechNo Prisoners Made into music, electricity can make you dance. Christopher Ames plugs into the local electronic music scene.

Heavy Mettle Vincent Verhei finds a group of friends who risk life—even limb—for the fight.

Southern Oscillation A storm is brewing in the usually peaceful Pacific Ocean. Kim Vincent finds out why "the boy child" could wreak havoc with our weather.

Far For The Course Whatcom County's 18 courses have put the community on the map—as far as golf is concerned. Jonathan Vann takes a swing at the links.

Drugged "Oh my God! Was I raped?" Lucy Kiem Kee tries to recall an evening she doesn't remember.
Every day is a black-tie affair for the limousine driver. Drivers transport clients inside a protected and luxurious space, adorned with customized amenities, but the job of a limo driver is quite normal. Julia Paige Groce makes the switch.

Limo drivers make every day: from dreary Seattle parking lots to the sparkle and shine of a Lincoln Town Car.

photos by Justin Coyne

The world seemed to drag in soggy boredom. A mop of ceaseless muggy drizzle crept its way into my sneakers, seatbelt and soul. Each screech of the aging wiper blades accomplished little in its sickly rain-ridding effort. The drops seemed to prick the windshield and then gurgle a thick thumping reply. All around, the wet swallowed my chugging Ford Escort into a gray blur of clouds and pavement.

The parking lot could have been part of Taco Bell or Boeing or Kmart. I slipped into a lean compact spot and squeezed between a small crumpled Toyota pick-up and a Volkswagen Rabbit in need of a paint job. I scanned the asphalt.

I opened the side door. The fragile air chilled my eyes as the air conditioning system created an unreality. Light blurred my vision, and I felt as if I had stepped through the looking glass.

They were shining. The stark concrete floor was illuminated with their clean brilliance and regal perfection. Extravagance and dignity accompanied their sparkling chrome. Like beasts, they possessed a strength and prowess. They appeared calm and pampered. I was surrounded by 17 stretch limousines.

To be a chauffeur is to make this transition every day. The world of the limousine driver is a fine crystal fantasy. At all hours, they shed the world of duct tape and woozing cassette players for champagne glasses and leather interiors. Braving the freeways in 35 feet of luxury, these men and women open the doors for the rich and famous, stars of stage and screen, prestigious government officials and screaming teenagers in rented formal wear.

The chauffeur business is not a job most individuals envision pursuing. Donald Ballard, a merry little gentleman with a quiet neighborly grin, was selling real estate three years ago.

"I wasn’t making nearly enough money to survive, and one of my clients said, ‘Hey, if you’re not..."
doing something around Christmastime, we need some extra help," Ballard recalled.

Suddenly thrust into a new career, Ballard has been wearing the black-and-white tuxedo-like uniform of the chauffeur for Bayview Limousine Service of Seattle. Such a position requires his discovered talent for "backing up a 35-foot car into a normal space. And you know, that's not that easy."

Mike Zawaideh purchased a limousine company 13 years ago, and now runs Super Limousine and Black Tie Transportation.

"It's not really a high-profit business if you're legitimate and do all the right things," he said. "It's sure fun, though."

The driving experience has a lot to do with the model of car the chauffeur is driving. A general consensus among professional drivers is that the Lincoln Town Car reigns above all other models. "Most of the drivers prefer the Lincoln. It's pretty responsive and to me you've got a better feel for the road," Ballard said.

Limousines can be created from virtually any make of automobile. Coach builders are certified companies that create the stretched version of the original, cutting the car in half and putting a section in the middle.

Other alterations include the famed hot tub in the back. But Seattle has not proven to be a great market for the limousine hot tub.

"If you have water in the tub, on the level Hollywood Boulevard in Los Angeles, it's great," one of Ballard's fellow drivers said. "But in Seattle, where you got hills, you go up and it all runs out the back. You go down and it all runs over your shoulders!"

Limousine rental is not exactly the cheapest way to get from point A to point B. The average cost ranges from $65 per hour for corporate accounts to $125 per hour for short-term use. Companies generally tack on an additional 20 percent gratuity charge for their drivers.

"Biggest tip I got was $2400!" Zawaideh boasted. "Let's just say that it was from a very wealthy individual."

"People think limo drivers are the concierges of the town, you can hook 'em up with women and World Series tickets, but we're trying to run a legitimate business... we let them take care of the details," remarked experienced chauffeur Ed Hill.

Getting a celebrity "ride" is an interesting experience. Celebrities "are kinda rude to other people, but they know that we're there to serve them. They think that if they treat us nice, we're gonna treat them nice," chauffeur Steve Lewis commented.

"Celebrities have done it so much, they know what to expect. Just get me there and don't bother me too much," is the kind of attitude," Ballard said.

"I've driven a zillion of 'em," Zawaideh bragged. "You got Ben and Jerry, Seahawks, Mariners, the Four Tops, Ice Cube, Montel Williams, Ed Hume, the Eurythmics, Bruce Jenner, Pauley Shore, the Sea Gals and a bunch of others."

"Mariners are our regulars," Zawaideh added. With the recent upset in the American League Divisional Playoffs, some of the athletes have been feeling low. "Just talked to Moyer about the whole thing. He was pretty upset, but he said it was a team deal. A real let down."
Celebrities can be eccentric in their requests. "We drive for Michael Bolton all the time," Zawaideh said. "Every time we pick him up he wants factory-creased towels in the car. No laundered ones. And he knows the difference.

"One time we didn't have time to go get new ones and tried to slip in some laundered ones. Let's just say he was a little upset."

Ballard has had other celebrity encounters. Driving for Joe Cocker was not too difficult. 'He just smiled, was laid back and fell asleep. I find that most of the entertainers are real tired; they lead a really crazy schedule--up at 4 o'clock in the morning, get on an airplane to go to the next place,' Ballard said.

Some entertainers portray a different side to their personality when they're alone in the cars. From the mastermind of "I Want Your Sex" came a surprising interaction on the road. "George Michael, now that was a cool guy," Zawaideh recalls. 'He just had a great aura and persona. Real intelligent guy. We just kinda talked about life and stuff."

The private life of Whitney Houston and her marriage to pop singer Bobby Brown is on MTV news all the time. Zawaideh said she lives up to her bitchy reputation.

'She just said to me, I don't need no white boy opening my door and so I just said 'okay, ride's over. I got her to her place, and that was it,' he recalled in disgust. 'There were no cars available that weekend, and they had her people calling me, begging me to drive. All I wanted from her was an apology,' he said. 'I never got it.'

Paula Melikian was the only female chauffeur in the little black garage lobby of suited men. She stopped in on her day off, and was a colorful visual alternative to the black slacks, starched white shirts and graying hair. Her pink lips and twist of yellow locks sat atop a busy kaleidoscopic coat.

"Julia Child was the one who impressed me the most," Melikian said. 'I was a sort of a concierge. We stopped and we talked and we visited.'

"Celebrities usually live with the attention every day of their lives and know what to do. But we, as working stiffs, don't know that. We're not used to it," Hill said. "It's a bigger deal to us than to them."

"Most people ask me, 'How long you been driving?' and 'Who have you driven that's famous?' Melikian said. 'I have to ask myself, Who's famous? Some like everyone in the car has a story behind 'em.'

Chauffeurs encounter all kinds of people through their work. "Proms, marriage proposals, bachelor and bachelorette parties and other occasions give way to some entertaining people. The majority are corporate accounts that just need to get to and from the airport," Ballard said. 'You usually never know who they are. It's set up by the corporate name. All you know is that the suit is worth more than you make in a month."

'I picked up a bunch of fishermen that were just back from Alaska, and they had their fish in the car with them. They had 'noseeums' too--little bugs that just chewed up your ankles. They bite you! We had to spray the car with anti-bug stuff because the people were getting in the back and just scratching all over,' Ballard remembered.

Limousines invite the world to enjoy a luscious sweet candy-coated ride, with the aid of some very tolerant drivers. Extreme cars demand extreme escapades. Ed Hill reminds us that "most of the jobs are just normal people going here and there. Some people just have these fantasies to get naked and do their thing, whatever that might be."
Amy King exposes the unseen world of undercover security.

The hushed tone of the time clock sounds as I slowly run my card through the machine that keeps track of my comings and goings. I walk briskly down the narrow hallway toward the exit to the break room, carefully pinning my name tag squarely above my left breast. I gingerly nudge the hinged door bearing the name "Employees Only" and move toward the onslaught of back-to-school and Canadian shoppers. So begins another day working retail.

As my trek begins across the bustling almost chaotic store, my heart races as the door from the break room slams ajar. Footsteps pound toward me, slamming into the white-tiled, symmetrical floor gaining speed. My gut reaction tells me to jump to my left, and as I do, the footsteps whirl past me and race toward the nearest store exit.

I try to regain my composure and continue walking through the store while keeping an eye on the exit doors. Seconds later, the footsteps return quietly, the arms empty-handed and the face with a disappointed frown. Another shoplifter escapes the hands of undercover security personnel.
Shoplifting accounts for major losses in the retail business annually. Businesses such as grocery stores lose an average of one to two percent of sales due to shoplifting, said Jeff Ostreim, 24, who handles security for nine Brown & Cole grocery stores in Skagit and Snohomish Counties. That's why stores protect themselves by staffing undercover security.

Security may not be that stereotypical middle-aged, uniformed guard, arms folded and positioned like a firm statue by the exit doors. "It's definitely not what people think it is," said Kevin Mede, who works security at the Bellingham Fred Meyer.

At 24, Mede works security part-time while taking classes at Western. With his laid-back attitude and contagious laugh, he easily blends in a college-town retail store.

For Mede, his youth is the perfect disguise.

The more well-hidden and mysterious security are, the better. Mede laughed as he dispelled the myth of the uniformed guard.

"You try to blend in," Ostreim said. "You've got to be sneaky."

Dressed in faded jeans, a white T-shirt and sporting a baseball cap, Ostreim spends more than 50 percent of his time on the job roaming the aisles of the store, pretending to be any ordinary shopper.

Security personnel try to be unnoticeable by pushing a shopping cart, carrying a basket or pondering the price of an item. Meanwhile, they're secretly scrutinizing a nearby shopper's every move.

Ostreim said body language is a better predictor. "It's their eyes that really give them away," Ostreim said.

People who appear nervous and awkward and are constantly paying more attention to those around them than their shopping are more likely to steal, Ostreim said.

Cameras are also an effective way to spot suspicious actions of shoppers.

Hidden cameras spaced throughout a store all feed images into one central camera room. Security spend hours daily camped out in these dark, secluded rooms, peering at screens that follow a shoppers movements throughout the store.

An average store has about 12 cameras, usually three have the capacity to follow a shopper through a targeted area of the store, Ostreim said. Cameras do have their weaknesses because they cannot cover the entire store premises, Ostreim said.

Cameras are not allowed in restrooms or fitting rooms because of legal restrictions. Though these prime places that people steal are untouchable with cameras, Ostreim said other methods can still work to catch shoplifters.

"It gets me all tense just thinking about this," Ostreim said nervously.

Secret catwalks 20 feet above the store floor provide security with a bird's-eye view of potential shoplifters. These secluded hallways stretch the entire length of a store but are slightly more narrow than the width of a twin bed.

In a low, serious voice, Ostreim recounted the time he used cameras to watch a suspicious 16-year-old girl who carried make-up into the restrooms. When she returned without the make-up, Ostreim phoned a store clerk to check the restrooms, and she found the girl had discarded the make-up packages in the restroom trash. Ostreim said he then knew he had her.

Peering through one-way mirrors that cover the expanse of the catwalk, Ostreim described the excitement he feels when catching a shoplifter.

"You can't help that rush of adrenaline when you see someone steal," Ostreim said.

That's when the high-intensity part of the job kicks in. Security must somehow apprehend the shoplifter immediately after the stolen merchandise is taken from the store. If the shoplifter is caught, secu-
curity are then able to issue a citizens' arrest and notify the police.

When security personnel view a shoplifter from a catwalk, the shoplifter's movements are momentarily lost while security scurry down the connecting ladder to the store floor. This short time-lapse can be enough for the shoplifter to escape.

Generally people run, Mede said. Others do not react as calmly, however.

"You never know what you're getting into when you stop somebody," Ostreim said.

Ostreim described what he calls the "spaghetti story" that began when a man apparently on drugs stole a pack of cigarettes. When Ostreim tried to apprehend him, the man became violent, yielding a broken jar of spaghetti sauce.

"The guy snaps...and grabs a jar off the shelf, breaks the glass and starts running after me with it."

Without a moment's hesitation, Ostreim tackled him.

"You've got to have good instincts," Ostreim said. "You've got to go with your gut feeling. You've got to spot the car's license plate number.

"At the time, she got away," Mede said, but enthusiastically added that two weeks later the police arrested her for first degree assault.

"It was fun in a sick way," Mede said. Mede stressed that security's main concern is to recover the merchandise and not risk unnecessary injury for a low-cost item.

More frequently, Mede said security uses a technique called non-arrest recovery where "we scare them, and they dump the stuff."

Ostreim said most shoplifters are between the age of 15 and 20 years old. Mede said college students are less likely to steal.

"We don't see a general increase of college students stealing," Mede said. Store employees account for a large portion of store losses—up to 50 percent, Ostreim said.

An employee who steals from the company takes, on average, $750—whereas a shoplifter takes only $60 worth of merchandise, Mede said.

Ostreim said he focuses on doing his job well, which means disregarding stereotypes and looking at every shopper or employee as a potential shoplifter.

"Every type of person steals. Your grandmother, your brother, your spouse—people you'd never expect," Ostreim said. People may try to justify shoplifting, but it really is a crime.

"It's a misdemeanor offense," Ostreim said. "It's the lowest of the low as stealing goes...But it's a huge problem."
A storm is brewing in our usually peaceful Pacific Ocean. It is a storm that carries such an innocent name: El Niño, or "the boy child." But this is no innocent storm. It is a phenomenon of monstrous proportions, ready to wreak havoc on weather patterns all over the world. As this "boy child" gains strength and size this year, sloshing its warm water around in the Pacific between South America and Indonesia, it is shaping itself up to be possibly the biggest El Niño this century.

Signs that El Niño is on its way have been all over the news: Fishermen have caught marlins off the west coast where it is usually too cold for them to survive; salmon are missing from Bristol Bay; and the Atlantic, usually riddled by hurricanes and storms, has been calm while the Pacific has already been hit by more than a dozen.

El Niño was named by Peruvian fishermen who first noticed the warm ocean currents of this phenomenon. They named it after the baby boy Jesus because its arrival coincided with the Christmas season. Scientists today refer to it as ENSO, or El Niño-Southern Oscillation. During El Niño times, trade winds that usually push warm water westward to Indonesia weaken. The warm ocean water instead washes through the Pacific eastward to South America and raises the surface ocean temperature. According to an article in US News and World Report, that zone of warm water is already bigger than the continental United States.

ENSO affects the atmosphere as well, creating tropical thunderstorms fueled by the humid air over the oceans. The thunderstorms affect jet stream winds, which in turn affect weather patterns all over the world. In the United States, this means that California and the Southwest will likely experience more rainfall than average while the Pacific Northwest will receive less rain and warmer winter temperatures.

According to the Joint Institute for the Study of Atmosphere and Oceans at the University of Washington, the effects of ENSO on rainfall are unpredictable. Some years bring more rain while others bring less. However, the effects on snowpack are consistent with lower-than-average snowpack beginning in February and amplifying as the winter season progresses.

Nathan Mantua, a research scientist for the University of Washington Department of Atmospheric Sciences, said the warmer-than-average temperatures from December through May have a small impact on the average amount of rain or snow we get. "Because of the warmer temperatures, however, there is a strong tendency for reduced snowpack at the more marginal snow elevations, which I generally put in the 2,500 to 4,000 foot elevation band," he said.

Everyone seems to agree that El Niño is unpredictable and could go either way. Doug Campbell, president of the Northwest Ski Association, said there is no way to tell exactly how the season will turn out. "The 1982-83 season affected us and snow was light," he said. "But it is already snowing now in October. It is something nobody can predict. You just have to go along and play it by ear."

–Kim Vincent
FOUL TERRITORY

Matt Finlinson takes us out to the ballpark with Mariner ballgirl Lindsey Ferris.
In an instant, the batter uncoils and rips turf. With the ball safely in her mitt, Ferris pivots to roar of the crowd wills the crafty hurler to make this was the playoffs, return to her perch in foul territory. would she hand off the pressure-packed was ending after this er a nasty slider to the plate. The eardrum-rattling 5D,0DD frenzied fans wait for the pitcher to deliv­ a hard ground ball foul down the right field line. One kid asks. "Give me the ball!" another fan yells. "Hey ballgirl, can I have the ball?" "Throw it up here!" a fan exclaims. One brief decision brought Ferris onto play, fans at sports bars across the nation seat down the right field line during the seventh friends saw the play, her Western classmates saw the same thing," Ferris contended. "At the time, it was a decision directed toward the
but at the time it seemed like the right thing to do."

at a ballgirl tryout inside the dome. Even though she stopped playing softball in third grade, and up until the tryout her experience amounted to backyard games of catch with her brother, her stress level was minimal on the field. Out of the possible 175 applicants for the job, Ferris became one of the privileged 12 girls to make the cut.

"It wasn't that bad even though there was like 50 or 60 people there. The tryout was supposed to be professional, but it was really just 50 girls trying to catch baseballs and not look like idiots in the process," Ferris said, chuckling. "The only problem was that in the Kingdome, if you missed a ball, it went all the way to the wall. Some girls would end up in line after chasing a ball down for 15 minutes. It was definitely a good motive for not missing the ball."

After surviving the tryout, Ferris prepared for life in the dome. Although snagging ground balls off the turf is an integral part of the ballgirl occupation, it pales in comparison to the most challenging part of being a ballgirl: dealing with the fans.

**The Fans**
Anyone who has braved the gray pile of concrete known as the Kingdome knows that the fans make the major league baseball experience. Maniacs dressed head-to-toe in team apparel shout obscenities as colorful as their Mariner foam fingers. For Ferris, it's the fans that bring the challenge and interest to the ballpark. Their craziness escalates when a foul ball is in their vicinity.

"It amazes me to see what people will do for a foul ball," she said grinning from ear to ear. "I've seen people dive over seats. I even saw two old men pushing and shoving each other just to get a ball. I almost wanted to tell them to just go to the store and buy a ball. It was ridiculous."

In the desperate quest for the foul ball, fans push the limits of sanity. A simple glove no longer suffices for die-hards as a means to lasso a ball off the bat of one of their diamond heroes. These navy and marine-blue clad fans break out the toolboxes and hardware in an effort to transcend the walls keeping them off the playing surface. The foul ball equals a golden nugget for souvenir-hungry fanatics.

"Fans have the greatest contraptions," she said. "I've seen people come to batting practice with these mouse cages attached to fishing line trying to scoop up balls in the outfield."

Although adult fan ingenuity can't be questioned, the kids constantly challenge Ferris' process of distributing the balls that roll into foul territory. Many kids get creative in search of a souvenir. When standard methods fail, youngsters get desperate.

"This one kid asked me for a ball when I obviously didn't have one to give him. After I explained that I didn't have one, he comes back with, 'Can you get me some turf? How about cutting me out some turf?' It cracks me up how creative these kids get. If I would have had a ball, I would have given him it just for being funny."

**The Drawbacks**
Finding a downside to being paid to watch baseball from the field is a tough task. But like in every job, small cracks do appear in the armor of Ferris' dream job on the diamond.
"I have to be honest. It does get bad when you're sitting out there during the game and you cannot use the restroom," Ferris shrugged. "You only have about two minutes to a minute and a half to sprint in and use the bathroom. And the thing is, everyone knows where the ballgirl is going. You are just stuck out there, and of course the game goes into extra innings when you really have to go.

And if the 100-meter dash to the toilet isn't a drawback, the flesh-seeking line drive definitely qualifies. At certain times, the Mariners navigational logo on the ballgirl uniform transforms into a readily accessible target.

"I got hit by a line drive in the shoulder once," Ferris says as if the pain has suddenly returned from the distant past. "I was talking to some fans as usual, and the ball came right at me on the fly. I didn't have time to react, and it smacked me right into the shoulder deflecting into left field. That one left a pretty good-sized welt."

"The Moose's costume limits the vision of the guy behind the mask, and ballgirls are needed to watch for any blindside approaches from crazed fans."

"Bat night was a problem too, because it's so wild kids can be just as dangerous and equally as hard to fend off. Kids can't wait to get a hold of fans, the exciter, the one who nightly take the turf by storm. For Ferris, it's being in the presence of all that encompasses Seattle Mariner baseball which provides the biggest rush."

"It's truly incredible to look up and see thousands and thousands of camera flashes. During those games, the whole aura of a packed Kingdome is just awesome," Ferris said.

A Good Perspective

Holding a job many people would line up around the corner for is not lost on Ferris. She and the nine other ballgirls in the Diamond Girls pro-

"It's not the game of baseball I like. It's the people, the fans, the excitement and the energy of game."

I didn't have time to react, and it smacked me right in the shoulder deflecting into left field. That one left a pretty good-sized welt."

Guarding the Moose

In addition to using important appendages to deflect heat-seeking missiles off the bats of Ken Griffey Jr. and Edgar Martinez, the ballgirl also serves as a secret service agent for the Mariner mascot, the lovable Mariner Moose. The Moose battery isn't confined to intoxicated visitors from the Great White North. Packs of wild kids can be just as dangerous and equally as hard to fend off. Kids can't wait to get a hold of an exposed antler.

The Players

Everybody has seen the pitchers in the bullpen. They occupy the bench in foul territory scratching seemingly holds the dream job. Some might wonder what it is like to rub shoulders with the likes of Ken Griffey Jr., Alex Rodriguez and the unending list of stars who nightly take the turf by storm. Donning the Mariners' uniform might get some people's adrenaline flowing. For Ferris, it's being in the presence of all that encompasses Seattle Mariner baseball which provides the biggest rush."

"It's the game of baseball I like. It's the people, the fans, the excitement and the energy of the game," Ferris said. "I love the atmosphere. I like being on the field. Although you really aren't
Short-sleeved polo shirts, windbreakers, shoes, clubs, gloves and golf balls adorn the walls in the pro shop at the Lake Padden Golf Course. Business is booming.

"Golf is cool now," said Kene Bensel, head golf professional at Lake Padden. "When I started in golf, it was kind of for nerds. Now it's reached the big time.'*

"The big time" translates to the rise of 18 different courses available to golfers in Whatcom County. In fact, a few years ago Whatcom County had the most golf courses per capita in the United States.

The new golf courses in the market forced the city-owned Lake Padden into a $2.5 million, seven-year course improvement plan in 1990 in order to stay competitive.

"They built the golf course for $550,000. That's what they spend per hole these days," Bensel said. "These improvements will help us keep pace with all the new golf courses in the county.'

The oldest course in the region is the Bellingham Golf and Country Club, which opened in 1912. It's one of three private golf courses in the area.

The differences between public courses and private courses is apparent upon entering the country club. Patrons are met in front by the fashion police, who exercise their power with a "no jeans beyond this point" sign. Adherence to the dress code permits a visit to the luxurious dining room where white tablecloths, scarlet napkins and shiny utensils decorate the ballroom-sized tables. A big-screen TV, a bar, and an elevated, panoramic view of the golf course are the big perks of the country club.

Kim Rosier, general manager of the Bellingham Golf and Country Club, said a private course has a totally different philosophy to operation because the members actually own the course. Members pay a $2,500 initiation fee and then buy a golfing certificate from an outgoing member for $2,000 to $3,000. Members pay monthly dues of $135 ($190 for couples) to finance the day-to-day operations of the course and clubhouse.

Membership is limited to 500 people to ensure fast rounds and smooth play and reduce the need for reservations.

North Bellingham Golf Course opened in July 1995, and is the newest course to vie for business. It's a true Scottish links-style golf course, which means fewer trees and more sand and water traps than the traditional design.

The price tag for construction is estimated at $7 million. Bill Chrysler, head professional at North Bellingham, said that Whatcom County was chosen as the site of the course because of the speculation of growth in the region. He points out that the population of the county isn't huge, but close proximity to Vancouver and Seattle keeps business up.

Chrysler said the large number of golf courses in the county both helps and hurts business.

"We're not as busy as we'd be if we were the only course in Whatcom County. But what it does offer is a variety of big-name designs, traditional designs and beginner 9-hole courses," Chrysler said.

It's the variety and expansion that has put the Whatcom County golf community on the map and assures a prosperous future for the sport.

Or, as Chrysler simply said, "It affords golfers good golf."

—Jonathan Vann
It was a dark, Indian summer night, and I was lost. Turmoil and longing consumed me as I searched for my destination. It was late, getting later, and I was unfamiliar with Portland. It seemed as though I was driving in circles. "Should I give up?" I wondered.

Just when I thought all hope was lost, I saw it. A tall rectangle of heavenly glow shone out onto the narrow street. I went to the light. As I stood before the door, I hesitated to go in, but I looked up and saw His glorious, side-burned face, and I knew I was home. So I proceeded up the steep, brown carpeted stairs, feeling anxious within the confinement of the surrounding walls.

Would I find what I was looking for when I reached the top? Would all of my prayers be answered?

At the end of my climb, I opened the glass door with a heavy pull and was greeted with the loud, violent sounds of six gothic and spike-dressed teens barking ferociously at me. This was definitely unlike any church I'd ever been to before. But what did I expect? This was, after all, the 24-hour Church of Elvis.
Your Friend, Stephanie G. Pierce

"Artist to the Stars"
What is it they say? One person's trash is another person's treasure? Nowhere else is this saying more true. Aside from the alarmingly scary teens, the scene on the other side of the door was a glitzy wonderland of toys and cheesy, retro paraphernalia. Every inch of everything in view was covered with things from childhood. Smurf dolls, Barbie dolls, Donnie and Marie Osmond album covers and busts of Elvis lined the tables and shelves in the midst of glitter and posters with fake Mormon scripture. The small, glitter-enclosed space poured out into a narrow hallway that wrapped around a corner of further decoration. And in the middle of it all was a short, brown-
haired adrenaline shot named Stephanie G. Pierce.

She yelled at my companion and me to introduce ourselves and informed us that we were either very late for the tour she was giving or very early for the next one. We came in at the beginning of ‘Let’s Make a Deal,’ Church of Elvis style.

Looking past the spiked scalp of one teen, I saw two young girls and their adult counterparts standing close by. The two girls were the lucky contestants who had to choose between door one, door two, door three or the box in the Barbie house makeshift gameshow set. With the encouraging screams of the crowd, the two girls opted to choose the glittery box.

In her fast-paced, high-pitched, gameshow fluctuating voice, Pierce revealed what the girls missed by not picking each door.

‘This is going to be painful, but don’t worry girls, there is a built-in support group of women here that can help you through this painful time,’ she exclaimed dramatically as she revealed the toy jewels young girls across America have used to play dress-up for years. ‘Now brace yourselves. Behind door number two is ... Glamour Jewelry! A bit dusty, but still glamorous.’

The girls, all of maybe 12, played along with wide eyes, not knowing what to make of the whirlwind that is Pierce.

‘Okay. You’ve seen what is behind all of the doors. You know what fabulous things you missed, but don’t worry because this time and this time only, I’m prepared to make you a deal,’ Pierce said quickly.

‘I am prepared to offer you all of the door prizes plus something extra, whatever tidbit that may be, but I’m not going to tell you what that may be because that is part of the surprise—not because I don’t know what that is because believe you me, there are actually lots of people who decide to not choose the box no matter what the audience tells them,’ she said in one breath. ‘Sooo you can choose the doors, or the box. Which will it be? Audience! What do you think?’

The girls chose the box, and after a short explanation of what ‘theoretical’ means, they won a prize of (Pierce counted the number of people in the room) a trip to San Francisco for 12 and then handed them each a pair of fake teeth for playing.

At the end of the tour, Austin, Jason, Julie, Chris, Tim and Dustin (the Goth kids), cleared out of the Church of Elvis to roam the Portland streets before going to ‘The Rocky Horror Picture Show.’ Austin and Jason, from Toutle, Wash., were in Portland to visit their companions and to celebrate National Coming Out Day. Their friends told them that they had...
the Church of Elvis for 12 years. The Ankeney Street location, between Broadway and Park near Portland's Chinatown, is her third store. She moved to this location to "start new with cheaper rent."

Pierce began the 24-hour Church of Elvis (which is actually only open about 24 hours a week right now) so she could express herself for a living.

"It's a performance art," she said. "My mom blames herself for not letting me decorate my room when I was little."

In fact, the idea for the church came to Pierce when she was a young girl in Milwaukee. "When I was a Brownie or a Girl Scout, we toured the Wonderbread factory and Schlitz Beer factory, and I always liked the tour guides," she recalled in a much slower, more normal tone. "I thought I would like to be a tour guide."

"We also traveled a lot when I was a kid, and I remember going places like Carlsbad Caverns with my family and just digging the souvenir stores. I thought it would be cool to work in one of those places."

And now she does. At the end of her 20-minute tour, Stephanie tries to "guilt" her audience into buying souvenirs from the church. Her tours are free so the revenue from the 24-hour Church of Elvis t-shirts, aprons, checkbook covers, key chains, Elvis x-rays ("from when Elvis tried to join the FBI in 1969") and Elvis driver's licenses ("cops love them") keep her dream going.

It took Pierce a while to realize her dream though. After 10 years of waitressing while attending college off and on, she was a lawyer for three years. Realizing that lawyering was "no fun" and she "didn't want to wear pantyhose," she worked on a cruise ship until she was injured on the job. At home, with nothing to do, she came up with the idea of decorating an office space the way she decorated her home and giving tours of the kitschy art her friends had always enjoyed to see the "Church of Elvis lady" while they were in town. "I loved it. She was weird and hella cool," Austin said with wide eyes, looking a lot like Robert Smith from the Cure, sans the red lipstick. "I haven't seen that much charisma since David Koresh," Tim added.

Pierce, known to many as the "Church of Elvis lady," is the self-proclaimed celebrity spokesmodel and minister, who has been running the Church of Elvis for 12 years. The Ankeney Street location, between Broadway and Park near Portland's Chinatown, is her third store. She moved to this location to 'start new with cheaper rent.'

As minister, Pierce also offers many thought-provoking questions for her congregation to ponder. As she passes around a tortilla chip with the natural image of Elvis on it, she asks, "If you only have one hand, can you clap? If a tree falls in the woods and no one is around to hear it, does it really make a sound? If you eat a tortilla chip with the image of Elvis on it, are you eating Elvis ... or God?"

Also as minister, Pierce performs wedding ceremonies. For $25 you can partake in the legal wedding which includes, as noted on the official Church of Elvis web site, www.churchof Elvis.com, "the wedding march, fashion twirl, testimonial time, inspirational message, touching legalization of the vows, first dance and traditional sidewalk parade. With a little preparation and an extra $25, Elvis (an impersonator, of course) can sing at these ceremonies.

Not ready for the ultimate commitment? Pierce also performs "cheap, not legal" weddings for $5. This ceremony includes "wedding rings, marriage certificate, use of bridal veil and trip around the block with 'just married' sign and cans." For an extra $2.50 you can get a Polaroid of the blessed event.

At the end of the tour, after the Goth kids cleared out, Jennifer and Loren, a Portland couple, paid $5 for the cheap, not legal wedding, dressed in the traditional bridal headdress of shower curtain rings and electrical chords and wedded. After the exchange of the plastic wedding rings, Pierce, dressed in a sparkling white shawl, waved her silver wand and instructed the couple and the witnesses to click their heels together and say "There is no place like home" over and over.

"If it can't be tragic and spectacular at the same time, why bother?" Pierce asked, citing one of the church's many mottoes.

I pondered this question as I stepped out of the light and back into the dark of the warm night. Fiona, one of the women I saw at the church that night, is originally from Australia. She told me that she thought the church provided her with an interesting look into American culture.

"Oh God," I thought. "Maybe this is where the tragedy lies."

But as I tried to find my way out of Portland (lost again), I realized that I no longer had inner turmoil or longing. My prayers were answered because I found something spectacular that night.

Thus, the Church of Elvis was born as a place of "art for the smart." Pierce even became an ordained minister of the Creative Art denomination.

Minister Pierce's sermons are in her tours. At one point she shows her audience a picture of James, the number-one fan of the 24-hour Church of Elvis. The picture is of James' arm on which he has tattooed the church's logo. Of course, she told us, James is a former disgruntled postal-worker with an affection for knives and Steffi Graf.

"Don't be like James," she warned.

Not forgetting who the church is named after, Minister Pierce forces her disciples to pay homage to the King by bowing to an Elvis altar. Surrounding the altar is a plethora of Elvis paraphernalia including an unfinished quilt of the sideburned one, a picture reminiscent of Andy Warhol titled, 'The Three Faces of Elvis,' and a velvet Elvis portrait.

As minister, Pierce also offers many thought-provoking questions for her congregation to ponder. As she passes around a tortilla chip with the natural image of Elvis on it, she asks, "If you only have one hand, can you clap? If a tree falls in the woods and no one is around to hear it, does it really make a sound? If you eat a tortilla chip with the image of Elvis on it, are you eating Elvis ... or God?"

Also as minister, Pierce performs wedding ceremonies. For $25 you can partake in the legal wedding which includes, as noted on the official Church of Elvis web site, www.churchof Elvis.com, "the wedding march, fashion twirl, testimonial time, inspirational message, touching legalization of the vows, first dance and traditional sidewalk parade. With a little preparation and an extra $25, Elvis (an impersonator, of course) can sing at these ceremonies.

Not ready for the ultimate commitment? Pierce also performs "cheap, not legal" weddings for $5. This ceremony includes "wedding rings, marriage certificate, use of bridal veil and trip around the block with 'just married' sign and cans." For an extra $2.50 you can get a Polaroid of the blessed event.

At the end of the tour, after the Goth kids cleared out, Jennifer and Loren, a Portland couple, paid $5 for the cheap, not legal wedding, dressed in the traditional bridal headdress of shower curtain rings and electrical chords and wedded. After the exchange of the plastic wedding rings, Pierce, dressed in a sparkling white shawl, waved her silver wand and instructed the couple and the witnesses to click their heels together and say "There is no place like home" over and over.

"If it can't be tragic and spectacular at the same time, why bother?" Pierce asked, citing one of the church's many mottoes.

I pondered this question as I stepped out of the light and back into the dark of the warm night. Fiona, one of the women I saw at the church that night, is originally from Australia. She told me that she thought the church provided her with an interesting look into American culture.

"Oh God," I thought. "Maybe this is where the tragedy lies."

But as I tried to find my way out of Portland (lost again), I realized that I no longer had inner turmoil or longing. My prayers were answered because I found something spectacular that night.
a Declaration of Independents

*Enter hysterical ivory tower liberal*

Anyone who has picked up an alternative publication has read how media moguls are crippling our ability to get useful information from the communications sources they own. Those who haven’t should suffer through a brief overview of the issues before we enter the dark flickering realm of Bellingham cinema.
What this means to us, the media consumers, is that useful information is being eroded and manipulated by these mingled corporate interests. Westinghouse's nuclear plants will not be criticized on "60 Minutes" and ABC will not expose Mickey-doll sweatshops in Asia.

Mergers and chains have the ability to crush the diversity of ideas we depend on to make educated decisions. The Gannett-owned Bellingham Herald and its hand-off approach to Georgia Pacific are a local example.

Another hazard of mergers is the sexy-sounding miracle of "vertical integration." The simplest translation—to own everything. Video stores, book publishers, theaters, newspapers, radio and TV stations and cable companies all have been sucked into the tentacles of mergers without our knowing it.

What we can do is prospect into the future of merger mania and show how the next phase could impact our community on a smaller level. By looking at the state of Bellingham cinema we can examine how these mergers might threaten our choice in films and rob us of yet another form of relevant communication.

"Art Nordbrock enters, stage center spotlight"

Art Nordbrock, a 31-year-old Western dropout, has a vision for the future of Bellingham cinema. "My aspirations are pretty humble about it," he said. "My goal is that it become a venue for people who love good film. And I'm confident that there are enough of those people in Bellingham to justify the existence of a place like this."

Nordbrock is referring to his Grand Bellingham Cinema, located at 141B Cornwall Ave. downtown Bellingham.

Open since June, his 98-seat theater, despite the cosmetic warts, represents this city's only independently-owned, independent cinema that plays independent films.

"Enter sober history buff, gripping podium nervously"

The cinema industry is the end result of what started years ago in some chain-smoking scriptwriter's mind. We all know the "movie" part of the movie industry, but much more is to be considered when sitting in those velvet iron maidens so ambitiously called seats.

The three stages in a film's life are production, distribution and exhibition. In 1948, the Supreme Court ruled in United States v. Paramount Pictures that companies that controlled both the production and exhibition of a film created a monopoly over first-run movies. The five major studios at the time owned only 17 percent of the theaters, but this was sufficient to shut out the independent productions they wanted to show.

Another major event in film history was the 1952 Supreme Court decision in Hurston v. Wilson, which announced that movies were "a significant medium for the communication of ideas," and that films had the ability "to entertain as well as to inform," The effect of this decision was to give First Amendment protection to film.

"Enter Act III Communications, freshly merged and glowing"

Almost 50 years after those court decisions, we are poised to make monopolies in the film industry again. Those monopolies will dictate what the First Amendment protection of their industry is worth at the box office.

Act III Communications owned 730 screens in seven states from Alaska to Texas. This October, Act III sold its chain to Kohlburg Kravis Roberts and Co. (KKR) for $650 million. KKR, which gained much of its notoriety from the record-breaking $25 billion purchase of RJR Nabisco, already owns a smattering of media interests and is rumored to be eyeing the 2,300 screens owned by United Artists Theater Circuit.

Clifton Robbins, a KKR partner, was quoted in the Bellingham Herald as saying, "The motion picture exhibition industry is clearly entering a period of consolidation that KKR..."
"We happen to own the theaters here, but it doesn't make it a monopoly."

—John Stanovich

believes represents an excellent opportunity. I would expect that Act III is only the first of our investments in this industry. KKR now owns all 15 of Act III's Bellingham screens.

"Re-enter a very tired Art Nordbrock"

Nordbrock is sitting outside his theater nursing a hand-rolled cigarette and a cup of bean. He has just started a movie about Flamenco dancers and is now waiting for the film to growl its way through the guts of his 1947 projector. All 13,000 feet of it. This gives him ample time to think about the daunting power of his nearest competitor, Act III.

"Theater chains have been in court on dozens of occasions for moving into communities the size of Bellingham and targeting pre-existing theaters" he said. "They can just change their programming specifically to bury other cinemas. It's conjecture, but I feel they're picking up films just because they know I'm here."

By looking at the scheduling of Act III's Sehome Cinemas, which has shown 'indie' films the last four years, Nordbrock might have reason to be nervous. Prior to The Grand's arrival, Sehome had a 13-week fixation with 'The English Patient' and would run other large independent films during most months. Now Sehome seems more committed to the genre and has even added "Look for other independent and foreign films to show here soon!" in its recorded message.

Nordbrock also figured out they have lost money on some of their movie selections by looking at the published box office receipts in this market.

"Their smallest theater is twice the size of mine," he said, "so they can't be happy about locking up a screen with those kinds of numbers."

Proving the market has no access has been a problem in past court cases. Monopolies have to be absolute for a judge to swing the hammer on a theater chain. That doesn't seem to be happening, but the ground is ripe for mega mergers to bloom, and further de-regulation could ensure that true monopolies in film occur.

"Enter Pat Fisher, sitting in Act III's Portland, Ore., headquarters"

Like Nordbrock, Pat Fischer is also a 31-year-old Western dropout. As the booker for Bellingham's Act III screens, and screens up through Alaska, Fisher coordinates which films go to which theaters. He is a little defensive about some of Nordbrock's concerns. "It's not like The Grand existed all this time and we suddenly started eating their lunch," he said. "I view it as providing a service, as well, by bringing in movies that otherwise might miss Bellingham."

Fisher also defends showing movies that lose money. "If you have a store, you carry a variety of products. You can't always know what will sell. We have frequent 'bombs,' but that happens with more commercial films too," he said.

The KKR buyout may change the climate of Act III's film selections, but Fisher would have little to say about it. KKR executives in New York could make profit margins the only priority of their new acquisition in Bellingham, and that may squeeze out the independents so that cash cows from Hollywood can fill the theater seats.

The possibility would not surprise Fisher, who has had his problems keeping independent films here already. "Quite frankly," he said, "it would be more convenient to not play these films. I mean we could probably make more money running 'Home Alone XIII' for a couple of months."

For the time being, however, Fisher has no plans to walk away from his commitment of bringing independent films to Sehome Cinema.

"Enter the voice of an all-seeing being"

In 1964, before Nordbrock even existed, John Stanovich was a doorman for Mt. Baker Theatre. Since then, Stanovich has worked in almost every incarnation of Bellingham theater and is now the manager of Act III's flagship at Bells Fair.

Stanovich's Bells Fair office looks very similar to Nordbrock's. Loose paperwork is sorted using the "level empty surface" method of filing.
A sturdy but inexpensive desk appears to have the most gravity in the room. Everything else has been mashed against the wall like it is trying to escape the orbit of this desk.

Stanovich is puzzled by Nordbrock’s Act III angst.

“I mean we happen to own the theaters here but that doesn’t make it a monopoly,” he said. “They are different markets, and I just don’t see that they are hurting each other. In fact, he has picked up some films that we dropped so, in a way, we are helping him by giving the show some previous exposure.”

Stanovich has lived through various buyouts in Bellingham cinema, seeing theaters go from SRD to Cineplex Odeon to the current mutation of KKR/Act III. The decision to play movies is getting farther away from him with each evolution, unlike the old days when most theaters were independent.

“If a movie isn’t making money we’re not going to play a loser forever and tie up a house with it,” he said. “These are decisions made in the home office, the manager has nothing to do with it.”

*Enter Norbrock, in shining armor, riding a very small white horse*

Nordbrock has a passion for indie films, which is reflected in his blatan dislike for the corporate integration of independent producers and distributors happening throughout the industry.

“The big trend is to have large media corporations buy out the independent distributors,” he said. “The problem is that the films quickly become commodified and watered down, making them more homogenized for the masses.”

Time Warner’s buyout of New Line’s independent distribution and Universal Studios slurping up of Cineplex Odeon and indie distributor Gramercy are some of the demonstrations that independent cinema is becoming an endangered species.

“People don’t realize how unique an independent, first run theater is,” Nordbrock said. “This is a nearly extinct icon, a cinema that is showing new films that is based, owned, and operated in Bellingham. These types of theaters just aren’t around in towns this size.”

The chain theaters offer us a hermetically sealed glass booth, complete with a low-fi speaker and microphone system, to protect us from any accidental contact with their ticket dispersal employees. The Grand only has Nordbrock, taking tickets, selling the popcorn, starting the film, and ready to hear our opinions after the show. Unlike a multi-billion dollar buyout company in New York, Nordbrock is completely exposed to the elements of the community around him. He is “unchained,” as the indies like to say.

*Enter the full cast of characters for a rousing finale*

The stance of KKR is strictly “no comment” from here to New York. Nobody there can say a word about its future plans. Fisher is not concerned about his job status, however, and since every theater needs a good manager, Stanovich should continue his 33-year streak with no worries.

Nordbrock, on the other hand, is being slayed by financial woes. The surge of college hipsters that were supposed to overwhelm his theater has not materialized and he has been forced to seek a partner, or a forgetful millionaire, who could lighten his burden.

The reel is still rolling on the Bellingham cinema saga. Stanovich plans to go to The Grand someday to catch a flick and Fisher said, “I sincerely wish him all the best.”

Nordbrock has a more punk rock, and less printable, sentiment for KKR but he directs his anger toward the multi-tentacled corporations rather than to the individuals within them.

The market is still broad enough that we are not yet force fed the latest Hollywood tripe, but the day seems sure to come when mergers control every facet of the industry again. Perhaps the only way to combat the trend is to vigorously inhale independent sources of information so we can at least remember what’s missing before it’s gone.

“They can just change their programming specifically to bury other cinemas.”

—Art Nordbrock
The nebulous expanse of electronic music from Depeche Mode to Chemical Brothers has its own faction of artists on our home turf. Christopher Ames jacks into the local circuit.

At low levels, electricity can cause a pleasant, ticklish feeling. Higher voltages can cause muscles to move uncontrollably. At still higher levels, electricity can lead to pain and injury. Or, made into music, electricity can make you dance.

My skin tingles in response to the current escaping into the darkened atmosphere of the studio. A multitude of glowing boxes and keyboards shine from their cluster around the computer monitor which provides the only light in the room, not counting the sickly sunlight managing to squeeze around the dusty blinds.

A dark figure behind the shroud of a mixing board jiggles a cable that has loosened and quickly reinserts it. The amp belches out a static-filled whump, sending the hairs on my arms into an impromptu tango. Then the room settles back into the subconscious hum of dormant sonic power. The swords that literally cover the walls would probably gleam and sparkle if any amount of light was allowed in the room. Instead, they dully glow with the LED light from the synthesizers. Several racks of boxes, technically called sound modules, with names like 'Drbif' and 'Pro-One 1260,' sit amidst arachnid-like tangles of speaker cable and cable synthesizer-computer interface wires. Leaning against one such rack is an odd instrument, an electric fuzz-wah dulcimer.

Taking in the picture as a whole—the swords, bizarre artwork, dulcimer, the chaotic mess and a sniff of the nimbus clouds of incense...
Josh Matheson of Essene at his home recording studio in Whatcom County.

key strokes save to the computer the minor change he just made on the track's bassline.

"It's a composite of dance music, rock and various ethnic music. Somewhere between where it all comes together... I'm searching for something entirely new in music," he explains.

Although names like Sound Mob, MC Sunshine and Philosopher Stone are familiar to few listeners, they are a part of Matheson's history of electronic music making that dates back to 1989, when Matheson was already progressing from the technopop of Sound Mob to the darker, gothic flavor...
MC Sunshine, an industrial band. Matheson began his career before high school, playing around in the studio his father put together for his own band years before.

During MC Sunshine's post high school life span, the band released a demo tape that circulated around the local music scene. The music was dark, brooding. They melded discordant elements such as echoing, feedback guitar, a vintage Hammond organ, haunting vocals and sparse metallic beats with an overall attitude of lovingly gothic sorrow.

Although it's not the kind of music most people play when cleaning the house, the tape caught the attention of local radio station KISM and earned Matheson a guest appearance on the station's local music show.

MC Sunshine played only a handful of shows, most in the Seattle area. Over the past summer, his partner on MC Dunshine left the band while the two were in the midst of changing to Philosopher Stone.

Now Matheson is on his own again with Essene, which he said is the latest step of his musical evolution. Philosopher Stone, his last band, was a mix of gothic industrial and techno dance. Now, Philosopher Stone abandoned, he has moved on to Essene.

"The Essenes were a group of Jewish mystics that lived in the desert waiting for the end of the world," Matheson explained while pulling up on the computer an alternate mix to the previous song.

Unfortunately, waiting for the end of the world may be a better bet than waiting for Bellingham to be a receptive climate for its local electronic talent.

Still, for better or worse, few locals haul samplers and drum machines about on bikes and skateboards to practice in a friend's basement. Even in Bellingham, a handful of bands, artists and DJs are tweaking the knobs of third-hand synthesizers and saving pennies for new computer soundcards.

Their numbers do not match those of the local garage band scene, but enough exist to make a difference.

Still, Bellingham music lovers just don't see them playing.

Matheson has attempted to put together a show with several local electronic bands a few times in the last year, but it has never worked out.

"I wish we could get together some sort of collective," he said, "to put on shows on our own. For electronic music [in Bellingham] it's quite hard to get a gig at a bar. It's not really beer-drinking music."

A.J. Razor of the Bellingham industrial band Lateral Tension partly disagrees.

"It's not tough to get a gig here," Razor said. "We've been invited to play 'fetish nights' at the 3B Tavern."

Lateral Tension formed a year ago when Razor, as vocalist and songwriter, was joined by programmer Sean Lankhar. Percussionist Malochi was added to help round out the band.

Using a couple of computers and synthesizers, Lateral Tension has crafted a hybrid of industrial vocals and attitudes with deep, thumping beats of techno. Often called "industrial dance," this genre has been associated with the likes of Skinny Puppy and Frontline Assembly, two bands which also rank high on Razor's list of influences.

"We blend together techno and industrial, give it a dance edge. We're intense," Razor said. "You can dance around the mosh pit."

Despite the invitation to play in town, Lateral Tension hasn't played a show here.

"I made a decision not to play a gig in Bellingham," Razor continued. "I don't think there is a lot of people into that scene."

Like Matheson, Razor believes that the beer-drinking crowd at most Bellingham bars offering live music would not be receptive to their music.

Lateral Tension has enjoyed some success and popularity via their independent debut album, "Pressure Device," the band released in October. The band...
also received exposure through KUGS DJ Jezebel who hosts a weekly industrial and gothic program, "Dark Entries." Razor and Lateral Tension, unlike other bands and artists who feel that success is corrupting, seek to push the band and to hook up with a recording label in the near future. "We're putting our lives behind it now." But, as Lateral Tension continues to cohere and improve as a band, Bellingham may not get to enjoy their fruition. The lack of a real outlet for their music and a ready fan base is frustrating for Razor. "If you really want to start getting serious about music, Bellingham is the wrong place," he said. "The town seems to be going backwards. It doesn't seem like there's huge gatherings of people interested in our kind of art. It's weird because Bellingham's location, between Seattle and Vancouver--two big cities for industrial music--you would think that we'd have that kind of interest here too."

Almost a second thought revelation, Razor suggested an idea that could help local electrodes help themselves. "There's enough bands around here. We should form like a collective to put the music out there for people to hear," Razor said.

October was an exceptional month for electronic music in Bellingham. Lateral Tension released its album, the Wednesday night techno show, Abducted, began at the Cosmos Cafe, and a relatively major tour came to Western. Featuring New York's DJ Spooky and England's Scanner, the Abstract Transmissions Tour attracted large crowds and good reviews across the country and up the West Coast. Almost as a validation of Razor's and Matheson's belief in a local electronic music scene, the tour enticed a full audience to the Viking Union.

Especially encouraging was the fact that on this stop, Saul Stokes, Western student and electronic musician, played the opener. Stokes is something of an oddity in the Bellingham scene. KUGS FM team member Kris Moon said Stokes is the only artist to have released an album. His ambient CD, "Washed in Mercury," has received positive reviews from publications like the Western Front.

Further setting himself apart, Stokes has skirted the cost issue that has held many musicians back. Instead of using a sound module like Matheson's $700 Orbit, Stokes built all of his own synthesizers. Not only has it saved him money, building his own has afforded him unmatched creativity.

Bellingham techno fans at the V.U. Lounge Abstract Transmissions show appreciated Stokes' distinctive style. Few danced, but Stokes does not pretend to play dance club music. The sparse, tribal beats barely poked from beneath the sonic blanket he laid over them. Most sat, or even laid on the floor, and closed their eyes, moved slightly to the rhythm and let the warm ambience wash over them.

"It's kind of like it's so intense that it goes over the border," Stokes explained, describing his music. "It's chaos that comes together."

"I'm trying to stand for something different," Stokes said. "I would like to see Pacific Northwest electronic music creating something that's different. ...what we need is some really cool bandwagon for people to attach to to help things move along."

Moon, also a producer and longtime house-party DJ in Bellingham, could bring the push Stokes is lacking for. In his third year of spinning music in Bellingham, preferrably electronic, Moon knows firsthand the difficulties beginning DJs and artists encounter when venturing into the local music scene. Moon actively supports the idea of a collective that many others, like Razor and Matheson, are calling for in Bellingham. "I see myself as a catalyst for change," Moon said. "Most evident of his commitment to musical progression is Moon's most public project, Abducted, which began early last October at the Cosmos Cafe. The hard-techno and jungle drum 'n' bass served up by Moon and other DJs such as Nerve Clinic have received a warm welcome so far. "We're trying to shift emphasis to a club--a group of people who are into the same scene," Moon said. "It's all about bringing new things to the Ham."

For example, when Moon plays a party, he supplies the turntables whereas others kick in the amp, speakers and mixer. They play at a friend's house and occasionally ask for a few bucks to cover costs but not to profit. Not only is Moon spinning technic, but he is also making it with help from others. Moon works with DJ Rama from KUGS in Rama's home recording studio. "I produce hard-techno," Moon said. "I write a new track a week."

Due mainly to financial reasons; Moon has yet to release a record. "That's the real limiting thing--money," he said. "It's hard to get people to share your vision and share it for dirt cheap."

Moon sees Stokes inevitable departure from the local scene (after graduates this year) as a substantial loss. "I'm going to try to learn everything I can from him before he leaves," he said. As Moon puts it, Bellingham is still very much "virgin territory" for electronic music. But it is also a scene in transition.

Back in Matheson's studio, Josh makes another small tweak to his third year of spinning music in Bellingham, preferrably electronic, Moon knows firsthand the difficulties beginning DJs and artists encounter when venturing into the local music scene. Moon actively supports the idea of a collective that many others, like Razor and Matheson, are calling for in Bellingham. "I see myself as a catalyst for change," Moon said. "Most evident of his commitment to musical progression is Moon's most public project, Abducted, which began early last October at the Cosmos Cafe. The hard-techno and jungle drum 'n' bass served up by Moon and other DJs such as Nerve Clinic have received a warm welcome so far. "We're trying to shift emphasis to a club--a group of people who are into the same scene," Moon said. "It's all about bringing new things to the Ham."

For example, when Moon plays a party, he supplies the turntables whereas others kick in the amp, speakers and mixer. They play at a friend's house and occasionally ask for a few bucks to cover costs but not to profit. Not only is Moon spinning technic, but he is also making it with help from others. Moon works with DJ Rama from KUGS in Rama's home recording studio. "I produce hard-techno," Moon said. "I write a new track a week."

Due mainly to financial reasons; Moon has yet to release a record. "That's the real limiting thing--money," he said. "It's hard to get people to share your vision and share it for dirt cheap."

Moon sees Stokes inevitable departure from the local scene (after graduates this year) as a substantial loss. "I'm going to try to learn everything I can from him before he leaves," he said. As Moon puts it, Bellingham is still very much "virgin territory" for electronic music. But it is also a scene in transition.

Back in Matheson's studio, Josh makes another small tweak to the as yet untitled Essene song. This time, he makes a barely audible adjustment to a sampled synth-string loop coming out of his Emu Orbit dance module.

Matheson is content to stay put, here in the local area. Music is by no means his livelihood nor does he ever expect to be famous. "I think I'll just continue doing what I'm doing," he says, flicking off the amp for a moment of easy conversation. "I enjoy working here in the studio, and I like the music I'm making. I'd like people to dig it, but when it comes down to it, I'll be happy doing just what I'm doing."
"Roofies" have arrived in Bellingham, leaving victims with no clue of where they’ve been or what they’ve done while under the influence of a drug they’ve never heard of.

It was Friday night, a time to laugh, celebrate, live a little and drink a lot. A time to unwind after a long, hard week, crack open a bottle of wine and relax in the company of good friends. My best girlfriend Tara had some old friends from high school who were throwing a party and she had invited me to come along.

Neither Tara, nor I, had any qualms about drinking our bottles of wine that night, since we knew that many of the people at the party would be old acquaintances—people we knew, trusted and liked.

As we pulled up to the curb of the house, we saw the crowd on the porch and immediately recognized many of the faces. Tara had been waiting nearly a week for this day and her chance to introduce me to all of her old friends. She grabbed my hand and ushered me around the crowds, introducing me to everyone who came along our path.

When we’d had our fill of the scene, we decided to head upstairs and talk to one of her ex-boyfriends, Sean. We found a vacant room and plopped ourselves on the floor.

I began to notice the people slowly but surely filing into the room. I saw a boy with a goatee and blue jeans enter. Another boy entered in a baseball cap and a blue sweatshirt. I noticed he had wide cheekbones, a trait I myself have, and always immediately recognized in others.

Then I noticed my bottle was empty. The boy with the cheekbones offered me a bright, red keg full cup of beer. The beverage was bright amber in color and smelled like beer, so I happily drank it up.

That was the last thing I remembered of not only the party, but the entire night.

I woke up the next morning, my head feeling like a ton of bricks. I was disoriented and exceptionally tired. My alarm was set for 9 a.m. so I could take my dog to obedience school.

I rarely get hung over, and it was even funnier than I thought, considering I’d left the party early.

Talking to my roommate Mary later that day, I realized we had stayed there until nearly 2 or 3 a.m., yet I remembered absolutely nothing of the entire night. I headed out the door for work, and she casually joked about our party we were planning for the coming Saturday. "I hope we don’t get any ‘roofie pizza,’" she said. I laughed a little and ran out the door.

"Roofie pizza," huh? I asked myself. I’d heard of the drug. I saw a talk show about it once. Girls were raped after they were given the colorless, odorless drug, but later remembered nothing of the entire night.

"Oh my God! Was I raped? What happened? Why don’t I remember any of it?" My mind was flooding with questions I knew I would never answer completely.

You were either asleep, or sitting on the couch talking to people," my roommate Sarah later told me, ‘You looked like you were having fun, but you weren’t yourself.’

Drowsiness, temporary amnesia, impaired judgment, dizziness, prolonged periods of blackouts and muscle relaxation are possible effects of Rohypnol. It has been compared to Valium, but the effects are about ten times stronger.

"At one point in the party, you came down the stairs obviously very pissed off ... I don’t remember what it was that you were talking about exactly, but you were not happy,” my roommate Mary said. Although Rohypnol is classified as a sedative, it may cause some individuals to become fearless or aggressive. At this point a bright red flashing light was going off in my head. Was I given roofies—the date-rape drug, which it’s more commonly referred to as—here in small-town Bellingham?

"I figured that you were okay," Sarah said. "But then when I locked again, I saw some guy leading you upstairs. I ran upstairs as fast as I could and threw open the door. You were standing there and I asked you if you knew the guy."

I didn’t know what to do, or what to say. I can’t help but think, what would have happened had Sarah not been there?

"It is very important that you learn to protect yourself," warns Judy from the Womencare shelter, "at a party it is very easy to lose your mind... avoid being around persons you feel are capable of doing this. Guard your drink. In second-party dates, where people are often a friend-of-a-friend’s, find out exactly who this person is. All cases (of date rape) are not always clear cut."

Never again will I accept a drink from a guy whom I do not know. And if I must, I will be sure that it is from an unopened container that I open myself.

Since Rohypnol is illegal in the United States, it is listed only in a book about prescription drugs available abroad. It is referred to by its medical name, flunitrazepam, not the brand name, Rohypnol.

"It is a benzodiazepine, in the same family as Valium," a representative at the Washington Poison Center said. "It’s not really dangerous."

According to the medical director’s records at the Washington Poison Center, no Rohypnol cases have been reported in the state of Washington. "All of the suspected cases turned out to be other drugs," an operator who wished to remain anonymous told me. "Because of this, no, we don’t have a file for it. We don’t have a need."

I am sure that I was given roofies. Because no one has stepped forward and because there are currently no documented cases in Washington, this will continually be viewed as a "big-town, Midwest problem."

Had I known Rohypnol leaves your system within 24 to 48 hours, I would have been in a doctor’s office getting a drug test in that time period.

I shared what I could of my story because our police departments, health centers, hospitals and crisis lines need to know about this drug, and that it is a problem. Until then, it is up to you and me to spread the word.

—Lucy Kiem Kee
The brute breathes loudly. His shoulders slouch. The long battle has taken its toll on him.

His massive hands grasp the broadsword tightly. Cold steel flashes in the light. Sweat drops from his forehead, moistens his tunic. Squinted eyes stare at his foe.

The smaller man stands straight, one knee bent. His right arm waves a rapier back and forth; his left is poised in the air. Long, black hair falls on his damp, white shirt. A brilliant smile flashes across his face. He taps his leather boot on the floor, then again, and attacks.

Sparks fly. Ears ring. Steel meets steel.

A thrust. A parry. The smaller man is disarmed. He strikes the brute across the face, then floors him with a spinning kick. The smile flashes again. He pounces on the enemy, draws a dagger and finishes him off.

After a moment's rest, the two rise and face the applauding crowd.

Children laugh and scream with glee. The two men bow, pick up their weapons, and jog offstage.

Just another performance for Dark Ages Live Steel Productions.

A stage combat performance group, Dark Ages was founded in 1994. They perform regularly for schools, children's programs and science-fiction/fantasy conventions, or "cons." All details, from costuming to weaponry, are historically accurate. Battles from ancient Japan and medieval Europe are re-enacted, even hypothetical futuristic conflicts erupt onstage. "We go as far back as we can find historical reference," said group co-founder Cheryl Armstrong. "We don't do anything we can't research."

Armstrong has studied martial arts for more than 10 years. Her training ranges from karate to kendo stickfighting. One of her former sparring partners worked at a movie theater. When the film "Highlander 2" was released...
"She was a hair away from stabbing his scrotum," he said, then shook his head and laughed. "He would've died—we would've never stopped the bleeding."

in 1992, Armstrong and her friends were asked to spar for crowds to promote the film. "It was something to do once, and then put it away," said group president Greg Spyridis. But the fighters soon found themselves performing again. "We did a con, we did 'Braveheart,' and we said, 'Let's do a business.'"

Those early shows were unchoreographed stickfights. By the time "Highlander 3" was released the following year, Spyridis decided it was time to do something more dramatic. "I had stage combat experience, so I showed the other guys some moves, and we did promotional work for that god-awful movie," Spyridis laughed.

Since then, Dark Ages has become a regular act on the con circuit, performing in Washington, Oregon, and California. "We've also performed in Canada, so technically we're international," Spyridis bragged. The group has to be creative to find the right gear. Broadswords and chainmail are rarely available in department stores.

While some of their weapons are purchased from BladeSmith's in Seattle, many must be ordered from Starfire Swords in New York.

Accurate apparel is just as hard to find. "I do all my costumes," Armstrong said. Trips to the library precede trips to the fabric store. Costumes are also ordered through specialty catalogs.

Despite the inherent danger of working with real weapons—"A sword is never unloaded," Spyridis warned—injuries have been few and far between. "I got one of my rings bent once," Armstrong said. "But it didn't hurt." Through hard work and precise practices, Dark Ages has ensured the only onstage fatalities are the rehearsed ones. "We practice so we don't get hurt," Armstrong said.

The most serious injury occurred as Spyridis was rehearsing with a newcomer to the group. "We were fighting with staffs," Spyridis recalled. "It looked like he was unarmed, but he was actually in control of my staff. He threw the staff down, and it bounced off the concrete, came up and broke off half his tooth. Nobody touched him. It was entirely self-inflicted." That member has since left the group.

The incident remains the lone blemish on an otherwise perfect safety record. However, there was one other close call. Former group member Cheryl Glover appeared to end a battle with member Bob Nims by stabbing him in the crotch. The blade was intended to miss by a safe distance, but actually hit so close to the target that it tore the fabric of his pants. Spyridis recalled the incident with a smile. "She was a hair away from stabbing his scrotum," he said, then shook his head and laughed. "He would've died—we would've never stopped the bleeding." The group shrugs off the importance of the event. "It was just a one-time thing," Armstrong said.

It takes a special kind of person to be in Dark Ages. Armstrong started throwing knives in her early teens. She began taking karate at the age of 19 and she has six years of theater experience. Spyridis has studied more than 3D forms of martial arts, both open-hand and armed. He's appeared in several plays and a few small films. Most members of the group have a theater or martial arts background, if not both.

Newcomers to the group have to prove themselves in an audition before being accepted. They must show skill and enthusiasm before they make the team.

In addition, they have to show they have the right mindset for the job. "We get a lot of freaks and whatnot," Spyridis sighed. "Bus [Jansen, a current group member] walked into BladeSmith's on accident. He ordered a broadsword, even though he had no idea how to use it. They
gave him our card. He gave us a call, even though he had no idea what he was doing. We said to ourselves, 'Wow. You're psychotic. We'll take you!'

Eccentric hobbies notwithstanding, the members of Dark Ages do maintain regular lives and jobs. Spyridis splits his time attending Shoreline Community College and assisting students in a computer lab. Armstrong is a system administrator for Boeing. Kate Collins works in a warehouse, while Nims and Jensen are computer technicians. Scot McIntosh is a medical technician. Oh, as Armstrong puts it, 'he draws blood, or something.' How appropriate.

The group's tour on the con circuit has spawned several unusual stories. 'We've produced a couple of discussion panels on the emotional and sexual aspects of men and women with swords,' Spyridis said.

'There are people out there who get turned on watching members of the opposite sex fight.' At one discussion, the women of the group were asked point-blank if the men's genitalia were in proportion to the size of their swords. 'She put us all on the spot. We just kind of ignored her,' Armstrong said.

Spyridis remembered the effect Nims had on a fan. 'In Baltimore, a young woman was so enamored with him that she grabbed her boyfriend and literally ran upstairs with him. They conceived a child that night. I don't know if it's a coincidence or what, but the child is named Bob (referring to Nims). Armstrong backs up Spyridis' story. 'They were there. They did not use protection. They did procreate.'

Some of their most memorable moments have occurred outside of cons, however. 'We were performing at the opening of Braveheart,' Armstrong said, 'and Greg was wearing a kilt. The bit we were doing was choreographed for something else, and wasn't meant to be done in a kilt; there were lots of rolls and throws. I was standing in the crowd with Greg's mother. She's seen him in a kilt enough times to know that he usually wears them in the traditional style, meaning without underwear. "His mom turns to me and says, 'This sure is an athletic piece. Is he wearing...?" And Greg does a roll, and his mother says, 'Oh, yes. Black.'"

Spyridis' most memorable performance was at SyndiCon in Baltimore. 'That was the first time we were treated like real stars,' he said. 'I signed my first autograph. They gave us the red carpet treatment. We got to mingle with the cast and crew from the Highlander TV show. So that was cool.'

Armstrong's favorite performance came in 1996. 'We were performing with the Kidso children's program on Mercer Island,' she said. 'One little girl was very excited. I showed her how to hold a blade in four-point position. She literally counted the days until our return. Armstrong sighed. "That was special."'

The members of Dark Ages have devoted many hours to learning their skills, and purchased countless dollars worth of equipment. After three years as a business, they are just starting to break even. As we've seen, they face the possibility of being killed, or at least castrated. One question remains: why do they do this?

'It's fun,' Spyridis said. "Primarily because it's fun. It allows us to show people, through action, comedy and drama, a side of life and of history that they don't get to see done often, and don't get to see done accurately." He paused. "But mostly because it's fun."

And Armstrong? "The thrill of being onstage. The adrenaline rush, the awe in the eyes of people watching you," she said. "They think it's so amazing, and you think it's so simple."