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Four bare-foot women dressed in long, flowing skirts glide into the room. The women stand closely, moving in a synchronized wave of purple, dark gray, green and golden-yellow. The women represent Banat Sahar, an Arabic name meaning “daughters of the dawn.” Each woman claps Zils—finger symbols—and gravitates toward the center of the room. The music lulls momentarily then returns with a brisk drum beat in time with the clanking symbols.

The wave of exposed torsos straighten into a line, stop and then turn. The women fling one hip, then the other, in the direction of the audience. Fluid movements quickly change with the pulsing drum beats and strains of foreign string instruments emitting from a tape player in the corner of the Fairhaven Auditorium. The Zils retain the beat as the dancers continue swinging their hips, their long skirts fluttering with the quick motion.

The four women may be mistaken for gypsies in their shells, coins and brightly colored skirts, but they are not gypsies; they are belly dancers. Western student Sonja Hinz, dressed in purple, her long brown hair covered in a black and silver cloth smirks as she reveals her stage name, “Neci,” a Hungarian word meaning hair. Amanda Rietz wears a smile, a black skirt and a short gray top that exposes her deep belly button. Her stage name, “Basem,” is Arabic for smiling. Kolby Labree, tall, with short brown hair covered by a black hat, reveals her stage name, “Khalida,” meaning strength. Sarah Holmes with sandy-colored braids on each side of her head wears a long green dress made of thin cloth traditionally worn by women in India. “Zadah,” her stage name, was chosen because it brings personal magic for her.

Though its roots cannot be traced to one specific region, belly dancing originated from fertility cults in dozens of cultures, Zadah said. The troupe dances in a tribal style, which includes dances from all over the Middle East, Egypt, India, Thailand, North Africa and other cultures. The tribal style originated from a woman named Jamila, who taught the troupe’s own teacher. Aside from the original dances, the troupe choreographs its dances. The style of dance is also referred to as “gypsy” because gypsies traveling from India took bits and pieces of dances encountered in their travels and made them their own.
As distinct as the history of belly dancing are the ornamental, eye-catching costumes that adorn the dancers. The dress for performances is chosen by the dancer. Most costumes include only a basic short blouse, full skirt and coin or tassel belt. Head pieces or jewelry may accent the costumes as well. Some of the ethnic dances require specific clothes such as a Ghwazee coat—a long, fitted coat that fully covers the dancer. As prominent as the dancers' attire are the markings that grace their extremities. Squiggly lines, stars and circles are drawn on the belly dancers' hands and feet with an earthy, reddish-brown paste called henna, which is mixed with teas and oils. This Middle Eastern "body art," called Mindhi, lasts three weeks.

"I find it is very, very strange to dress up like these women from other cultures and do these dances from other places," Zadah explains. "There is nothing that's so feminine and beautiful and powerful in this culture."

The unity of the group comes through in the intricate and physical dances. The fluid, yet focused, synchronized movements cannot shroud the encouraging glances and pure delight shimmering in the women's eyes as they dance.

One dance requires the women to balance baskets atop their heads while their hips swing, and their entire bodies sway in circular motions. Their arms slither upward, carefully and slowly, like snakes.

The music that accompanies the dances is much like snake-charmer music—slow and high-pitched wind instruments accompanied by a throbbing drum.

Consistent with gypsy style, the music also comes from a mixture of cultures, although most is from the Middle East.

Not all Middle Eastern music is suitable for the dances. A typical performance list includes music from Egypt, Turkey and the Upper Nile. The belly dancers use recorded music but would prefer to have their own musicians.

Ian Voorhees, a banjo player and sometimes drummer, is the lone musician who attends practices and some performances. After tuning his banjo, it releases notes close to those in the recorded music.

"Ian is wonderful," Zadah says, smiling as she picks up her son. Three of the four women have small children. "He is our one-man wonder—and the troupe nanny."

"I know we are obviously very fertile," Basseema adds, extracting a round of laughter as the children run circles around the women.

"That's why I always laugh, because this troupe is always surrounded by kids," says Neci, the only woman without a child.

Neci tells a story about a tribe who has dancers present for women about to give birth. They are present to remind the soon-to-be mother how to move her body during the birthing process. The troupe agrees that the process of giving birth is very similar to belly dancing.
"That is basically what it started as—simulating what your body does at birth," Baseema adds.

"Yeah, PUSH!" yells Khalida.

The women laugh as they discuss how audiences react to their performances.

"When we dance, I want people to watch my hips because that's what's moving around, but people are scared to watch our hips," Neci says. "They watch our eyes and that's not where the dance is happening ... but they're afraid to watch your body."

These belly dancers strive to dismantle stereotypes of how women should look or carry themselves.

"This culture is so disconnected," Khalida says. "You look at women's bodies (in) magazines or TV or whatever, but it's not real. The packaging is very degraded and controlled. (Belly dancing) is something that is very out of their control."

Belly dancing is not discriminatory of body type, age or size, the troupe asserts.

"That's why I love it. My ballet teacher was always harping me about losing weight, and then I started belly dancing," Baseema says. "Then it was good to have the extra meat to throw around. ... I was pretty serious about ballet. But I could never be a professional ballet dancer. I have the wrong body type. That was really depressing."

"The thing with (belly dancing) is the more you do it, the more comfortable you are with your body," Zadeh adds. "I was drawn to it because I totally associated it to wild and crazy women. I wanted to be one. It makes me think of these women that are outside of society that can't be controlled."

The women are aware of the misconceptions and, in some cases, bad reputation, associated with belly dancing. They have experienced it firsthand.

"I don't want to act like we are bad-mouthing belly dancing themes. It is really hard. I've had people say to me, when I tell them I'm a belly dancer, 'Do you dance topless?' Baseema says. "I don't know why they think that. And I say, 'No, I didn't say stripper, I said belly dancer.' People just have this idea."

"The images that came to mind when I thought of belly dancing were from 'I Dream of Jeannie,'" Khalida exclaims. "It seemed vulgar or something. When I started dancing, I didn't think I would ever want to perform."

For these women, belly dancers embody strength. Historically, the dancers were frowned on by society, although afforded great freedoms. Some were allowed to own property.

The Banat Sahar dancers said dancing is important in the everyday life of Middle Easterners. Unfortunately, dance is often not as revered in American culture.

"I mean there is [dance in America], but a lot of it is trivial," Baseema says. "A lot of it is based on current trends, like how swing dancing is really popular."

Through teaching, the women hope to educate people about the origin of the dance and its cultural significance, as well as shatter the "bad belly dancing image that is out there," Neci says.

"(Dance) is not something that belongs to everyone," Baseema says. "They see it as more of an entertainment. It's not personal. It is one of our main points to entertain people and not necessarily teach, but to inform."
story by Jenni Odekirk

photography by Barney Benedictson

Sandwiched between the Bagelry and the Sojourn clothing store on Railroad Avenue is a thin slice of the past.

Radio fans and curiosity seekers walk past two plaster figures of Nipper—the white dog with black eyes and ears of RCA fame—and enter a 12-by-100-foot world dedicated to archaic radio technology. Polished wooden radios of all sizes and shapes line the walls. The comforting smell of wood saturates the room. Lionel Hampton soulfully warbles “You’re Driving Me Crazy” from a 100-milliwatt radio station—94.5-FM—that continually broadcasts old music and radio shows through a small radio in the back room.

A tall, thin man soon greets anyone walking into the museum. Wearing a forest-green fedora, olive-green and mustard-yellow tweed slacks, brown plaid tie and spectacles, Jonathan Winter, president and curator of the Bellingham Antique Radio Museum, fits right in with his vintage surroundings.

“To me, imagining someone with a radio in their house and a pair of earphones and tuning in and listening is just great—I dig it,” Winter said.

Winter traced his interest in radios to discarded electronic equipment given to him by garbage men in his hometown near Santa Barbara, Calif.

“For a little kid, a radio or a box that had knobs on it, or some old piece of electronic gear that was thrown out was like gold,” Winter said. “I remember ... having all of these old parts and pieces there to play with. That stimulated me and got me going and let me know that I could build; I could create; I could make this stuff work. And my parents were cool—they encouraged me. That early experience—that was what empowered me to be in no way afraid of the insides of radios.”

Winter’s fascination with radios progressed as he built radios and receivers, and collected antique radios after he graduated from high school. Within the span of 35 years, while Winter attended college and worked as a jewelry designer and satellite installer, he collected more than 1,000 antique radios—particularly radios from the 1920s—and other outdated technological equipment. It was not, however, until his daughter graduated from high school in 1989 that he decided to create a museum from his radio collection.

“I noticed that many of (my daughter’s) friends had no concept of the history of radio, or the history of the analog world,” Winter said. “It's the digital world that we’re moving into, and we have—in a very short period of time—pushed aside our older analog equipment. All these items are being focused into ... the com
Winter set up the Bellingham Antique Radio Museum nearly 10 years ago in the farmers' market building in Fairhaven. At first, he displayed pre-1927 radios. After he notified teachers, children and collectors of his museum, he added radios from the 1930s. Five years later, Winter moved his museum to its current location. Here, he receives as many as 100 visitors per day, from all over the world.

The space is cramped. The side shelves overflow with old radios, extra parts and machines. A Whimhurst generator and Tesla coil divide the middle of the museum, creating only narrow paths on each side. Winter said the space is all he can afford.

'I've been interested in sharing the collection in ways that it becomes a resource for teachers, students and, in fact, the general public,' Winter said. 'The goal of the museum now is to become permanently situated here in Bellingham and to eventually deed the museum to the community in one way or another.'

Winter took the Bellingham Antique Radio Museum a step in that direction when it became a non-profit organization six months ago.

Joseph Yaver, now a member of the museum's board of directors, and former director of the International Society for Optical Engineering, said he became interested in the museum when he realized its educational value. He said Winter's radio collection is in the upper tier of collections in the United States.

'Even the Smithsonian would be proud to have some pieces of his collection,' Yaver said.

Winter's collection includes two particularly rare items. One is a 1928 Visionola machine that simultaneously plays a reel of film and a record. It was used for a brief time in the 1920s before a sound strip was added to film. Equally rare is a 1917 U.S. Navy submarine radio, but nothing is too rare to be touched by curious hands.

'The idea is to make everything in here available, so that if somebody comes in and wants to see something work, or how an early radio was built and designed, they can see it, take it down, plug it in, turn it on and explore how it works,' Winter said.

Two grade-school aged boys drifted into the museum. Their baby-blue shirts and golden hair contrasted with the dark atmosphere of the room.

Spying the boys, Winter beckoned them to an Edison Standard phonograph made of polished mahogany wood, and standing nearly as tall as the youngsters.

'This is the equivalent of CDs today,' Winter said, as he turned the phonograph's crank.

A garbled, high-pitched voice, accompanied by tinny music came from the machine.

'It's what your great-grandmother listened to,' Winter said.

'Cool,' the boys said, as they watched the phonograph's needle meander across a wax cylinder, then walked off when the tune ended.

Winter shares his knowledge—and some of the less pricey items in his collection—with the community by loaning out pieces to local schools. Sometimes he also makes presentations.

Cathy Dexter, a second grade teacher at Fisher Elementary School in Lynden, said Winter's presentation was inspirational to her students.

'The whole magic of radio and radio waves was in taking the concepts and seeing them actually work,' she said. '(Winter) has such a vast knowledge of the subject of radio development. He was very able to make them understand how these inventions changed the world we live in. Perhaps Winter can relate so well to elementary students because he did not lose his childlike wonderment and curiosity.

Winter gingerly took a long rectangular radio, built in 1920, off the shelf.

'Come here, I'll show you something special,' he said, as he slid the bottom off the radio to reveal a maze of wires. 'Most people think the circuit board wasn't developed until around the early '50s, but here's an example of a radio that was produced by a legitimate company, and it has a clear-cut circuit board, and yet it appears to be the only example.'

'That, to me, is a real mystery,' he said, with a grin and a gleam in his eye.
On a damp, gray Saturday in November, Kristine Becker stands poised behind the mocha bar at Northcoast Thunder Bikes. She has a full-time job, but on weekends she can usually be found here, helping her husband, Arlie, owner of the aftermarket Harley repair shop.

For now, going fast for this woman means whipping up a double mocha.

A month ago, going fast meant wrapping herself around a nitro-burning, top-fuel, Harley drag bike and accelerating to 170-plus mph in less than eight seconds. Now that the squeal of spinning tires, the smell of burning rubber and nitro, and the thunderous roars of the fire-breathing engines are gone, Kristine's attention has quickly turned to next season.

In the back of their Everett shop, Kristine's bike has already been torn down to its skeletal steel frame. Only the 10-inch-wide slick, which is a wide, treadless race-tire, and the handlebars distinguish it as some type of two-wheeled machine.

Her bike, which she fondly calls "PMS Express," is receiving modifications that among other things, will create room for a new nitro motor.

"Well, it's still affectionately known as the PMS Express, but now it's on nitro, so it's like ... like ... PMS with a really bad attitude," she explains with a broad smile.

At first glance, this woman appears as if she would be more at home on a ranch than on the back of a hot-rod bike. At ease, with confident eyes, she's as quick to smile or laugh as others say she is to get on the throttle. When she's talking bikes, her face comes alive. Bikes are her passion, one full of excitement and long from being quenched.

At 17, he rode her first bike, a Harley. At 21, she married Arlie, whom she met at Seattle Harley Davidson where he worked.

"We went for a ride, then another ride, and we just clicked," Kristine says. "The rest is history."

That's putting it mildly.

Their history includes many magazine and newspaper clippings, and trophies, which adorn the walls and shelves of the shop.

Kristine started racing at 28, after watching and learning from her Harley-racing husband.
DRAG QUEEN
Although currently she seems to get the spotlight more often than her husband, Kristine is quick to give credit where she believes credit is due.

"I have an excellent tuner and builder," she says. "He does all the mechanical work and tuning. I ride it, and Arlie makes it go fast!"

When she began racing they were in different classes. Arlie was already riding in the nitro-fueled, pro-drugster class, while Kristine started out in a street-eliminator class, on a high performance, gasoline-burning Sportster. Several classes for street-legal race bikes exist, based primarily upon the fuel used.

Now the Beckers are in the same class. Kristine calls it a win-win situation. With Arlie building both bikes, regardless of who crosses the finish line first, they both win.

While Arlie appears to take second place to his wife in stride, she has a lot of other male competition to contend with.

Jeff Carney is the service manager at Eastside Harley Davidson in Bellevue, and he has raced in the pro-drugster class for more than a year. He knows Kristine both on and off the track; he knows what it's like to race her, and he knows what the back of her bike looks like as she beats him across the line.

"I can remember the first time," Carney says. "It was quite a blow to the male ego. It was a real blow seeing her bike as she passed me. Then you realize, 'I just got my ass kicked by a girl!'

He means that in the best of ways, not only because most guys in their class have been defeated by her at least once, but also because of the respect among the racers.

"I don't think most people understand what kind of guts it takes to put a bike down the track under fuel," Carney says. "She'll shake your hand before the race and at the other end we'll talk and joke. She is a real nice person."

At a pro-drugster race, pairs of competitors take off from the green light, tripping a laser beam as they cross the starting line. A computer calculates their elapsed time and speed.

Carney compares leaving the starting line to being shot out of a cannon. He has roared down the quarter-mile track, reaching 172 mph in less than eight seconds.

Kristine explains a run down the track quite differently.

"Bikes do break. They do explode. They do have problems. That first pass of the day, to me, is the scariest one. It's what I call the 'milk run'. (Once), in Las Vegas, a valve broke, or a lifter broke, or something failed. We can't even make an ashtray out of that one," Kristine says, smiling.

Nitro methane fuels pro-drugsters, producing five times the horsepower of gasoline. It won't burn alone, but is explosive when mixed with alcohol. Nitro methane is not to be confused with nitrous oxide, or laughing gas, often mixed with gasoline in street-modified cars.

When Kristine pulls up to the line, she's all business. Dressed from head to toe in leather, she wears heavy boots and a full-face helmet. She also wears a special chest guard to protect her in case of engine failure as she leans over...
Engine, combined with its high-performance fuel, can make for a wild and sometimes dangerous ride.

In October, 1995, Kristine's engine exploded as she crossed the finish line at almost 150 mph. The force vaporized the motor below her, spraying parts in almost every direction.

"There were parts of that bike we never found," Kristine says. "Fortunately for me, it went downward and outward. We were especially sensitive to this, since another rider had died racing two months earlier."

What has happened, or could happen, is not on her mind when she rolls the bike to the starting line.

With the powerful engine shaking her entire body, the almost deafening beat of the engine in her ears and the smell of nitro in her head, she's wrapped tight and low around the bike.

As she pulls up to the starting line, her attention is on the "Christmas Tree," a sequence of lights that turn from orange to green to start the race, and the starter who operates them.

"I don't think about anything; he's what I concentrate on," she says. "Then I pick a spot down the track and say, 'OK, go there.'"

Kristine compares the last few seconds before takeoff to diving off the high-dive for the first time.

"Everybody's jumped the high-dive at the local pool as a child," Kristine says. "We all got up to the top and went, 'Oh my God!' And we looked down, and we didn't know if we wanted to do it.

"Our friends were down there going, 'You can do it, you can do it!' And you're going, 'God, if I have to climb back down the ladder, my friends are going to laugh at me!' So you did it," she continues. "That feeling you get—right when you jump—is exactly what it feels like right before you go."

Once the light turns green, all she has to do is crank on the throttle. These bikes have only one gear—very fast forward—which Kristine prefers to call 'WFO'—Wide Fucking Open.

Her ability to get down the track has won her numerous awards and trophies, and some firsts for women. In September 1995, at the Woodburn Drags in Oregon, Kristine became the first woman to win a fuel class event in the history of motorcycle racing.

In August of 1997, she became the first woman in Canada to ride on the fuel class and win.

In 1998, she finished third in points in the pro-dragster class with the Canadian Motorcycle Drag Racing Association and third in points with the All Harley Drag Racing Association. She ranked sixth in the United States.

Between November and May, when the next season starts, Kristine and Arlie have a lot of work to do. They'll not only work on the bikes in the off-season, but also try to raise the $30,000 she will need to run in 1999. That's the average expenditure for a year of racing. Kristine's mother is chipping in by building her a Web site in hopes of promoting the sport.

At this point, no real money exists in drag racing motorcycles, as there is in other organized racing sports, such as NASCAR.

"We pay entry fees, and then if we win the class, we might get a grand. I think the organizations at some point are going to have to step up to the plate," Kristine explains. "I think drag racing, even in the '90s, is in the infancy stages. We are now at the stage where NASCAR was 40 years ago, when Junior Johnson was still running moonshine in the back of his '53 Pontiac. I think we're kind of on the same trail. We're gaining recognition, and eventually we'll be there. We're just not there yet."

Her next season appears off to a good start already, and Kristine is very optimistic.

"Everything will be brand new," she says. "And I'm probably going to be stepping up to a new class. Hopefully we'll be going faster, and hopefully we'll be competitive."

photo courtesy of Kristine Becker
The room is filled with the sounds of rumpling sheets and the rustle of flannel pajamas. An incoherent mumble escapes your lips. Although you lie safe within the comfort of your bed, you toss and turn in despair, unable to distinguish fantasy from reality—one of those horrible dreams has come to haunt you again.

As you stand in the center of a room, the sound of many pencils fervently scratch against paper echoes inside your head. You blink and squint your eyes in an attempt to distinguish a handful of dark shapes from the background. Suddenly, there is dramatic clarity: The room is full of people, their eyes focused on you. To your left sits the guy you regularly see walking around campus. On the right, a girl you know from that introductory psychology course, and directly in front, is the cute boy who has been checking you out at the bars the last few weekends. The cute boy is smiling now, and you're beginning to think this dream may not turn out to be so bad until you see why he's smiling—you're completely naked!

Your mouth opens to release a scream that never comes, and your feet freeze to the floor. As you stand there, cold and horrified, a startling realization makes your nightmare significantly worse—the strangers are busily drawing pictures of your naked body.

Kristen Taylor, this sort of experience isn't surreal or a nightmare, but reality. Although the idea of standing completely naked in front of a room full of strangers would be rather uncomfortable for most, she has no qualms about posing nude in front of the strangers who compose a drawing group.

"I'm proud of myself as a woman and proud of my body," Taylor says. "And it really empowering to be able to share myself with other people in a way that most people don't understand.

Taylor, 27, had been nude modeling for eight years since she moved to Birmingham in 1990 to pursue an elementary art and teaching degree.

Wearing a multi-colored, striped long-sleeve shirt and black jeans, Taylor looks like an average student. A particular look or figure is not what separates a nude model from the rest of society. Instead, it's her strong self-image and love of the arts that sets her apart.

An appreciation for art filled Taylor with a desire
to give something back to a community she believes has given her so much. Taylor decided she
could do the most good by giving local artists an opportunity to expand their talents, enabling
them to capture the beauty of the human body through art.

"The human body is an art form in and of itself, not just a machine to get you to
work and to home and back again," she says. "It is by far the most difficult thing to
draw, so I really felt like I was doing such a service—and getting paid for it."

Although nude models do get paid for their work—usually an average of $8
to $10 per hour—it isn't the money that has kept Taylor modeling for the
past eight years.

"[A model] has to be somebody who wants to do it for art's sake," she says. "I don't see anybody doing it just for the money because it
just isn't that much money."

The difficulties and occasional embarrassing experiences that
nude models often endure are more prevalent than many may rec­
ognize. The seemingly simple act of remaining in one position for
an extended period of time takes more strength and skill than most
would believe.

"It's difficult to hold a pose when muscles you didn't even
know you had are falling asleep on you," Taylor says, flailing
her arms to emphasize her point. "The next time you go to a
grocery store and you're standing in line, try to stand there in
one position and just see how long it takes you to be uncom­
fortable—it's not that long. We're not aware of how much we
move."

In a sculpting class several years ago, she held her
longest pose ever—two hours. During these extended periods
it is extremely important models to keep their bodies
absolutely still.

"Sometimes I'll be sitting up there, and I'll think of
something so funny that I have to crack a smile," Taylor says.
"Then I'll remember someone may be drawing my mouth, and
I'll have to try to look the way I did before."

Some challenges nude models face are, likely, exclusive to
their job and can create potentially hairy situations.

"There have been a few times where I've scheduled
myself for a modeling time and happened to be on my
period," Taylor says. "You know the artists are counting on
you, so it's uncomfortable, but not impossible. I think that if
you did let out a big old fart, or if your string was hanging
out, the people in the room would understand."

Irene Saxton, a music major at Western who has been
modeling for figure drawing classes at Western for a year,
also finds it difficult to hold extended poses.

"Sometimes I'll look at one of my friends or something,
and I'll start to laugh and could move or something," Saxton says.

"You really have to be strong willed and strong minded
enough, to be sure of yourself as a person, to be able to
model and do it well," Taylor says. "If you're going to be
freaking out that people are going to be pointing fingers and
laughing at you, you'll think they're doing it when they're
actually not."

Sometimes even the strong willed grapple with such
thoughts.

"Still, those thoughts go through your mind like, 'what if
they are looking at me like that?''' Saxton says. "But then I
usually just brush it off."

Despite the rare awkward moments some artists experi­
ence when drawing from nude models, Taylor attempts to get
beyond the unwritten rule that prompts people in the room to
go silent.

"I like to talk a little bit so people don't think I'm this cold­
hearted statue," she says. "I'm a real person—I live, I breathe,
I'm human. ... I can hear you, and I can see you," she says.

Taylor's hazel eyes, hidden behind her black-rimmed glasses,
reflect the inner strength and
confidence necessary to be able to engage in an activity that so many people don’t understand or may simply disapprove of.

“There are so many issues with nakedness and porn in our whole country out there,” Taylor says. “There are a lot of negative attitudes toward nakedness as a whole, and it feels really empowering to be able to get past that. Discovering the courage within and the power to put yourself in an exposed position is usually only the first step a nude model takes before finally shedding the robe.

Before she decided to pose, Taylor talked with friends and family about her intentions.

“I wanted the people that I surround myself with to understand what I was doing and why I was doing it—not so much to gain their permission, but to gain their understanding.”

When Saxton told her parents about her modeling, their reactions were what one might expect from their parents.

“When I first told my parents, my mom almost started crying, she was like, ‘What if I come down to Western and see you naked all over the place?’... They were just like, ‘Oh no, what did we do?’

The reactions both Taylor and Saxton received may be just as strong for their male counterparts.

Justin Gray, 22, who is new to the business, but has been an exotic dancer for several years, agrees that male nude models are viewed differently in society than female nude models. He said he believes males are typically less comfortable with nude modeling because of the questions of sexuality that may arise.

“When you’re nude modeling, you’re way more worried about what other people are thinking, whether it seems ‘gay-ish’ or not,” Gray says. “Girls seem to be a bit more confident with art... Girls also get a bit more comfortable with their sexuality earlier than guys do.”

The current societal views about male and female nude models are a fairly recent phenomenon, said Richard Bulman, a coordinator of the drawing group that meets at Western.

“Historically, male nudity was more accepted in the arts than female nudity,” Bulman says. “With the Greeks and Romans, for instance, you would see a lot of male nudity and a lot of pride in that. It’s only recently that it’s evened out, and you see both male and female models.”

Bulman says the fear of becoming sexually aroused while modeling is the most common concern of all the male models he has worked with.

“Luckily, we’ve never had a strong instance in that way where it would be... a big problem,” Bulman says, laughing.

Bulman has taught his male models to overcome embarrassing situations by thinking of something completely different.

“I get the butterflies every time I do it, and that keeps it from happening for me,” Gray says. “It’s like waking up in the middle of one of those dreams when you’re naked in front of the school.”

Male and female models potentially face a host of embarrassing situations and even ostracism from segments of society. However, Taylor said she has yet to encounter anything that would deter her from an activity she still loves to do eight years later.

As her body continues to age, she does not anticipate a change in her attitude or in her chosen method of giving something back to the art community.

“I know a lot of people who feel burdened by their body for many different reasons,” Kristan says. “I’m proud to be who I am; I’m proud of my body, and I really enjoy being able to share that—knowing that I love myself, that I am loved and that I can benefit people by sharing myself.”
Cake rarely makes a great conversation piece at parties. Cake—consumed, not admired—merely serves as a fix for sugar junkies. What kind of lunatic would admire a cake? The kind who observes a cake made by Mike McCarey.

In fact, this artisan of the torte-world can mold a cake so incredible it could make Martha Stewart slobber all over her $1,000 apron.

McCarey designs, sculpts and paints a myriad of cakes at "Amazing Cakes," his Redmond business.

A walk-in refrigerator fills the far corner of the cake shop, its steel walls matching the gray worktables—amazingly clean considering the amount of cake carving done on any given day. Shipping boxes with cellophane windows rest on top of the refrigerator. Movers are more careful when they can see the beautiful work inside.

McCarey and his employees chatter nonstop over the monotonous drone of a purple, industrial-sized mixer. Chaos is order.

McCarey situates the items on his table, including two unidentifiable cake mounds, his hands moving at a frantic pace, his face calm and sure.

He is a professional in the uniform of his choice: a sunshine-yellow shirt bearing the company name, jeans, sneakers and a waist-high apron stained with a rainbow of colors from past creations.

"This is going to be Cinderella's carriage for a little girl's birthday," he says, pointing to each of the mounds. "This will be the carriage, that will be the pumpkin."

McCarey shaves one rounded mound of cake with a six-inch serrated knife to obtain the desired pumpkin form. A novice would slowly calculate each slice, but he briskly and perfectly shapes
Mixed Medium

story by Colin Howser
photography by Steven Uhles
the cake, meshing experience and talent.

In the background, Kelly Trace and Laura Phillips work on separate projects. "Kelly is the lead decorator and pundit," McCarey yells, loud enough for Kelly to hear. "Laura is the head baker, and she handles the baking and prep and also does cakes."

Once the carriage and pumpkin are carved to his satisfaction, he puts them in the refrigerator and comes back with a two-foot-long heap of cake and starts whacking unwanted chunks from the side. Some copper tubing juts out from one end—the spine of some future creature.

McCarey began his trek at a culinary school in Denver 17 years ago. "It was a general culinary education; it wasn't specifically on baking," he says as he continues to mold the lumps. "From that, I decided I wanted to go into pastry-chef work."

McCarey's dream of being a professional of the patisseries led him to jobs in bakeries, country clubs and hotels, but he wasn't satisfied with baking the same items again and again.

"I did that for about 10 years," McCarey says, as he whistles on a soon-to-be brontosaurus. "I ended up moving to Seattle to a company that just did occasion cakes."

Once he and co-worker John Auburn realized the cake business was not going to spread its artistic wings the way they wanted, they left to start "Amazing Cakes."

"It seemed silly to keep doing that job when we had a lot of ideas that we couldn't do because it wasn't our company," he says. "We thought we'd have more fun and do it for ourselves."

Auburn retired from the business a year ago, leaving McCarey as the lone cake architect.

McCarey is hesitant to say he is an artist. He said his creations do not have the prestige given to the culinary arts in Europe, where the practice is steeped in tradition and government awards are given to the upper echelon of chefs.

"Oftentimes it's construed as an art form, but not always," he explains, as he scoops unwanted cake shavings into a large, green garbage can. "You're going to a bakery; you're buying a cake, and you're taking it home. It's not going to be hanging in a museum or art gallery. It's more of a craft or trade."

Both of McCarey's assistants received their basic culinary training at South Seattle Community College and have been with the business for less than a year. While the creations boast price tags ranging from $75 to $1,000, Phillips says she is pursuing this career because she finds it fascinating, not because of the paycheck.

"This is the reason I went to school—this concept," Phillips says, as she prepares a reproduction to be used in the creation of a six-string acoustic guitar. She traces every element of the guitar for exact scale.

"I'm so amazed by this man," she says, pointing to McCarey. "There's no way you could know how his mind works. He can look at blocks and say, 'This is this, and that goes there.'"

"I've got a really good visual memory," McCarey says. "But if it's something I don't know well, I need reference material."

McCarey says he uses any material that will give him an exact image of the subject. Some of the most difficult projects are buildings, and he will use blueprints, aerial photographs and elevation charts as references. He's even studied a skyscraper from an adjacent building.

"Buildings are so accurate, you gotta' get your dimensions right, or it will look a little screwy. Rooflines are a real bitch."

Most of the cakes McCarey does are for weddings and reproduction work. For reproduction work, customers bring the item or photographs of what they want: a grandfather clock, dad's Chevy or a friend's head, and McCarey discusses the possibilities of recreating that object.

"If you think about a bicycle, there's no place to put cake. The tires are so skinny, there are spokes, there are nothing there on the frame. So we steer them in a different direction. We'll do a seat or a helmet," he says.
"What I would like to do more is more original designs," he continues, "but that's asking the customer to go out on a limb. The best way to attack that is to do a sketch, so they understand what they're getting.

McCarey says his goal during any job is to make every part of the creation edible. Sometimes one little factor makes it impossible to accomplish that task—gravity.

"Let's say I'm doing an elephant. There won't be any cake in the legs... There are dowels in the legs fastened to the cake board," he explains, while pointing to the brontosaurus on the table. "With the elephant, the legs will be chocolate, his body will be cake, and a small piece of his underbelly will be a platform. Part of his head will be cake, and his trunk will be chocolate.

"The copper tubing I get from the Eagle plumbing department—quarter-inch, three-eighths, half-inch. Or, I'll use non-leaded armature wire, but I use wooden dowels mostly." Although he's never had any major disasters, it's a constant learning experience finding the correct way to create cakes with most of the weight at the top.

"We're fighting gravity here," he says. He uses a pound cake, which is more suited to his job of sculpting or to the abuse that height gives the cake.

For pliability, he uses white chocolate mixed with corn syrup to create the chocolate accessories on the cake. Small intricate designs, such as one-inch windows, are made of the white chocolate, as well as tall narrow structures, like the brontosaurus head that juts out from the cake.

"Because the neck's going to be so skinny, it's not practical for me to put cake on it," McCarey explains.

Once McCarey has completed the shape for the brontosaurus, added the chocolate, applied the frosting and the basic color, only two steps remain.

"The last step is to coat it with a roll of fondant [a sugar coating]... to give it some muscle tones—some highs and lows. It's like skin," McCarey says. "I roll it out really thin—about an eighth of an inch. That's also how I make all of the different elements come together as one."

An airbrush is used for some coloring but more importantly for the realistic shadows.

"I could do the dinosaur and cover him in green, and it would look nice, but we want it to look real," McCarey says. "It really helps to put in the natural shadows that would occur."

Flavor is not a simple choice for the customer.

"We do any flavor, but you tell people that and they don't know where to start."

To help narrow the choices, Amazing Cakes has compiled a list of 20 popular flavor combinations, such as "Chocolate Mocha Cake with Kahlua Mousse studded with Chocolate Covered Espresso Beans."

They're combinations of stuff we've created or have occurred through one process or another," McCarey says.

McCarey can't, or won't, make cakes for some of his more eccentric customers. Although he is always open to suggestions, and welcomes the opportunity to create eccentric cakes, he recently turned down a request from a man in New York City.

"He had a performance artist that was going to premier at his gallery," McCarey explains. "He wanted a corpse lying down with his mouth open, and he wanted semen coming out of his mouth. He actually wanted to put in real semen. He also suggested that we could use bull semen."

Not only did the customer want semen dripping from the mouth, but he wanted semen to be added to the cake mix and icing.

"Of course, we declined it. He thought we had a problem with his lifestyle, but I told him it was a matter of the FDA," he explains with a laugh. "He said, 'Oh, we can get you certified bull semen, which would be totally clean.' He was willing to pay any amount of money to have this thing made, but that didn't matter."

McCarey says Amazing Cakes caters to a lot of families, so he wouldn't want to have erotic cakes in the bakery. He refers those customers to "Erotic Cakes," a business in Seattle.

"I also wouldn't derive any pleasure out of making a bunch of penises on a cake," McCarey says, laughing. "We thought about having a little area off to the side for that, with curtains."

Amazing Cakes limits the size of their cakes only by the size of an airline cargo hold—seven feet long and 40 inches high—and the width of the business's front door—36 inches. Beyond those configurations, McCarey can make the cake in sections for assembly at the destination.

"Biggest thing we've shipped was a five-foot Porsche for the owner of the Mirage Hotel," he says. "We had to put it on a pallet because it was so heavy."

McCarey says he is working on a way to put a natural sheen on shiny creations such as guitars or cars.

"I haven't found a way yet, but I'm working on it. Every day something new comes up. I'd like to know it all, but that's not going to happen."

While the quality of his work never deteriorates, McCarey says he does get into an occasional rut.

"I don't know how many times I can make castles or golf bags. After the fifth one, I've kind of lost interest. The alternative... is that I could be making danish a..."
September Morn's dancing class is about to begin in the small, one-room school on Madrona Street. A fire burning in the wood pellet stove wraps the students in warmth as they arrive through the front door, escaping the harsh Bellingham wind and rain outside.

Some of the two-legged students head to the wooden cupboard and pour themselves hot chocolate or coffee into Dixie cups. Others patiently sit in plastic chairs that line the walls, while their four-legged partners pant excitedly on mats, wiggling their bodies and straining at the ends of their leashes in anticipation.

A collection of multi-colored Hula Hoops hangs in one corner of the room near a "Cycle Guide to America's Dogs" poster. A clear plastic sign suspended from the ceiling reads, "BE A CANINE GOOD CITIZEN" in black stenciled letters. As 7:30 p.m. draws near, the air fills with the musky smell of wet dog, and the remaining dancers drift into the classroom two by two. With each arrival comes a commotion of greetings: sniffs, barks and licks blended with a chorus of "hellos," "hi's" and "how are yous."

Finally, Morn's powerful, enthusiastic voice rises above the din.

"Shall we start off with some swing?" she asks, as she walks to the cassette player and presses play.

"In the Mood" erupts from the speakers, and Morn begins to strut around to the beat with her partner, China. White, fluffy and no bigger than a tomcat, China—or Ch'a, for short—is a mini American Eskimo dog. Following Morn's index finger, Ch'a prances through and around Morn's legs, turns in circles, stands on her hind legs and pirouettes like a ballerina, eager to receive the treat Morn clutches with her other four fingers.

"The main idea is to move around with the dog and lure them with the treat," she asserts, as she rewards Ch'a with a small doggie biscuit.

Two by two, the other eight members of Morn's freestyle obedience class, "Dancing with Dogs," take turns practicing these circles, one species guiding the other.

"Any kind of music you like, you can dance to with your dog. It doesn't matter," Morn affirms, as she switches the music to an Irish jig.

The dog-and-human pairs begin to walk the diagonals of the room, the dogs changing directions in response to human cues. "Good! Yes! Good! Yes!" Morn shouts in encouragement, her short, tousled brown hair bobbing up and down with approval.

After class, Morn plops down onto a couch near the door. Ch'a rests on her lap.

"My first word was 'dog,'" she explains. "I was taken care of..."
by an elderly Labrador retriever when my mother first brought me home from the hospital. But, I didn’t start training dogs until I was five.”

Although Morn trained dogs throughout most of her early life, she didn’t begin training dogs for a living until 1969, shortly after her son was born.

“My husband wanted me to stay home and be the wifey-pooh, and I was getting very bored of TV soap operas as the only adult conversation,” Morn says. “So I figured out a way that I could work at my home doing something that I enjoyed.” Her eyes light up as she giggles with delight, recalling her son’s first sentence, “dog sit.”

Morn began teaching dogs in a training room that simulated the home environment. In this mock living room, Morn conditioned dogs to not steal from the trash, not climb on the furniture and not bark when left alone.

In those days, a harsh military style was the popular method for teaching dogs to obey, so Morn taught dog owners to punish their dogs by jerking harshly on their necks to force them to perform basic obedience commands, such as sit, heel and stay.

Her voice softens as she sadly recalls why she turned to the opposite philosophy of training dogs.

“I ruined my first dog; she was sensitive,” she says. “It took me a year and a half to braven her up again, so I could show her and get her through obedience training. She taught me that dogs do not respond as well to the harsh method as they do to a more motivational, positive method.”

Since she now believes that dogs learn better by reward, Morn uses treats to entice dogs to obey. She also emphasizes a difference between correction and punishment in dog training.

“To me, correction is something that shows the dog what it is supposed to be doing, while punishment dramatizes your displeasure of the dog’s failure to do something,” she says. “I mostly just correct.

“A lot of trainers teach ‘sit’ by jerking on the dog’s neck, but that’s not necessary,” Morn continues, as her eyes narrow with conviction. “We teach ‘sit’ by luring the dog’s nose up. If their nose goes up, their bottom, for comfort’s sake, drops.”

This method has attracted many clients—Morn has around 50 at a time—and she teaches eight or nine classes per week.

Cindy Wilson enrolled her dog, Cody, in Morn’s beginning six-week obedience class after a friend recommended it.

“I knew September had a gentle method of teaching,” Wilson asserts. “So many people used to force dogs to do something, but in Morn’s class they are doing it because they want to.”

Morn says she hadn’t planned to train dogs full time. After moving to Bellingham in 1980, intending to become a counselor, Morn enrolled in Western’s psychology program.

“I was only supporting myself with my dog-training business until I got my degree. And then, somewhere in the middle of school, I realized that training the dogs is so much fun,” she says. “If I was a counselor, every day I would be filled with everyone else’s worst nightmares. And I just decided it was a lot more fun to play on the floor with puppies than it was to be involved in everyone’s pain.”

Despite this revelation, Morn continued with school, graduating from Western in 1988 with a degree in psychology. Ever since, dogs have been both her job and her hobby.

“In my down time, I take my dogs tracking. Also, my Rottweiler is a therapy dog, and he goes to rest homes and schools and hospitals and brings love…”

Morn also began writing about four years ago. Now she makes her living equally from writing and training.
Aside from articles for *Dog Fancy* magazine, she has written numerous books, mostly about dog training, including "Dogs Love to Please." Mom also hopes to branch into fiction and has recently been reading books about how to improve her writing.

"In 10 to 20 years, along with training others to train dogs, I see myself mostly lecturing and writing," she says.

She recalls that her writing is also what led her to discover freestyle obedience.

"I've been winning awards for my writing in the last four years, so I've been going to the Dog Writers' Association in New York for the annual awards banquet. About three years ago, I went into the dog show hospitality suite, and on the TV set someone had a freestyle tape," she explains, her voice fluctuating in pitch from high to low. Her eyes widen as she emphasizes each word, recalling the awe of the moment.

"I saw these dogs doing this, and I just stood there, transfixed, and watched for about five minutes, and my hair just stood up, and I started crying. It was the most beautiful link between a person and a dog that I had ever watched under any kind of organized circumstances. And that's when I decided that's what I wanted to do."

Freestyle is used to demonstrate obedience exercises in a way that is pleasant for the audience to watch. It also improves a dog's focus, enthusiasm for obedience and relationship with the owner.

"Regular competitive obedience has to be very precise," she says. "With freestyle, you can choreograph it yourself. You can see that freestyle dogs are happy and grinning the whole time."

Joy Spirare is a family friend who has been assisting with Morn's classes for about a year. Comet, her Siberian Heeler, has been enrolled in Morn's classes since she was 8 weeks old.

"We like the freestyle class because it's fun," she says. [Comet] likes it so much when she hears a song we've worked to on the radio, she'll get excited and whine. She'll want to dance."

Wilson agrees.

"This class is so much fun," she says, smiling. "The dogs have a great time, and it has brought Cody and I closer. The family gets a kick out of what he does and, as a result, he feels like he is more of the family."

And this is one of the main goals of Morn's freestyle class. Although she limits her class size to five dogs, she encourages family members to come and watch.

No longer married, Morn says her significant other is a Rottweiler. Emphasizing that she lives with—not owns—three dogs, she relates why she loves them so dearly.

They give so much. They want to love you, they want to be with you, they want to work with you. They're so willing. They're funny. They have a better sense of humor than many people. I'm an animal lover completely, but dogs are my special people."
I'm an Olympian.
Well, that's not exactly true. I'm going to be an Olympian.
OK, so that's not the whole truth either. I'm in training to become an Olympian.
That is the truth.

Becoming a sports deity isn't easy. It takes endless hours of practice, immeasurable talent and most of all, a sport that's not easily mastered by just any old schmuck. This is precisely why I should be in the Olympics sometime before 2050.

It also helps that the American Football Association is trying to compel the Olympic Committee to allow table soccer access to its rightful place among the greatest sports in the world—the Olympics.

Table soccer, or foosball, originated in either Germany or France during the late 1800s. The phenomenon was launched in America when returning veterans of World War II told tales of German citizens and their skill at this miniaturized version of soccer. Table soccer was imported to the United States in the 1950s. Today, professional foosball players, foosball tournaments and even foosball trading cards exist. International tournaments can have prizes totaling $100,000, with the winner bringing home a cool 12 grand.

It is these dreams of glory that provoke me to indulge in a piece of the ever-growing football cash cow. Recently, I convinced my roommate to throw in $25, and we went in on our very own second-hand Premier Championship Soccer foosball table. Fifty bucks wasn't too much of an investment for a $30,000 return.

All I need now is practice.
I went where any true foosball fan would look for a quick competitive game—the dorms. That's right I went to take on the finest foosers at Western.

My search took me to Higginson Hall. Crossing the street to get there, I mulled over my plays in my head, mentally preparing for the upcoming battle as any true athlete would. As I rounded the corner into the lounge, my heart sank. I realized I was alone with the table. What had become of the once training ground for future professionals?

Hoping to find that there was still sanity left in society, I traveled to Bigfoot's Bistro—home of a world-class, jet-black Dynamo Table. I decided that this time I would wait as long as it took to get a game. As the seconds turned to minutes, and the minutes to an hour, I mused over to the TCBY counter to ask when the next foosball rush would begin.

Disappointment set in when I was informed that only about two people play foosball at the Bistro each day, and I had missed them. I decided I had to go where they separate the men from the boys, to a place where the best of the best foos—the taverns.

My first stop was Grandstands Eatery and Beer Emporium. I swung the door open and walked in with the brash confidence of any athlete in training.

Inside, to the left, numerous brown tables covered the floor; they looked as if they were lifted from a run-down bingo parlor. Beyond those stood "the corner of intimidation," strewn with numerous trophies from softball leagues and dart tournaments of years past. Trying not to allow these daunting ornaments of glory to affect me, I walked slowly to the bar and ordered my elixir of energy—Budweiser.

Suddenly sipping my brew, I strolled through the middle corridor strewn with empty kegs and pinball machines. Then I saw him, my nemesis, just beyond the two pool tables.

"Want a game?" I asked, coolly.

He agreed, and we started hitting the ball back and forth, getting a feel for the table and each other's playing style. The blue surface was covered with a faint brown residue, the remains of years of spills. The little plastic soccer players were wounded, barely held intact with black electrical tape. As we warmed up, I told him of my Olympic dream.

"It seems to me more like a bar game—like pinball or something," said Mark, my opponent. "I never thought of it as a sport."

Unfortunately for Mark, he underestimated the intensity of the game.

The match started slow, and then I drew first blood with a magnificent push shot from my center forward. The game was a scoring duel—4-4. I collected my thoughts and rallied my 11 players to the winning shot—the final score, 10-7.

It was time to take a break. I headed back to the bar to ask where I might find Olympic-quality competition.

"There are a lot of people on Sundays," bartender Steve Porter said. "Definitely Olympic caliber. However, we tend to draw people who want to play free games. It comes in waves. It's really popular for a while, then it's not."

Gus and Naps Tavern was the next stop on my tour. Walking in the door, I was immediately approached by a short Italian guy wearing a gold earring. He had a proposition.

"You need some shrooms?" he asked.

Carefully considering my options, I respectfully avoided the temptation. Hell, I can't mess with that shit—remember Ben Johnson?

I walked toward the bar and ordered my lucky Budweiser, figuring I could use the edge in the coming battle. I strolled through, searching for the crowd of foosballers. Thinking that perhaps I needed a special password to get into the secret champion's lounge, I asked the bartender where the foosball table was.

"We haven't had foosball for over a year," said bartender Brie Halligan.

"It's been gone for a while," bartender Terry Halligan said. "There wasn't much play on it."

Halligan explained that in its day, Gus and Naps was home to several foosball tournaments.

"For a short while there were some good players in here," Halligan said.

Morud just so happened to be one of those players. As I explained the Olympic opportunity, she seemed excited about her chances.

"I think if I had the opportunity, I'd be down here every night and practicing—I don't see why not," she said.

Deciding I needed to get another game in before I could quit training for the night, I took Morud's advice and headed to The Royal in search of a final match.

I went directly up the stairs, purchased my customary Bud and headed to the beautiful Tournament Soccer table. I quickly grabbed the first patron I saw and challenged him to a game—my treat.

When the game started, I realized this table was like no other. The fluid movement of the rods spun easily with each flick of the wrist. I had obviously made it to the big time. We played a fast-paced game, and when the final ball went through his goal, I prevailed—5-2.

I triumphantly left the brick-lined walls of The Royal. It was time to head home for some rest—it's hard work training for the Olympics.
story by Jennae Phillippe
photography by Stuart Martin
A villain enters the scene.
As one, they move to attack it. Sebastian draws his sword; Tamar notes an arrow on his bow and Prospero changes shape, becoming something much more sinister and deadly. Yelena uses her magic, but to no avail.
Alexander and Sebastian, a smooth killing team, cut the enemy down. From the corner, Luke watches. A circle of people sit in a living room off Bill McDonald Parkway. The most action they take is rolling dice, yet together, they killed an enemy. Today, Luke Shilton observes. Next time, he will join in the game and become a vampire as well.

The concept of a role-playing game is to invent a new persona or character for oneself based on certain game rules, interact within a setting with other made-up characters and have fun.

Holly Zehnder, Jeff Cook and their friends, Max Kalton, Marci DeLeon, Cody Anderson and Steve Metke, are playing "Vampires," a popular tabletop role-playing game.

In "Vampires," a storyteller leads the group of created characters. Each character is different, each supposedly comes from a different clan of vampires.

For instance, Max's character Prospero, a vampire from the Tzimisce clan, Russian for "fiend"—according to White Wolf, a game guidebook—can mold human flesh into whatever shape he chooses. He is very dark and morbid, and Max wouldn't want him any other way. Through his characters, Max finds a deeper understanding of himself.

"Certain people" think that it convinces you that some other reality is more real than this one," Max says. "I find the opposite is true. People who don't have access to the different facets of their personality don't really know who they are... people who explore those parts of themselves see who they are and who they might be.

In this game, the players all become vampires, but the companionship, not the characterization, draws them there.

To watch people who play role-playing games is to step into another culture.

They talk in their own language, move by their own rules and interact under their own social codes.

All actions of a tabletop game are spoken. The players narrate, telling the others what they are doing as they do it. In live-action games, players reveal their deeds through actions not possible in a tabletop setting.

No one wins or loses a tabletop game. The goal—character development. The on-screen life or health meters of video games are similar to what gamers use to measure traits of their characters. These traits, such as strength and dexterity, are used to complete tasks. Players roll dice to determine the winner.

Characters might face off by rolling 10-sided dice in a tabletop sword fight. Whoever has the most successes (i.e., rolled more high numbers than the other) wins the fight.

Many players of these games roam around Western as vampires, werewolves, and other fantasy creatures.